



Staff Recommendation

December 4, 2024

Item 6b

Action Item:

**Consideration and Approval of Disbursement of Funds to Advance
30x30 in Coastal Waters**

Abby Mohan, 30x30 Program Manger

Recommended Action: Authorization to disburse up to \$10 million to fund projects that advance 30x30 in coastal waters by supporting action-oriented science, expanding and accelerating local environmental restoration and stewardship, including tribally-led stewardship, to be selected through a competitive solicitation of proposals. Individual projects recommended for approval will be presented at the June 2025 Council meeting.

Location: Statewide

Strategic Plan Goals and Objectives: Goal 1: Safeguard Coastal and Marine Ecosystems and Communities in the Face of Climate Change; Objective 1.3: Improve Understanding of Climate Impacts on California’s Coast and Ocean. Goal 2: Advance Equity Across Ocean and Coastal Policies and Actions; Objective 2.1: Enhance Engagement with Tribes; Objective 2.2: Enhance Engagement with Underserved Communities. Goal 3: Enhance Coastal and Marine Biodiversity; Objective 3.1: Protect and Restore Coastal and Marine Ecosystems.

Equity and Environmental Justice Benefits: Integration of equity and environmental justice principles in the research design and/or project outcomes, including but not limited to mentorship to students, with the goal of increasing retention in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and launching careers in coastal science; supporting research programs within or building research relationships with Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs); community engagement and partnerships with local community based organizations, tribes, and/or impacted communities; and/or project outcomes that have direct benefit to environmental justice and tribal communities by informing and improving natural resources management (habitat/access/water quality, etc.).

Exhibits:

Exhibit A: [Pathways to 30x30](#)

Exhibit B: [Pathways to 30x30 California Appendix E: Science Needs for Advancing 30x30 in Coastal Waters](#)

Findings and Resolution:

Staff recommend that the Ocean Protection Council (OPC) adopt the following findings:

“Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibit(s), OPC hereby finds that:

1. The proposed projects are consistent with the purposes of Division 26.5 of the Public Resources Code, the California Ocean Protection Act;
2. The proposed projects are consistent with the Budget Act of 2024, which included a \$27 million Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund appropriation for ocean protection and resilience to climate change;
3. The proposed projects are consistent with OPC’s Proposition 68 Grant Guidelines, adopted September 10, 2024; and
4. The proposed projects are not ‘legal projects’ that trigger the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Public Resources Code section, section 15378.”

Staff further recommend that OPC adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 35500 *et seq.* of the Public Resources Code:

“OPC hereby approves the authorization to disburse up to \$10,000,000 to applicants who submit a successful application for projects that advance 30x30 in coastal waters by supporting action-oriented science, expanding and accelerating local environmental restoration and stewardship, including tribally-led stewardship, to be selected through a competitive solicitation of proposals.

This authorization is subject to the condition that prior to disbursement of funds, selected grantees shall submit for the review and approval of the Executive Director of the OPC detailed work plans, schedules, staff requirements, budgets, and the names of any contractors intended to be used to complete the projects, as well as discrete deliverables that can be produced in intervals to ensure the projects are on target for successful completion. All projects will be developed under a shared understanding of process, management, and delivery.”

Executive Summary:

In October 2020, Governor Newsom issued [Executive Order N-82-20](#), advancing biodiversity conservation as an administration priority, and elevating the role of nature in the fight against climate change. As part of this Executive Order, California committed to the goal of conserving 30% of state lands and coastal waters by 2030 (the “30x30” initiative). California’s 30x30 initiative seeks to create and expand enduring conservation measures across a broad range of landscapes and seascapes to protect biodiversity, expand access to nature, and mitigate and build resilience to climate change.

Accomplishing this requires action-oriented science to address knowledge gaps, active restoration and stewardship to safeguard our coastal and underwater ecosystems, and support for the tribal communities that have stewarded California’s coastal resources since time immemorial. To address research needs, improve conservation outcomes, and provide support to restore and revitalize tribal stewardship, this proposed funding opportunity will build upon the vision laid out in [Pathways to 30x30](#) (Exhibit A) and [Appendix E: Science Needs for Advancing 30x30 in Coastal Waters](#) (Exhibit B) to accelerate 30x30 in California’s coastal waters.

