



**Staff Recommendation**

March 3, 2025

Item 11

**Consent Item:**

**Consideration and Approval of Disbursement of Funds to Support Post-Wildfire Monitoring Coordination in Los Angeles County**

Michael Esgro, Senior Biodiversity Program Manager & Tribal Liaison

**Recommended Action:** Authorization to disburse up to \$75,000 to the Southern California Coastal Water Research Project to support post-wildfire monitoring coordination in Los Angeles County.

**Location:** Los Angeles County

**Strategic Plan Goals and Objectives:** Goal 3: Enhance Coastal and Marine Biodiversity; Objective 3.1: Protect and Restore Coastal and Marine Ecosystems

**Equity and Environmental Justice Benefits:** Coordinated monitoring of post-fire impacts in the Los Angeles region will support improved health and safety outcomes for communities impacted by recent catastrophic wildfires.

**Findings and Resolution:**

Staff recommends 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 project is consistent with the purposes of Division 26.5 of the Public Resources Code, the California Ocean Protection Act;
2. The proposed project is consistent with the Budget Act of 2024, which included a \$2.5 million General Fund appropriation for MPA monitoring;
3. The proposed project is 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; 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 recommends that OPC adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 35500 *et seq.* of the Public Resources Code:

“OPC hereby approves the disbursement of up to \$75,000 to the Southern California Coastal Water Research Project to support post-wildfire monitoring coordination in Los Angeles County.

This authorization is subject to the condition that prior to disbursement of funds, the Southern California Coastal Water Research Project 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:**

OPC staff recommend approval to augment an existing agreement that is supporting the development of a region-wide post-fire monitoring network in the Los Angeles region. This effort is providing much-needed coordination for over 50 entities involved in monitoring wildfire impacts on aquatic habitat. The recommended budget augmentation for this existing agreement will support emerging data quality assurance/quality control needs, primarily focused on ensuring that water quality monitoring data is consistently reported and can be uploaded to Los Angeles County’s public-facing data dashboard to communicate sampling locations and results.

### **Project Summary:**

The tragic wildfires in Southern California have left a profound and lasting impact on our state. Given the unprecedented nature of these fires and the proximity of burned areas to the urban coastline, OPC is closely tracking potential impacts on local communities and coastal ecosystems. This includes direct threats to human health and safety, such as toxicity and pollution.

Monitoring post-fire impacts on the environment and local communities is essential to support recovery and resilience in the Los Angeles region. In February, OPC provided \$200,000 under the Executive Director’s delegated authority to the Southern California Coastal Water Research Project, in partnership with the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board, to develop a regionwide network to monitor wildfire impacts on aquatic habitats. This effort will provide much-needed coordination for over 50 agencies, academic institutions, and conservation organizations,

bringing together on-the-ground partners to identify key sites and indicators to be monitored, develop recommended methods, and align sampling of water quality, sediment, and wildlife to assess environmental health. To date, OPC funding has enabled monitoring partners in the Los Angeles region to coordinate monitoring during wet weather sampling events that followed the wildfires, helping agencies better understand threats and inform courses of action related to water quality, seafood safety, and beach access.

The recommended budget augmentation for this existing agreement will support emerging data quality assurance/quality control needs, primarily focused on ensuring that water quality monitoring data is consistently reported and uploaded to Los Angeles County’s public-facing data dashboard to communicate sampling locations and results.

### **Equity and Environmental Justice Benefits:**

Many communities in the Los Angeles region, including communities entitled to environmental justice, have experienced devastating loss as a result of recent wildfires. Importantly, the highly urbanized location of these wildfires is predicted to result in toxic runoff that threatens marine ecosystems and coastal communities. Coordinated monitoring of post-fire impacts in the Los Angeles region is essential to supporting improved health and safety outcomes for these communities.

### **About the Grantee:**

Southern California Coastal Water Research Project (SCCWRP) is an aquatic sciences research institute that works to improve management of aquatic systems in Southern California and beyond. Since its founding as an intergovernmental public agency in 1969, SCCWRP has been developing strategies, tools and technologies to more effectively protect and enhance the ecological health of Southern California’s coastal ocean and watersheds that drain to it. SCCWRP’s reputation is built on conducting research and translating this science into actionable guidance and recommendations that inform management decision-making and policy development; this includes ongoing monitoring of the Southern California Bight through the Southern California Bight Regional Monitoring Program. SCCWRP has partnered with OPC on many recent initiatives related to water quality and broader ecosystem health in Southern California.

### **Project Timeline:**

March 2025 – March 2026

## **Project Financing:**

Staff recommend OPC authorize encumbrance of up to \$75,000 to the Southern California Coastal Water Research Project to support post-wildfire monitoring coordination in Los Angeles County to understand impacts to community and coastal ecosystems, including adjacent marine protected areas (MPAs). The anticipated source of funds will be from the Budget Act of 2024, which included a \$2.5 million appropriation for MPA monitoring.

An alternate funding source may be the Budget Act of 2024, Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund appropriation to OPC (Fiscal Year 2024/2025) for projects that advance ocean protection and resilience to climate change. The proposed project supports the purpose of this appropriation to increase the resilience of marine wildlife and ocean and coastal ecosystems by providing information to inform agency actions to increase the health and resilience of coastal and marine ecosystems following the Southern California wildfires.

## **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.
- 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.
- 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 considered ‘legal projects’ that trigger 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 any were determined to be a ‘legal project’ under CEQA, the proposed project(s) 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 a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource.