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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

June 5, 2024 – September 10, 2024

*Providing an update on outcomes
and accomplishments since the
previous OPC Meeting.*

Contents

California Ocean Protection Council: 20 th Anniversary	2
Budget	2
Updates By Strategic Plan Goal	3
Goal 1: Safeguard Coastal and Marine Ecosystems and Communities in the Face of Climate Change	3
Goal 2: Advance Equity Across Ocean and Coastal Policies and Actions	4
Goal 3: Enhance Coastal and Marine Biodiversity	6
Goal 4: Support Ocean Health Through Sustainable Blue Economy	9
Legislation	9
Personnel Notes	11

California Ocean Protection Council: 20th Anniversary

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the California Ocean Protection Council. The [California Ocean Protection Act](#) was signed into law September 23, 2004, establishing OPC to coordinate state agency activities, improve the collection and sharing of scientific data, and identify policy recommendations to protect and conserve California's coast. Over the past 20 years, OPC has established meaningful partnerships with state and federal agencies and external partners and made significant investment and policy contributions to support healthy marine ecosystems and coastal communities, including but not limited to: sea level rise planning and adaptation guidance; researching the scale and impact of ocean acidification; ongoing management of California's landmark Marine Protected Area (MPA) Network including monitoring and community engagement; addressing plastic pollution and marine debris; leading kelp restoration efforts; and ensuring emerging ocean uses – including offshore wind – are informed by the best available science. OPC has also taking important steps to improve engagement with California Native American tribes and underserved communities to advance equity and include local knowledge and expertise into California's coastal management and policy efforts. Together, these actions and investments have protected wildlife and habitat, supported advancements in critical science, and established a network of partners, within and outside state government, that will support coastal and ocean conservation into the future.

Budget Update

The 2021 and 2022 Budget Acts committed \$1.3 billion to advance ocean and coastal resilience over multiple years. Given the state's \$37.9 billion shortfall, the final FY 2024/25 Budget included the following funding updates to OPC:

- **Ocean and Coastal Ecosystem Resilience:** The Budget Act of 2024 retained \$65 million (\$50 million in FY 22/23 and \$15 million in FY 23/24) of the original \$100 million appropriated to OPC over two years (FY 22/23 and FY 23/24) for resilience projects that conserve, protect, and restore marine wildlife and healthy ocean and coastal ecosystems. Of this amount, \$27.5 million remains for projects and was shifted from the General Fund to the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF).
- **Senate Bill 1 Implementation:** The Budget Act of 2024 retained \$37.5 million in FY 22/23 GGRF to support the implementation of Senate Bill 1 (Atkins, 2021), which requires OPC to administer grants to local and regional governments to complete sea level rise adaptation plans and implement adaptation projects along the coast and shoreline of the San Francisco Bay. The Budget Act of 2024 included a two-year delay of an additional \$36.8 million in GGRF from FY 24/25 to FY 26/27.

- **Offshore Wind:** The Budget Act of 2024 included a one-time General Fund appropriation of \$3.6 million to OPC for the purpose of supporting the development of an offshore wind monitoring and research program.

Updates By Strategic Plan Goal

Goal 1: Safeguard Coastal and Marine Ecosystems and Communities in the Face of Climate Change

Blue Carbon Ecosystem Model and Data Assessment Report and Webinar

OPC, in collaboration with the California Air Resources Board (CARB) and Dr. Melissa Ward from Windward Sciences, recently released the [Blue Carbon Ecosystem Data and Model Assessment Report](#). This report is a helpful resource for those working on developing models or inventories for blue carbon ecosystems and can guide investment decisions in these vital areas. The report outlines definitions and frameworks used in California's carbon inventories and carbon target modeling. It also covers the criteria and data required for including novel ecosystems in CARB's 2027 update to the [2022 Scoping Plan for Achieving Carbon Neutrality](#), with a focus on coastal wetlands. An [informational public webinar](#) was hosted by OPC staff on August 19, 2024 to provide further context and enable discussions on the report.

Indicators of Climate Change Webinar Series: Bridging Science and Action

On July 31, 2024, OPC co-convened a [webinar](#) with the Office of Environmental Health Hazard and Assessment (OEHHA) to address the impacts of climate change on California's coast and ocean, and the efforts underway to address these impacts. Topics included trends in ocean dynamics, particularly ocean warming along the California coast, potential impacts to fisheries, climate impacts on the North Coast and adaptation efforts by the Wiyot Tribe, sea level rise adaptation efforts by the City of San Rafael, and state efforts to create a publicly available climate change vulnerability assessment tool to identify contaminated sites vulnerable to sea level rise across California.