Project Summary:

Background:

California’s 30x30 initiative seeks to protect and restore biodiversity, expand access to nature, and mitigate and build resilience to climate change. This effort drives and aligns with broader state commitments to advance justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion, strengthen tribal partnerships, and sustain the state’s economic prosperity, clean energy resources, and food supply. For the purposes of California’s 30x30 goal, an area is considered a “30x30 Conservation Area” if it meets the following definition: Land and coastal water areas that are durably protected and managed to sustain functional ecosystems, both intact and restored, and the diversity of life that they support.

Currently, California’s coastal waters are a complex mosaic of overlapping marine managed areas that vary widely in purpose, level of protection, managing agency, and potential biodiversity benefits. California’s statewide network of 124 marine protected areas (MPAs), which cover 16.2% of coastal waters, aligns with the definition of conservation set forth in Pathways (Exhibit A). Conserving an additional half a million acres of coastal waters by 2030 will require action across four fronts: adaptively managing the state’s marine protected area (MPA) network; strengthening biodiversity conservation in National Marine Sanctuaries; supporting tribally-led conservation, such as through Indigenous Marine Stewardship Areas (IMSA); and exploring the role of other

spatial management measures to provide durable biodiversity benefits (e.g., areas established for the purposes of fisheries management or to improve water quality).

OPC has concluded a 120-day public comment period on the [Draft Decision Making Framework](#) for 30x30 in coastal waters and is currently integrating public comment into the final framework. Staff anticipate bringing the final framework to March 3, 2025, Council Meeting and beginning evaluations of identified candidate areas for 30x30 in coastal waters in Spring 2025 ([see Item 6a](#)).

Project Summary:

OPC will solicit proposals in three priority areas to advance 30x30 in coastal waters. This request for proposals will build on strategies laid out in [Pathways](#) (Exhibit A), in particular *Pathway 6: Expand and Accelerate Environmental Restoration and Stewardship*, and address science gaps identified in [Appendix E](#) (Exhibit B). In the near term, as OPC moves into the evaluation of identified candidate areas, immediate research to address science and knowledge gaps will both support evaluation and identification of future conservation priorities for 30x30, in addition to advancing objectives and priorities across many of OPC's strategic plan goals. Overall, these investments in research, restoration, and stewardship will strengthen and advance biodiversity conservation in state coastal waters and advance the state's 30x30 initiative.

This competitive solicitation will have three funding priorities. Funding allocations may be shifted across the following three priorities dependent on the applications received:

Funding Priority 1: Action-Oriented Science (\$2,000,000)

California's coastal and marine ecosystems currently face a multitude of threats, including more frequent and more intense disturbance (marine heatwaves, storms, etc.), sea level rise, ocean acidification, marine disease, invasive species, pollution, and, in some cases, overharvest of marine resources. To effectively conserve 30% of coastal waters by 2030, the state requires an improved understanding of how these threats are currently impacting biodiversity and how their intensity and distribution may change in the future (especially the climate vulnerability of specific habitats, species, and cultural resources), as well as how these threats and stressors vary by ecoregion, habitat, and social-cultural setting.

This funding priority is intended to support action-oriented science that identifies 30x30 opportunities and addresses the information needs found in [Appendix E](#). This includes areas to prioritize to advance conservation, address threats to coastal and ocean biodiversity, strengthen biodiversity protections, support the role of complementary conservation measures, and for monitoring and evaluation. This funding priority will also support research that identifies strategies

and management actions to build resilience to climate change and other human-induced impacts. The science funded through this call is intended to improve the durability and impact of conservation outcomes from 30x30 Conservation Areas.

Funding Priority 2: Expanding and Accelerating Local Environmental Restoration and Stewardship (\$4,000,000)

Safeguarding California’s biodiversity for decades to come will not be achieved simply by protecting intact habitats. Restoring and stewarding ecosystem functions across a broad array of watersheds and seascapes is essential to ensure the long-term viability and durability of natural communities. Efficient and strategic restoration and stewardship can help imperiled species recover and enable ecosystems to thrive even amidst climate change. This funding priority will fund conservation priorities identified in [Pathway 6](#).

