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# EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

June 11, 2025 – September 30, 2025

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

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## 2026 – 2030 OPC Strategic Plan

Ocean Protection Council's (OPC) is finalizing its 2026-2030 Strategic Plan. Building from the current [2020-2025 Strategic Plan](#) centered on the four goals of Climate Change, Equity, Biodiversity, and the Sustainable Blue Economy, the new Strategic Plan will guide OPC's work to protect California's coast and ocean over the next five years.

Following Council input, early tribal consultation and extensive public outreach that informed the draft, public comment period for the [Draft 2026-2030 Strategic Plan](#) closed on August 1, 2025. OPC received nearly 30 individual comment letters, many of which were submitted by coalitions of multiple organizations and groups, in addition to comments received during the early public listening sessions and tribal roundtables. OPC staff are in the process of making revisions to the Strategic Plan based on the feedback received. The final Strategic Plan will be presented to the Council for consideration of adoption at the December 2025 Council Meeting.

## Budget

The Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024 was approved by California voters in November 2024 for water, wildfire, and climate projects, including \$135 million to OPC for projects that advance resilience for ocean and coastal ecosystems, \$75 million for projects to advance sea level rise adaptation, and \$75 million to the Natural Resources Agency and the Department of Fish and Wildlife to protect and restore island ecosystems, advance climate-ready fisheries management, and support the restoration and management of kelp ecosystems over the life of the bond.

The Budget Act of 2025 directed the following disbursements of the bond to OPC for FY 25/26, totaling \$54.5 million:

- **Resilience of Ocean and Coastal Ecosystems:** \$7.5 million to increase resilience from the impacts of climate change, with preference given to projects that conserve, protect, and restore marine wildlife and healthy ocean and coastal ecosystems.
- **California Sea Level Rise Mitigation and Adaptation Act of 2021 (SB 1):** \$20 million to implement the California Sea Level Rise Mitigation and Adaptation Act through the SB 1 Sea Level Rise Adaptation Planning program.
- **Rocky Reef and Kelp Forest Recovery:** \$19 million to support restoration and management efforts of rocky reef and kelp forest habitats, and their associated species.

- **North Coast Working Waterfront Infrastructure:** \$3 million to improve working waterfront infrastructure along the North Coast.

As authorized by the Budget Act of 2025 (Assembly Bill 149, Public Resources Trailer Bill), OPC staff will develop grant guidelines specific to Proposition 4 solicitations through the emergency regulation process in accordance with Chapter 3.5 commencing with Section 11340 of Title 2, Division 3, Part 1 of the California Government Code.

## Federal Impacts to California's Coast and Ocean Programs

At the June Council meeting, OPC staff presented [an overview of expected impacts of federal actions](#) on California's coast and ocean programs and partnerships. To further identify and understand the impacts to federally-funded coast and ocean programs in California, OPC released a [Tracking the Impacts of Federal Actions on California's Coast and Ocean Survey](#) in September 2025. This survey will remain open and allow programs and projects to share information on a rolling basis, in order for OPC to understand the ongoing impact to jointly funded state programs and projects, and to identify critical environmental data and information gaps.

## Updates By Strategic Plan Goal

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

#### SB 1 Grant Program: Progress Update and New Mapping Tool

Since launching in 2023, the [SB 1 Sea Level Rise Adaptation Grant Program](#) (SB 1 Grant Program) has continued to provide critical support for local and regional sea level rise adaptation planning. To date, OPC has approved \$20.4 million in SB 1 funding across five rounds, along with one additional project with the City of San Leandro approved under the Executive Director's delegated authority this past quarter. That project will augment San Leandro's Subregional Shoreline Adaptation Plan through additional flood and groundwater analyses and expanded engagement with tribes and environmental justice communities. [Item 5b](#) recommends an additional \$9.3 million be awarded to seven projects, further extending the program's reach throughout the San Francisco Bay. Looking ahead, the competitive solicitation for Track 2 (Implementation Projects) is anticipated for release in fall 2025 ([Item 5c](#)).

To track progress and visualize statewide impact, OPC has developed an [interactive map](#) of all SB 1-funded projects, highlighting investments across the California coast and San Francisco Bay.