Update on Sandy Beaches and Dunes Characterization Project

As approved by Council on January 24, 2023, OPC awarded the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) a grant to support geomorphological and ecological characterization of sandy beaches and dunes across the state, with Dr. Kyle Emery as the Principal Investigator (PI). This grant is undergoing a grantee transfer due to an PI affiliation change from UCLA to University of California,

Santa Barbara. A new grant agreement has been created to reflect the updated grantee. The project PI and project deliverables remain unchanged.

Update on Contaminated Sites Vulnerable to SLR Projects

As approved by Council on August 15, 2023, OPC is supporting the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) and the Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) to update their respective contaminated site inventories and create a statewide prioritization of contaminated sites at risk of sea level rise (SLR) and groundwater shoaling. However, due to internal contracting challenges with the SWRCB, a third party has been identified to support the work completed by the SWRCB to update the contaminated site inventory. The project deliverables and final timeline of the project remain unchanged.

Goal 2: Advance Equity Across Ocean and Coastal Policies and Actions

Environmental Justice Advisory Board for California's Coast and Ocean

In May, OPC and partners at [Better World Group](#) (BWG) established the inaugural [Environmental Justice Advisory Board for California's Coast and Ocean](#) (EJ Advisory Board, Board). The EJ Advisory Board, comprised of community leaders and advocates who represent California's diverse regions, aim to provide guidance and recommendations to enhance equity across OPC and state programs affecting the coast and ocean. Since its formation, the EJ Advisory Board has held two sessions. The first, on May 29, involved onboarding members, co-developing the Board's Charter, and setting the stage for future meetings. The second session, on August 20, focused on several key agenda items:

- **Approval of the Board's Charter:** Members voted to approve the guiding document of the inaugural Board.
- **Community Science Engagement Strategy and Human Dimensions Research Agenda for MPA Management:** The Board provided feedback on how best to consider process and scope for these statewide initiatives, which are tied directly to recommendations from the state's [Decadal Management Review](#) of the Marine Protected Areas (MPA) network.
- **Equity in the California Ocean and Coast Report Card:** The Board offered preliminary advice to OPC and Ocean Science Trust on integrating equity into the state report card's indicators, limitations, and progress tracking to assess the health of the California's coast and ocean.

The EJ Advisory Board will reconvene in November for its final meeting of the year and will continue meeting quarterly in 2025. An information item is anticipated to be brought before the

Council at the next December 2024 Council Meeting to introduce and report out activities by the EJ Advisory Board.

Environmental Justice Small Grants Program

OPC's pilot Environmental Justice (EJ) Small Grants program, launched in partnership with [Justice Outside](#), completed its selection process to provide \$1 million in grant funding to support small, short-term projects in California's coastal EJ communities. In February 2024, Justice Outside announced the grant opportunity through their [Liberated Paths Grantmaking Program](#), for projects and programming that engage people in ocean and coastal conservation at the intersection of racial justice, including addressing ocean and coastal issues, advocacy, research, education, awareness, equitable access to the California coast, and more. The program received 99 applications, totaling \$4.6 million in requests, exceeding available funds for this pilot round by four times.

In July 2024, the application review committee selected a total of twenty-four (24) grantees to be awarded funding for two-year projects and/or programs. These projects, ranging from environmental advocacy through art to ocean conservation and aquatic sports, are expected to have a significant positive impact on California's EJ communities and advance equitable ocean and coastal conservation efforts. An informational item ([Item 7](#)) highlighting the pilot model, partnership with Justice Outside, and selected awarded grantees, will be presented to the Council at the September 10 Council Meeting.

Proposition 68 Grant Guideline Revision

OPC staff have revised the Proposition 68 (Prop 68) Grant Guidelines to reflect OPC's commitment to increase equitable access to OPC funds by prioritizing funding within or to benefit Priority Populations and/or Communities, updating scoring criteria, and improving clarity and accessibility within the guidelines themselves. OPC's priorities for Prop 68 funding are projects that contribute to healthy coast and ocean ecosystems, while also improving community resilience to climate change and adaptation. The [draft Revised Prop 68 Grant Guidelines](#) were released for public review and comment on July 3 and closed the comment period on August 9. During this period, OPC staff provided an overview of the guideline revision during an [informational webinar](#) and held an office hour as another opportunity to receive questions and public comment. The proposed final Prop 68 Grant Guidelines are before the Council for consideration of adoption as a consent item ([Item 10](#)) at the September 10 Council Meeting.

