



**Staff Recommendation**

June 10, 2025

Item 7

**Action Item:**

**Consideration and Adoption of a Roadmap to Achieving 30x30 in California's Coastal Waters**

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**Location:** Statewide

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

**Exhibits:**

Exhibit A: Roadmap to Achieving 30x30 in California's Coastal Waters

**Executive Summary:**

Five years into the 30x30 effort, and halfway into the initiative's target date, OPC has developed a roadmap to achieving 30x30 in California's coastal waters. This roadmap will chart our progress and accelerate momentum toward achieving the 30x30 target. It reflects not only expert scientific guidance, but also OPC's engagement with over a thousand Californians who care deeply about our coast and ocean. The roadmap is intended to provide clear and transparent guidance for how OPC will identify 30x30 Conservation Areas in coastal waters and achieve our ambitious conservation target in a way that enables people and nature to thrive together.

An important part of the roadmap is applying California's strong definition of a 30x30 Conservation Area to coastal waters. The roadmap recognizes that conservation is not "one size fits all" and that 30x30 Conservation Areas can both protect ecosystems and enhance sustainably managed access and recreation. Importantly, it assesses not only the quantity but also the quality of conservation. It recognizes 1) tribal stewardship areas, 2) marine protected areas (MPAs), and 3) areas that are not MPAs but are managed in ways that achieve significant biodiversity benefit as 30x30 Conservation Areas.

Staff recommends adoption of this roadmap, which would bring California to 21.9% of coastal waters conserved – nearly three-quarters of the way to our goal. Key next steps to achieve 30x30 include 1) sustain ongoing adaptive management of the state’s MPA network, 2) strengthen biodiversity conservation in National Marine Sanctuaries, 3) support tribally-led conservation, and 4) explore the role of other coastal and marine designations in conserving biodiversity.

## Background:

### California’s 30x30 Goal

In October 2020, Governor Gavin Newsom issued [Executive Order N-82-20](#), which advanced environmental conservation as an Administration priority and elevated the role of nature in combatting climate change. A cornerstone of this Executive Order committed California to conserving 30% of its lands and coastal waters by 2030 (the “30x30” or “30 by 30” target) – placing our state on the leading edge of an international movement to protect and restore nature. Following that Executive Order, in 2022, the California Natural Resources Agency released [Pathways to 30x30](#), a groundbreaking strategy that defines 30x30 Conservation Areas, highlights the breadth of conservation that is consistent with this definition, and establishes 10 pathways to achieve 30x30 in California.

The primary objective of 30x30 is to protect and restore California’s biodiversity – our state’s exceptional variety of life, from individual species to ecosystems. *Pathways to 30x30* also identifies two other key objectives: expanding access to nature and mitigating and building resilience to climate change. Where possible, achieving 30x30 in coastal waters should support these priorities – for example, by providing for a wide variety of outdoor recreation experiences, protecting tribal ancestral lands, or removing and storing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Importantly, *Pathways to 30x30* encourages actions that help people and nature thrive together. This means that achieving 30x30 in coastal waters can both protect ecosystems and biodiversity and allow sustainably managed recreational activities such as fishing, boating, and diving, so long as biodiversity impacts are minimized.

### Progress to Date

Since the establishment of 30x30, the California Ocean Protection Council (OPC) has been working with California Native American tribes, state and federal agency partners, commercial and recreational fishermen, conservation organizations, and coastal communities to expand coastal and ocean conservation and chart a course for reaching 30x30 in coastal waters. 30x30 is part of OPC’s broader work to conserve coastal and marine biodiversity, which over the past five years has included:

- Investing in sea level rise adaptation planning and resilience projects, including wetland and dune restoration
- Funding modeling and coordinated monitoring to better understand the causes and impacts of ocean acidification and hypoxia
- Supporting long-term monitoring of marine protected areas (MPAs) across the state, providing data to inform the first Decadal Management Review of California’s MPA network
- Partnering with scientists, divers, and commercial fishermen to protect and restore vulnerable kelp forests through innovative research and in-water restoration projects
- Investing in data collection, gear innovation, and entanglement response to protect wildlife from being entangled in fishing gear while supporting commercial fishing communities.