#### Coastal Habitat Mapping Expert Panel and White Paper Release

OPC, in partnership with San Francisco Estuary Institute and Southern California Coastal Water Research Project, convened a series of expert panels on habitat mapping in early 2025. The panel has finalized a [white paper](#) that characterizes and evaluates the different approaches for mapping and tracking acreages for four coastal habitats: beaches and dunes, wetlands, eelgrass and rocky intertidal habitats. The white paper also discusses how to define habitat boundaries, collect and analyze data, and produce routine updates to maps in a cost-effective manner. OPC plans to use the information in the white paper to inform how the acreage targets in our Strategic Plan could be achieved, our progress towards the targets, and support partner agencies including California Natural Resources Agency and California Air Resources Board in tracking statewide natural and working lands acreage targets as it pertains to coastal habitats.

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

#### Environmental Justice Advisory Board for California's Coast and Ocean

The [Environmental Justice Advisory Board for California's Coast and Ocean](#) (EJ Advisory Board, or Board) met virtually on September 9, 2025, for its quarterly session, facilitated by OPC staff and partners at the Better World Group. The meeting focused on the draft California Coast and Ocean Report Card's equity analysis and an update on the developing Equity Plan Biennial Assessment.

Members received a presentation from Ocean Science Trust (OST) and Dr. Dan Reineman on preliminary analysis regarding disparities in coastal access for California communities. The Board provided recommendations on how to strengthen the clarity of data communication, improve the integration of equity considerations, and enhance future analyses. Members will have an additional opportunity to provide feedback on both California Coast and Ocean Report Card and Equity Plan Biennial Assessment, both of which will be publicly presented to the Council as informational updates in December 2025.

### **Equity Plan Biennial Assessment**

OPC staff are finalizing the first Biennial Assessment of OPC's [Equity Plan](#), which evaluates progress in implementing the Plan and identifies future priorities to advance the four core goal areas in the Plan: Funding and Engagement, Workforce and Workplace, Policy, and Science. The draft integrates feedback from the EJ Advisory Board and results from the public [OPC Engagement and Partnerships Survey](#) with metrics focused on realistic and meaningful outcomes and benefits for California communities. This first assessment is designed to establish a baseline for future reporting, while also highlighting areas for improvement and opportunities for enhanced tracking and reporting across OPC programs over time. This work comes at an important moment, as OPC implements new Proposition 4 (Climate Bond) investments, which require that at least 40% of total bond funds directly benefit disadvantaged, severely disadvantaged, and climate-vulnerable communities. The final assessment will be presented to the Council in December.

### **Tribal and Environmental Justice Small Grants**

OPC staff are seeking Council consideration of authorization of up to \$2,000,000 to support the California Coastal Commission's 2025–26 cycle of the [WHALE TAIL® Competitive Grants Program \(Item 7\)](#). This investment includes approximately \$1,000,000 dedicated for tribal communities and approximately \$1,000,000 for Environmental Justice Small Grants, with a focus on small grants that reduce barriers to coastal access and expanding opportunities for underserved communities. The program will fund projects that advance coastal education, cultural practices, stewardship, and resilience while strengthening community connections to the coast and ocean. This action builds on OPC's [Equity Plan](#) and [Tribal Engagement Strategy](#) by creating accessible funding pathways to reach California Native American tribes and environmental justice communities statewide.

## Goal 3: Enhance Coastal and Marine Biodiversity

### IUCN Green List and California's Global Leadership on Biodiversity

In June, California's marine protected area (MPA) network was [officially accepted to the International Union for Conservation of Nature \(IUCN\) Green List of Protected and Conserved Areas](#), a high-profile international certification that recognizes the most successful examples of biodiversity conservation worldwide. California's system of marine protected areas, or MPAs, is the first nature network in the world to receive this honor. Green Listing of the MPA network represents the culmination of a seven-year evaluation process conducted by IUCN in close collaboration with an expert panel of Californians representing diverse sectors such as marine ecology, fishing, recreation, tourism, and resource management. Further cementing its status as a global leader in biodiversity conservation, California helped IUCN tailor its Green List standard so that it could be applied to a large-scale network, which will ultimately help advance nature networks around the world.

OPC Executive Director Jenn Eckerle and Senior Biodiversity Program Manager Mike Esgro will attend IUCN's [World Conservation Congress](#) in the United Arab Emirates next month to officially accept the Green List award, highlight the critical importance of subnational government leadership and California's continued commitment to bold action on biodiversity and climate, and strengthen collaboration with key international partners.

### 30x30 Partnership 2025 Summit

On August 14, the California Natural Resources Agency hosted its annual [30x30 Partnership 2025 Summit](#) at the San Diego Natural History Museum. The Summit celebrated California's progress toward conserving 30% of the state's lands and coastal waters by 2030 and brought together over 500 environmental champions from across the state, demonstrating the incredible momentum that is building behind 30x30 at the initiative's halfway point. During a breakout session at the Summit, OPC hosted a well-attended panel that explored the essential role of partnerships in achieving 30x30 in coastal waters – shining a spotlight on the inspiring work of OPC's state, federal, tribal, and community partners.