Goal 3: Enhance Coastal and Marine Biodiversity

Conserving 30% of California's Coastal Waters by 2030

In June 2024, OPC published its [Draft Decision-Making Framework for 30x30 in Coastal Waters](#). Developed in close partnership with the California Ocean Science Trust and the [30x30 Technical Advisory Panel](#), this draft framework translates policy objectives for 30x30 Conservation Areas – protecting biodiversity, expanding access to nature, and building climate resilience – into objective, transparent, science-based criteria. Public comment on the draft framework is through the [30x30 Draft Decision-Making Framework-Public Comment Submission Form](#) or submitted to 30x30coastalwaters@resources.ca.gov until October 2, 2024. OPC has respectfully requested tribal consultation on the draft framework in parallel with the public comment period; tribal consultation closes on November 1.

OPC is hosting a series of online webinars, in-person regional public workshops, and tribal roundtables to solicit feedback from local communities and California Native American tribes. The full webinar and in-person workshop schedule is available on the [OPC 30x30 webpage](#). The [30x30 Partnership Summit](#), which will be held on October 3, 2024 in Sacramento, will serve as another opportunity to engage with OPC staff on the draft framework and opportunities for meaningful coastal and marine conservation. Sign up to attend on the [Summit registration webpage](#).

Ongoing efforts to advance 30x30 in coastal waters include: continued partnership with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and California Fish and Game Commission to adaptively manage MPAs, deepening the state's partnership with federal managers to strengthen biodiversity protections in the Greater Farallones National Marine Sanctuary, and, in collaboration with CNRA, initiating early tribal consultation to further explore the concept of Indigenous Marine Stewardship Areas.

Adaptive Management of California's Marine Protected Area (MPA) Network

On August 12, the California Fish and Game Commission [approved](#) the California Department of Fish and Wildlife's recommendations to place specific public petitions for changes to MPA regulations into "Bin 1" (short-term assessment) and the remaining petitions into "Bin 2" (longer-term assessment). OPC provided remarks at the Commission meeting reiterating CNRA and OPC's support for an objective, transparent, and science-based approach to petition evaluation, and for continued collaboration with the wide spectrum of partners and communities to adaptively manage the MPA network.

To this end, two investments are before the Council at the September 10 Council Meeting under [Item 9b](#) for developing and refining tools to support MPA petition evaluation. However, evaluating

proposed changes to the MPA network is only one of 28 recommendations in the 2023 MPA Decadal Management Review. OPC continues to work with partners to advance many other recommendations, including developing a community science strategy and a human dimensions research agenda. During [Item 9a](#), OPC staff will provide an informational update to the Council on these two efforts.

Partnerships to Reduce Plastic Pollution

As part of ongoing implementation of the [2018 California Ocean Litter Strategy](#), OPC and NOAA's Marine Debris Program (MDP) hosted a California Ocean Litter Strategy [webinar](#) in July 2024. The webinar included updates from OPC, NOAA MDP, presentations from science and policy experts and Ocean Litter Strategy community members, and a preview of the update to the 2025 Ocean Litter Strategy, as the current Strategy runs through 2024.

On the federal level, NOAA's Marine Debris Program and the Environmental Protection Agency's Trash Free Waters Program released a [Report on Microfiber Pollution](#) in July 2024 on behalf of the federal Interagency Marine Debris Coordinating Committee. Required by the Save Our Seas 2.0 Act, the report provides an overview of the microfiber pollution issue, while also outlining a plan for federal agencies, in partnership with other stakeholders, to address the problem of microfiber pollution.

Save the Date: [California Coastal Cleanup Day](#) is celebrating its 40th anniversary on September 21, 2024! Led by the California Coastal Commission, Coastal Cleanup Day is a volunteer-driven event that takes place in almost every California county from the coast to inland waterways. Coastal Cleanup Day has led to the successful diversion of trash and plastic debris from the ocean and provided a long-term dataset on plastic pollution, including data on the [top ten items](#) collected over the last several decades. To participate in this year's Coastal Cleanup Day, visit the [California Coastal Commission webpage](#) to locate a site near you.

Protecting and Restoring California's Kelp Forest Ecosystems

To advance the development of the [Kelp Restoration and Management Plan](#) (KRMP), the KRMP's Community Working Group (CWG) and Science Advisory Committee (SAC) held individual virtual meetings in August 2024. This latest CWG meeting provided a venue for community members to share perspectives related to kelp forest restoration. The SAC meeting focused on identifying and discussing key stressors affecting kelp forest systems, a key step in the design of the KRMP. Both groups will continue to meet throughout the development of the KRMP.