Additionally, in the last five years OPC has emerged as a global leader on 30x30 and marine conservation more broadly, helping to co-chair an international working group on 30x30 implementation and joining high-level California delegations to major international conferences to champion biodiversity action and build global partnerships.

With the release of *Pathways to 30x30* in 2022, OPC initially accounted for conservation in coastal waters by counting the 16.2% of coastal waters covered by the state’s MPA network. However, following the publication of *Pathways to 30x30*, OPC and partners embarked on a process to develop refined guidance for applying California’s strong definition of a 30x30 Conservation Area to coastal and marine areas, and to update the state’s accounting of conserved acres in coastal waters.

### Defining Conservation in Coastal Waters:

Five years into the 30x30 effort, and halfway to the initiative’s target date, OPC has developed the roadmap presented with this item to chart our progress to achieve 30x30 in coastal waters. The roadmap reflects not only expert scientific guidance, but also OPC’s engagement with over a thousand Californians who care deeply about our coast and ocean. Developed with expert scientific guidance and informed by a robust public comment and tribal consultation period, it is intended to provide clear and transparent guidance for how OPC will identify 30x30 Conservation Areas in coastal waters and achieve our ambitious conservation target in a way that enables people and nature to thrive together.

An important part of this roadmap is to apply California’s definition of a 30x30 Conservation Area to coastal waters, expanding the pathways to achieve durable environmental conservation in coastal and marine environments. *Pathways to 30x30* defines 30x30 Conservation Areas as “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.” In order to be considered a

30x30 Conservation Area in California’s coastal waters, areas must meet both of the fundamental elements of this definition:

**Durable protection.** Durably protected areas are defined in *Pathways to 30x30* as “areas with species and habitat protection designations that have gone through a formal rulemaking or other enforceable decision-making process not subject to simple reversal.”

**Managed to sustain functional ecosystems and the diversity of life that they support.** 30x30 Conservation Areas can take many forms, but must have a high degree of ecological protection. Areas may meet this criterion in one of several ways:

- **Tribal Stewardship Areas:** These are areas that are formally and collaboratively managed, stewarded, and cared for by California Native American tribes in ways that achieve significant biodiversity benefits. One notable example in California’s coastal waters is the new Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary, which protects an area of high biocultural importance. The Sanctuary’s management plan is focused on biodiversity and includes an explicit and binding framework for collaborative co-stewardship with local Chumash tribes. Indigenous Marine Stewardship Areas (IMSAs), a new concept in California, may also qualify for inclusion in 30x30 via this pathway as mechanisms for their recognition and co-stewardship are established.
- **Marine Protected Areas:** These are areas of the ocean set aside for long-term conservation aims. *The MPA Guide*, a science-based tool to identify different types of MPAs, can help to evaluate the degree of biodiversity protection in an MPA.
  - **Fully or highly protected MPAs** have the greatest potential to protect biodiversity, support climate resilience, and benefit both ecosystems and people. These areas meet California’s definition of a 30x30 Conservation Area. An example in coastal waters is our state’s ecologically connected MPA network, which functions as one cohesive highly protected site as described in *Pathways to 30x30*.
  - **Lightly protected MPAs** may meet California’s definition of a 30x30 Conservation Area, but should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis to better understand threats to biodiversity, conservation benefits, and potential opportunities to strengthen biodiversity protection.
  - **Minimally protected MPAs** allow significant extractive or destructive activities, with high total impact on biodiversity. These areas do not meet California’s definition of a 30x30 Conservation Area. However, despite not counting toward 30x30, these areas may provide significant economic or recreational value.

- **Areas that are not MPAs, but are managed in ways that achieve significant biodiversity benefit:** California’s coastal waters contain many designations that are not MPAs, but may still contribute to biodiversity conservation. Such areas should be evaluated for inclusion in 30x30 on a case-by-case basis. Examples of such areas in California’s coastal waters include University of California Natural Reserves, which restrict recreational and commercial activity in order to make undisturbed lands and waters available for research and teaching.