On August 13, in advance of the Summit, OPC participated in an invitation-only government convening that included leaders from Canada, South Africa, Chile, and other states, as well as tribal representatives from across California and the Indigenous Leadership Initiative in Canada. This exciting day of presentations and discussions focused in part on the global partnerships being forged by California and other subnational government partners, such as the Mediterranean Climate Action Partnership and the High Ambition Coalition Subnational Government Task Force on 30x30. The event clearly demonstrated California's global leadership but also highlighted

important opportunities to learn from others working to conserve biodiversity, build resilience to climate change, and enhance access to nature across the globe.

## **Adaptive Fisheries Management**

On August 14, the California Fish and Game Commission (CFGF) approved emergency [changes to California's state recreational groundfish regulations](#) as well as [final amendments to the Market Squid Fishery Management Plan \(FMP\) and updated regulations for the squid fishery](#). These events highlight the ongoing value of and need for state investment in long-term monitoring, innovative science, and stakeholder-informed processes to implement the [MLMA Master Plan for Fisheries](#) and adaptively manage California's fisheries in California in the face of climate change.

Since 2023, California's commercial and recreational groundfish fisheries have been limited by stricter regulations and depth restrictions, when one groundfish species, Quillback Rockfish, was declared federally overfished. The overfished declaration was based on a data-limited federal stock assessment conducted in 2021. This year, the Pacific Fishery Management Council fast-tracked updated [federal groundfish regulations](#) when an [updated stock assessment](#) based on improved data revealed that Quillback Rockfish are healthy, and not overfished as previously believed. The state responded by rapidly implementing emergency regulations to open state waters north of Point Conception to recreational fishing at all depths on August 28, 2025. The stock assessment and resulting regulation changes were made possible by new data sources including the [California Collaborative Fisheries Research Program](#) (CCFRP), a community-based science program which brings together recreational anglers, charter boat captains and crew, and scientists to collect data on fishes inside and outside of California's Marine Protected Area Network (MPAs) statewide. With [funding](#) from OPC, CCFRP collects essential data on nearshore fishes, including Quillback Rockfish, to inform California's management of the MPA network and federal stock assessments.

The approval of the Market Squid FMP and associated regulations is the culmination of a multi-year process conducted the Squid Fishery Advisory Committee, an advisory body composed of stakeholders and tribal members and convened by CDFW, to review and update the [Market Squid FMP](#). Throughout the process, stakeholders praised the value of [OPC-funded](#) facilitation of the advisory committee. OPC funding also supported population genomics research, which revealed that Market Squid from California, Oregon, and Alaska have very little genetic variation and can be managed as a single West Coast stock.

## **Dungeness Crab and Whale Entanglements**

Since 2020, CDFW has assessed marine life entanglement risk for whales and sea turtles and implemented management actions for the Dungeness crab fishery through the Risk Assessment

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and Mitigation Program (RAMP). On June 20, 2025, the commercial Dungeness crab season closed statewide. This closure was based on a [risk assessment](#) conducted by CDFW on June 13, which recommended closing the fishery from the California/Oregon border to just south of Point Arena. Commercial fishing in central and southern California was closed earlier in the season based on [prior risk assessments](#). Fishermen reported lower catches than expected this season, likely due to normal fluctuations in the population driven by environmental factors, and many chose to focus their effort in the northern part of the state. However, scarcity in the fishery drove up the price; average price per pound was higher this season than in the past 10 seasons. The total landing value of the fishery statewide was greater than last season, and greater than the average total landing value over the last 10 seasons. Despite the high value of crab, a delayed opening and low catches challenged the fishing community, especially for small-scale fishers.

Unfortunately, more [entanglements in both Dungeness crab and unknown fishing gear](#) were reported in the 2024-2025 season than in the past four seasons. However, entanglement reports were still fewer than in seasons before RAMP was implemented. [OPC funding](#) and close collaboration with CDFW continues to support strategies to reduce entanglement in fishing gear and ensure thriving fisheries through collaborative partnerships, best available science, gear innovation, and entanglement response and outreach.