Priorities include, but are not limited to: projects that implement watershed-scale restoration that connect land and coastal water habitats; reconnect wetlands to ocean tides by removing human-made barriers to deliver successful outcomes for biodiversity, blue carbon sequestration, and ecosystem health; restoration that allows for habitats to transgress inland as sea levels rise and protect near-shore areas from storm surge or sea level rise; restore coastal wetlands, seagrass beds, and kelp forests to improve biodiversity, protect blue carbon stores, and build resilience to sea level rise, storm surge, and ocean acidification; manage invasive marine species in coastal waters.

This funding priority will fund restoration projects and ongoing stewardship activities that provide multiple benefits, including opportunities to create and support functional ecosystems in areas where biodiversity has been lost and to increase connectivity across seascapes and/or watersheds both within 30x30 Conservation Areas as well as “complementary conservation measures.” Complementary conservation measures are actions, while not quantified within 30x30 as conserved acres, that are essential to the state’s long-term conservation success. These actions strengthen biodiversity outcomes through large landscape connectivity, by creating corridors between 30x30 Conservation Areas for migrating species and mitigating and building resilience to climate change.

Funding Priority 3: Restoring and Revitalizing Tribal Stewardship (\$4,000,000)

A key conservation priority for California’s 30x30 initiative is improving California Native American tribes’ connection, ownership, stewardship, and uses of ancestral and traditional areas that are central not only to tribal identity and sovereignty, but also biodiversity protection and ecosystem function. 30x30 aims to develop meaningful and mutually beneficial opportunities for tribal co-

stewardship within coastal watersheds and marine waters, through formal agreements and other measures. OPC will partner with California Native American tribes to apply tribal expertise and Traditional Ecological Knowledges (TEK) to management and restoration efforts for the coast and ocean and co-develop restoration projects in support of shared priorities. A key approach to 30x30 in coastal waters includes supporting Indigenous Marine Stewardship Areas (IMSAs), a novel, tribally led approach to stewardship. Building upon insights gathered through consultations and tribal roundtables from California Native American tribes and tribal partners on the [Draft Decision-Making Framework](#), OPC is actively working to identify strategic ways in which state agencies can support IMSA development and implementation, such as through funding, co-management, and collaboration. As part of ongoing OPC commitments to advance meaningful partnership and engagement, OPC's work to support IMSAs and other tribal stewardship activities, and include TEK into 30x30, will continue in partnership with California Native American tribes.

Projects related to this funding priority will be led by or work directly in partnership with California Native American tribes such as, but not limited to, projects that advance the use of Traditional Knowledges in 30x30, projects that support tribal stewardship, and environmental monitoring and restoration efforts led by tribes.

Next Steps

Pending Council approval to disburse funds to advance these three priorities, a Request for Proposals (RFP) is anticipated to be released in January 2025, with letters of intent due in February and final proposals due in March 2025. For funding priority 3 (Restoring and Revitalizing Tribal Stewardship), final proposals will be accepted until July 2025, providing additional time and flexibility for tribal applicants. Proposals will undergo a structured and competitive review process led by OPC. At its discretion, OPC may request additional review by relevant experts or suggest coordination of complementary proposals. Projects selected through this review process will be brought to the Council for final consideration of grant awards at the June 2025 Council Meeting, and the September 2025 Council Meeting for projects received under funding priority 3 (Restoring and Revitalizing Tribal Stewardship). Following Council approval of the grant awards, the anticipated start date of selected projects are anticipated to begin Fall and Winter 2025. The duration of a project request is anticipated to be two years, although requests for one-year awards are also encouraged.

Equity and Environmental Justice Benefits:

OPC values diversity and equity at all levels of its workforce, in community engagement, and funded research. OPC will encourage all applicants to integrate diversity and inclusion in their scientific project and/or research design. This may include, but not be limited to mentorship to

undergraduate and graduate students, with the goal of increasing diversity and retention in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields; supporting research relationships with minority-serving institutions; supporting meaningful inclusion of stakeholder communities in research and restoration efforts, including through community science; supporting tribally-led research and restoration efforts; improved access to coastal and marine resources and ecosystem services. Further, as part of commitments laid out in [OPC’s Tribal Engagement Strategy](#), projects in funding priority 3 aim to directly uplift tribal stewardship by providing support for existing tribal programs, collaborative development of new research in support of shared tribal priorities, restoration of culturally important sites and habitats, improving tribal access to coast and ocean, and supporting customary use of coast and ocean resources.