California Native American tribes are represented on both the CWG and the SAC, however, each tribe has unique perspectives on, and relationships to, kelp forest ecosystems. To support inclusive

tribal engagement, the KRMP Project Team held a virtual Tribal Community Forum in July 2024 to learn more about the priorities of tribal governments, as well as tribal communities more broadly, related to kelp protection and restoration.

In June 2024, OPC staff participated in a meeting of the [Chile-California Conservation Exchange \(CCCX\)](#) focused on kelp protection and restoration. Hosted at UC Santa Cruz's Long Marine Lab, the CCCX brought together resource managers, conservation organizations, and academic scientists from Chile and California to discuss shared challenges and potential solutions to kelp loss. Participation in this international convening strengthened California's partnership with Chile and provided a valuable opportunity for knowledge exchange on marine protected areas, kelp harvest, long-term monitoring of kelp forests, and adaptive management of these threatened ecosystems. The CCCX is now exploring the possibility of reconvening in 2025 to discuss a shared commitment to 30x30 and strategies for achieving meaningful conservation on land and in coastal waters.

California's International Leadership on Coastal and Marine Biodiversity

California is nearing the finish line in its effort to add the state's unique and globally significant MPA network to the [International Union for Conservation of Nature \(IUCN\) Green List of Protected and Conserved Areas](#). In July 2024, the Expert Assessment Group for the Green List – a group of California stakeholders with diverse experience related to MPAs – met to formally recommend to IUCN that CA's MPA network receive the Green List award. This represented the culmination of more than five years of evaluation work assessing the ecological and social outcomes of California's MPAs against IUCN's global criteria. IUCN will formally vote on Green Listing the network at the next meeting of its Standards Committee in September 2024; California's MPAs would be the first protected area network anywhere in the world to be added to the Green List.

OPC, alongside the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA), is preparing for a strong California state government presence at the upcoming [United Nations Biodiversity Conference \(COP 16\)](#) in Cali, Colombia this fall, including a speaking role at the 8th Summit for Subnational Governments and Cities to elevate the role of subnational governments, including the State of California, in reaching global biodiversity targets. COP 16 offers an exciting opportunity to build on California's attendance at the 2022 United Nations Biodiversity Conference ([COP 15](#)), showcase California's globally significant leadership on biodiversity and climate, including efforts to advance 30x30, and strengthen relationships with key international partners.

Goal 4: Support Ocean Health Through Sustainable Blue Economy

Market Squid Fishery

In 2023, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) convened a [Squid Fishery Advisory Committee \(SFAC\)](#), composed of stakeholders and tribal members, to provide input to the Department on potential changes to California Market Squid fishery management. OPC provided [\\$338,000 in funds](#) to support the facilitation of the SFAC process, including the development of a report summarizing the SFAC's recommendations, which, along with the completion of genomics research, will ultimately inform updates to the Department's Fishery Management Plan for market squid.

At the California Fish and Game Commission's July 18 Marine Resources Committee Meeting, CDFW staff presented a summary of the [SFAC's recommendations](#). These recommendations included regulatory changes, a proposed transition to electronic logbooks, and several suggested gear modifications. The SFAC also recommended distributing a "best practices" guide for limiting the impacts of squid lights on seabirds to the fleet, continued exploration of small-scale fishing opportunities through Experimental Fishing Permits (EFPs), and improved forecasting of environmental conditions using innovative modeling techniques.

Legislation

The following is an update on coastal and ocean-related legislative proposals tracked by OPC staff this legislative session, as of August 29, 2024:

[AB 80 \(Addis\)](#): This bill would require OPC to establish and oversee, in coordination with other unspecified state and federal agencies, a West Coast Offshore Wind Science Entity. Held in Senate Appropriations.

[AB 953 \(Connolly\)](#): This bill would require OPC, in coordination and in consultation with various entities, to implement a statewide voluntary vessel speed reduction and sustainable shipping program for the California coast in order to reduce air pollution, the risk of fatal vessel strikes on whales, and harmful underwater acoustic impacts by January 1, 2026. Held in Senate Appropriations.

[AB 1284 \(Ramos\)](#): This bill would encourage the Secretary of Natural Resource or the Secretary's delegate to enter into co-governance and co-management agreements with federally recognized tribes for the purpose of shared responsibility, decision-making, and partnership in resource management and conservation within a tribe's ancestral lands and waters. Enrolled and sent to the Governor's Desk.

[AB 1407 \(Addis\)](#): This bill would require OPC, on or before December 1, 2024, to establish acreage-based targets and Kelp Forest and Estuary Restoration and Recovery Framework to restore kelp forests, eelgrass meadows, and native oyster beds with the goal of achieving restoration by 2050. The bill would establish in the State Treasury the Ocean Restoration and Recovery Fund to be administered by OPC to develop and carry out large-scale restoration and enhancement projects. Order to inactive file on the Senate Floor.

[AB 1533 \(Utilities and Energy Committee\)](#): This bill would specify that energy generated by the Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant could not be counted toward the state's "zero carbon" energy goals after August 26, 2025. In Committee with Joint Rule 62(a) suspended (8/29/2024).

[AB 1797 \(Wood\)](#): This bill would establish the Dungeness crab (*Metacarcinus magister*) as the official state crustacean. Enrolled and sent to the Governor's Desk.

[AB 1992 \(Boerner\)](#): This bill would amend the Coastal Act to explicitly authorize the Coastal Commission to authorize blue and teal carbon demonstration projects, defined as the creation or restoration of coastal wetland, intertidal, or marine habitats or ecosystems, including, but not limited to, seagrasses and wetlands that capture carbon. Floor Process (Senate).

[AB 2214 \(Bauer-Kahan\)](#): This bill would require OPC, on or before March 1, 2025, to establish and lead an interagency coordination group and adopt a workplan to implement the Statewide Microplastics Strategy on or before December 31, 2025. Enrolled and sent to Governor's Desk.

[AB 2537 \(Addis\)](#): This bill would create the Offshore Wind Community Capacity Building Fund Grant Account in the Voluntary Offshore Wind and Coastal Resources Protection Program for the California Energy Commission to award for capacity building grants within local communities and tribal communities to engage in the process of offshore wind energy development. Floor Process (Senate).

[AB 2298 \(Hart\)](#): This bill would require OPC to participate in an advisory capacity to the Protecting Blue Whales and Blue Skies Program to support coastal air districts in their efforts to implement a statewide voluntary vessel speed reduction and sustainable shipping program for the California coast in order to reduce air pollution, the risk of fatal vessel strikes on whales, and harmful underwater acoustic impacts. Held in Senate Appropriations.

[AB 2572 \(Muratsuchi\)](#): This bill would require the California Air Resources Board to develop a plan to include ocean carbon dioxide removal technology and projects that it determines are environmentally safe and sustainable into the Carbon Capture, Removal, Utilization, and Storage Program by January 1, 2027. Held in Assembly Appropriations.

[SB 867 \(Weiner\)](#): This bill enacts the Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024 to authorize \$10 billion in bonds, if approved by state voters, including projects that advance resilience for ocean and coastal ecosystems and projects to advance sea level rise adaptation. (Chapter 83, Statutes of 2024).

[SB 951 \(Weiner\)](#): This bill would amend the Coastal Act to apply specified rezoning standards for any necessary local coastal program updates for jurisdictions located within the coastal zone specific to changes in land use designations, intensity of land use, zoning ordinances, and zoning district maps. Floor Process (Senate).

Personnel Notes

Sarah Stangle, Administration & Finance Manager

Sarah has transitioned to a new role as OPC's Administration and Finance Manager, after serving as OPC's Administration and Finance Analyst since February 2022. Prior to joining OPC, Sarah worked for CAL FIRE as the finance analyst and emergency purchaser including purchasing on California's second largest wildfire, the "Dixie" wildland fire. Sarah received a B.S. in Business Administration from CSU Monterey Bay. In Sarah's free time she enjoys outdoor activities. Sarah's passion is traveling the world and immersing herself in new cultures. Places she has visited include Italy, Greece, and next on the list is Germany.



Departures: At the end of August, Ben Dorfman, California Sea Grant Fellow – Climate Change Program and Maya Hsu, Executive Fellow each completed fellowships with OPC and CNRA respectively. Ben worked with OPC from February 2023 – August 2024 and was instrumental in the development of OPC's Senate Bill 1 Sea Level Rise Adaptation Program. Following his fellowship with OPC, Ben has joined the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC) as a Coastal Program Analyst II where he will continue to work on SLR adaptation for San Francisco Bay. Maya worked with CNRA and OPC from November 2023 – August 2024, focused on offshore wind development, including the development of the AB 525 Offshore Wind Strategic Plan, and supporting CNRA's efforts to develop an updated tribal consultation policy and an environmental justice policy. Following her fellowship, Maya has joined the Governor's Office as a Scheduling and Correspondence Assistant. We are thrilled as Ben and Maya take the next steps in their careers!

Recruitment efforts will take place for OPC's Administration and Finance Analyst, and three new positions to advance and inform offshore wind development in California. Position postings for a Senior Environmental Scientist (Specialist) and Environmental Scientist to support the development of an offshore wind research and monitoring program, and a Staff Services Manager I related to tribal and community engagement for offshore wind will be posted in the coming weeks.