Staff recommends adoption of this roadmap, which would bring California to 21.9% of coastal waters conserved:

- State MPA network: 546,000 acres (16.2%)
- Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary: 191,000 additional acres (5.7%)
- University of California Natural Reserves: 150 additional acres (< 1%)

### Moving Forward:

With the adoption of this roadmap, California is nearly three-quarters of the way to its goal in coastal waters. However, we will need to mobilize across sectors and act quickly to conserve an additional 275,000 acres of coastal waters by 2030. OPC has identified four key approaches for achieving 30x30:

- **Sustain ongoing adaptive management of the state’s MPA network.** This will include working with staff from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and California Fish and Game Commission to evaluate petitions for MPA change received as part of the MPA Decadal Management Review Process. OPC also recognizes that management action beyond the petition process may be warranted to ensure MPAs meet their goals and is working in close partnership with CDFW to explore potential actions based on recommendations in the Decadal Management Review. Examples include strengthening water quality protection across the MPA network, updating the MPA Monitoring Action Plan, and developing a pathway for tribal co-management of MPAs. Importantly, MPA adaptive management is driven by the goals of the Marine Life Protection Act and takes place via the Fish and Game Commission’s public process. There is not a separate process to expand existing or create new MPAs to achieve the 30x30 target.
- **Strengthen biodiversity conservation in National Marine Sanctuaries.** While Sanctuaries provide important conservation and access benefits, each Sanctuary has different regulations and policies that will need to be assessed individually to determine alignment with California’s definition of a 30x30 Conservation Area. As

described above, the Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary is unique because of its focus on biocultural protection, its explicit framework for collaborative co-stewardship with local Chumash tribes, and its biodiversity-focused management plan that includes tribal priorities. OPC remains committed to working closely with federal partners to identify threats to resources across California's other Sanctuaries (such as water quality impairments or whale ship strikes) and opportunities to address these threats through strengthened biodiversity protections.

- **Support tribally-led conservation.** Native American tribes are the original stewards of California's ecosystems, and strengthening tribal partnerships is a core commitment of the 30x30 initiative across the state. OPC is committed to supporting tribally-led conservation by developing a formal pathway for state recognition and co-stewardship of IMSAs, funding the development of IMSA management plans, and funding tribally-led monitoring and stewardship programs, such as the Tribal Marine Stewards Network.
- **Explore the role of other coastal and marine designations in conserving biodiversity.** California's coastal waters include a wide variety of marine managed areas that have not yet been fully assessed for consistency with our definition of a 30x30 Conservation Area. This includes protected areas such as National Wildlife Refuges, National Estuarine Research Reserves, and the ocean portions of National Parks and National Seashores. Many of these areas are lightly protected and therefore need to be more closely evaluated, on a case-by-case basis, to understand how management is conserving biodiversity in the face of localized threats and pressures. Over the next year, OPC will undertake this evaluation in partnership with relevant managing agencies, key ocean data partners, scientists, and local tribes and communities. Improving water quality and addressing threats unique to California's vulnerable estuaries and wetlands are high priorities for OPC.

In addition to these four approaches, OPC is also committed to expanding and accelerating environmental restoration and stewardship in furtherance of the 30x30 goal. Over the next five years, OPC plans to commit significant funding to projects that advance this objective, including through a \$10 million competitive call that will accompany this roadmap.

Designating 30x30 Conservation Areas is only one step to achieve the objectives of California's 30x30 initiative. To effectively protect and restore biodiversity, expand access to nature, and build resilience to climate change, 30x30 Conservation Areas in coastal waters must be adaptively managed to ensure continued positive outcomes for nature and people. This should include long-term monitoring, actions aimed at supporting climate resilience, meaningful consultation with California Native American tribes, and increased access for communities.

30x30 is about more than simply designating areas as “conserved” on a map. It is a call to action. While this roadmap sets the standard for 30x30 Conservation Areas in coastal waters, OPC looks forward to working with partner agencies to further establish 30x30 as a shared state initiative and drive coordinated action on the priorities listed above. 30x30 also represents a unique and historic opportunity for state government to engage more deeply with California Native American tribes and coastal communities, improving conservation outcomes while expanding access and building resilience to climate change.