Partnerships with local community-based organizations, tribes, and impacted communities will be encouraged, consistent with OPC’s Equity Plan: Goal 1.4: “Ensure OPC projects and actions are informed by community needs by incorporating community engagement into every OPC project and funding opportunity, as appropriate” and Goal 4.2: “Collaborate with California Native American tribes, environmental justice communities, and community partners such as: community-based organizations, colleges and universities, research organizations, including community science groups, and local stakeholders, to include Traditional Ecological Knowledges, tribal expertise, local knowledge, social science, historical context, and lived experiences into ocean and coastal science, and research.”

Project Timeline:

- December 2024: Grant awarded
- January 2025: Release RFP
- January 2025: Solicitation Webinars
- February 2025: Letters of Intent due
- March 2025: Full Proposals due (Funding Priorities 1 and 2)
- July 2025: Full Proposals due (Funding Priority 3)
- June – September 2025: Selected projects brought to June and September Council Meetings for project concurrence and consideration of funding
- Fall or Winter 2025: Selected projects start date

Project Financing:

Staff recommend that the Ocean Protection Council (OPC) authorize encumbrance of up to \$10,000,000 to fund statewide 30x30 projects that will directly the state’s goal of conserving 30% of lands and waters by 2030, and multiple objectives of OPC’s Strategic Plan.

Ocean Protection Council	\$10,000,000
TOTAL	\$10,000,000

The anticipated source of funds will be the Budget Act of 2024, Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund appropriation to OPC (Fiscal Year 2024/2025), which authorizes the distribution of funds for competitive or discretionary projects that advance ocean protection and resilience. The proposed disbursement and anticipated projects support the purpose of this appropriation to inform and advance the restoration and resilience of marine wildlife and ocean and coastal ecosystems.

An alternate source may be from the Proposition 68 Chapter 9 Fund, provided by The California Drought, Water, Parks, Climate, Coastal Protection and Outdoor Access for All Act of 2018, Fiscal Year 2020/2021. Chapter 9 funds (Section 80120) may be used to support projects that “conserve, protect and restore marine wildlife and healthy ocean and coastal ecosystems with a focus on the state’s system of marine protected areas and sustainable fisheries.” The disbursement and anticipated projects support the goals of Proposition 68, Chapter 9 to restore and protect marine wildlife and healthy ocean and coastal ecosystems by informing and enhancing habitat for marine life.

Consistency with California Ocean Protection Act:

The proposed project is consistent with the Ocean Protection Act, Division 26.5 of the Public Resources Code, because it is consistent with trust-fund allowable projects, defined in Public Resources Code Section 35650(b)(2) as projects which:

- Eliminate or reduce threats to coastal and ocean ecosystems, habitats, and species.
- Improve the management of fisheries and/or foster sustainable fisheries.
- Improve coastal water quality.
- Allow for increased public access to, and enjoyment of, ocean and coastal resources, consistent with sustainable, long-term protection and conservation of those resources.
- Improve management, conservation, and protection of coastal waters and ocean ecosystems.
- Provide monitoring and scientific data to improve state efforts to protect and conserve ocean resources.
- Protect, conserve, and restore coastal waters and ocean ecosystems.
- Address coastal water contamination from biological pathogens.

- Provide funding for adaptive management, planning coordination, monitoring, research, and other necessary activities to minimize the adverse impacts of climate change on California's ocean ecosystem.

Compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA):

The proposed projects are not 'legal projects' that triggers the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Public Resources Code section 21068 and Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations, section 15378. If it were determined to be a 'legal project' under CEQA, the proposed projects are categorically exempt from review under CEQA pursuant to 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15306 because the projects involve information collection, consisting of data collection, research, and resource evaluation activities that will not result in serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource.

If individual projects are selected that trigger CEQA, OPC must determine whether the project is in compliance with CEQA prior to the issuance of funding awards.