## **Kelp Forest Restoration and Research**

Preliminary results from ongoing kelp restoration and research activities during summer 2025 suggest that novel kelp outplanting coupled with grazer suppression techniques may be most effective in restoring existing kelp beds. These kinds of on-the-ground experimental projects are helping advance the state of knowledge around marine ecosystem restoration, while laboratory and modeling studies are being evaluated to guide future actions for kelp forest restoration and stewardship. An analysis of kelp canopy cover from 2024 satellite imagery suggests that recent investments in kelp restoration are paying off; while kelp canopy cover in northern California is still low compared to historical averages, increased cover can be seen within pilot restoration plots. Lessons learned from initial research will be integrated into CDFW's statewide [Kelp Restoration and Management Plan](#).

## **Advancing Adaptive Management of the Marine Protected Area (MPA) Network**

OPC is working with CDFW, California Fish and Game Commission (FGC), and other members of the [MPA Statewide Leadership Team \(MSLT\)](#) to advance several [recommendations](#) of the [2022 Decadal Management Review \(DMR\)](#) of the MPA Network. In July, the MSLT released a [new five-year work plan](#), which identifies key actions centered around the DMR Recommendations (DMR Recommendation #9). Using the approved evaluation framework by the FGC, OPC is collaborating



with CDFW and the FGC to evaluate the 2023 MPA petitions submitted by the public in December 2023 (DMR Recommendation #4).

In partnership with OST and CDFW, OPC is conveying a MPA Social Science working group to develop a social science research and monitoring plan for the MPA Network (DMR Recommendation #14). Working group recommendations will be final in early 2026. Informed by a series of listening sessions, OPC is also developing a Community Science Strategy (DMR Recommendation #12). Both the Social Science Research and Monitoring Plan and the Community Science Strategy will be components of an updated MPA Monitoring Action Plan (DMR Recommendation #11), which will be finalized and presented to Council in summer 2026.

## **Goal 4: Support Ocean Health Through A Sustainable Blue Economy**

### **Aquaculture Action Plan**

OPC is working with the Aquaculture Statewide Leadership Team, made up of the California Coastal Commission, Department of Fish and Wildlife, Fish and Game Commission, State Lands Commission, State Water Resources Control Board, State Coastal Conservancy, California Department of Food and Agriculture, and the California Department of Public Health, to develop a Statewide Aquaculture Action Plan. The Action Plan will provide direction to improve the management of existing and future aquaculture operations and build a more sustainable, equitable, and profitable aquaculture industry in California. It is centered around three goals: improve California's aquaculture governance framework through increased interagency coordination and transparency; maximize environmental sustainability and protect public health; and facilitate the expansion of sustainable marine aquaculture in state waters. Over the last year, OPC staff have worked to develop a streamlined draft Action Plan, which establishes the highest priority actions in each of these goal areas, as identified by the leadership team, along with clear milestones for implementation. OPC staff anticipate releasing a draft Action Plan to the public early next year and presenting a final Action Plan to the Council in 2026.

### **Informing Responsible Offshore Wind Development**

OPC, in collaboration with state, federal, and tribal partners, is leading the development of a West Coast Science Collaborative (WCSC) for Offshore Wind. The WCSC will provide independent and objective scientific expertise that can inform coordinated environmental research, monitoring, and analysis, and support regulatory decision-making and ongoing adaptive management. OPC held tribal roundtables at two locations, in August at the Smith River (North Coast) and in September at Morro Bay (Central Coast), gathering tribal priorities and input to inform the ongoing planning and development of the WCSC governance structure and near-term activities. A Draft Blueprint for the

WCSC will be released for public comment in fall 2025, accompanied by a robust public workshop series and the WCSC is expected to launch early in 2026.

### Projects Approved under Executive Director Delegated Authority

Grantee	Project	Amount	Description
University of California, Santa Barbara	California Beach Resiliency Plan	\$50,000	Additional outreach and engagement with California Native American tribes and to cover work study expenses by students.
Ocean Science Trust	Science Advisor	\$69,491	Additional scientific working group activities and inform adaptative management for offshore wind.
City of San Leandro	Shoreline Sea Level Rise Adaptation Plan	\$134,093	Augment to San Leandro's Subregional Shoreline Adaptation Plan through additional flood and groundwater analyses and expanded engagement with tribes and environmental justice communities.

### Legislation

The following is an update on coastal and ocean-related legislative proposals tracked by OPC staff this legislative session.

**AB 14 (Hart)**: Coastal resources: Protecting Blue Whales and Blue Skies Program. This bill would require OPC to participate as an advisory stakeholder to the Protecting Blue Whales and Blue Skies Program, supporting a statewide voluntary vessel speed reduction and sustainable shipping program along the coast in order to reduce air pollution, the risk of fatal vessel strikes on whales, and harmful underwater acoustic impacts. **Enrolled and presented to the Governor on September 10, 2025.**

[AB 399 \(Boerner\)](#): Coastal resources: coastal development permits: blue carbon demonstration projects. This bill would authorize the California Coastal Commission to authorize blue carbon demonstration projects to demonstrate and quantify these projects' carbon sequestration potential. **Enrolled and presented to the Governor on September 15, 2025.**

[AB 452 \(Irwin\)](#): Coastal recreation: designated state surfing reserves. This bill would require the State Coastal Conservancy to establish criteria and an application process for designating an area of the coastline as a state surfing reserve and would require that OPC consider and include these reserves in the state's 30x30 goal. **This is a two-year bill.**

[AB 823 \(Boerner\)](#): Solid waste: plastic microbeads: plastic glitter. This bill would prohibit cleaning and personal care products containing one ppm or more by weight of plastic microbeads or containing plastic glitter. **Enrolled and presented to the Governor on September 9, 2025.**

[AB 900 \(Papan\)](#): Environmental protection: 30x30 goals: land conservation: science-based management and stewardship. This bill would require the California Natural Resources Agency to update the *Pathways to 30x30 Report* with recommendations to improve stewardship of 30x30 lands, as part of the 2027 annual report on progress made toward achieving the 30x30 goal. **Enrolled and presented to the Governor on September 11, 2025.**

[AB 996 \(Pellerin\)](#): Public Resources: sea level rise plans. This bill would establish a process by which local governments are encouraged to consult with the California Coastal Commission (Commission) while developing sea level rise adaptation plans, ahead of the January 1, 2034 statutory planning deadline set by SB 272 (Laird, 2023). **Enrolled and presented to the Governor on September 11, 2025.**

[AB 1056 \(Bennett\)](#): Gill nets: permits. This bill would eliminate the provisions in the Fish and Game Code that authorize the transfer of commercial-use gill or trammel net permits upon the disability or death of the original permitholder to another qualified individual. **Enrolled and presented to the Governor on September 12, 2025.**

[AB 1086 \(Muratsuchi\)](#): Marine Carbon Initiative. This bill would require the California Air Resources Board to establish a new Marine Carbon Initiative to create a new council, research program, and an expedited marine carbon research program permitting process. **This is a two-year bill.**

[AB 1102 \(Boerner\)](#): Sea level rise and groundwater rise: contaminated sites: report. This bill would require the Department of Toxic Substances Control and the State Water Resources Control Board to submit a report to the legislature about all contaminated sites that are vulnerable to sea level rise and groundwater rise. **This is a two-year bill.**

[AB 1417 \(Stefani\)](#): Energy: Voluntary Offshore Wind and Coastal Resources Protection Program: community capacity funding activities and grants. This bill would create the Offshore Wind Community Capacity Funding Grant Account within the Voluntary Offshore Wind and Coastal Resources Protection Fund to finance capacity building activities and would require offshore wind

entities to provide financial assistance to this new grant account for the three-year period after executing an offshore wind lease. Enrolled and presented to the Governor on September 16, 2025.

[AB 1448 \(Hart\)](#): Coastal Resources: Oil and gas development. This bill would require the State Lands Commission or a local trustee to consider additional factors before approving a lease renewal, extension, amendment, assignment, or modification for oil- and gas-related infrastructure upon tidelands and submerged lands within state waters associated with Pacific Outer Continental Shelf leases. **Ordered to inactive file on September 12, 2025.**

[AB 1207 \(Irwin\)](#): Climate change: market-based compliance mechanism: extension. This bill would extend authorization for the California Air Resources Board cap-and-trade regulation through 2045 and revises the use of specific revenues. **Enrolled and presented to the Governor on September 13, 2025.**

[SB 643 \(Caballero\)](#): Carbon Dioxide Removal Purchase Program. This bill would establish the Carbon Dioxide Removal Purchase Program within the California Air Resources Board and deem specific carbon dioxide removal projects, including marine carbon dioxide removal, and eligible for grants under the program. **Ordered to engrossing and enrolling.**

[SB 840 \(Limón\)](#): Greenhouse gases: Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund: studies. This bill would require the California Air Resources Board to conduct a study and report to the Legislature evaluate and make recommendations on the use of offsets. **Enrolled and presented to the Governor on September 15, 2025.**

## Budget

[AB 149 \(Committee on Budget\)](#): Public resources trailer bill. Authorizes agencies to develop and adopt program guidelines and selection criteria for programs under the Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Fund (Prop 4, Climate Bond) through emergency regulations. **Chapter 106 of Statutes of 2025.**

[SB 105 \(Weiner\)](#): Budget Acts of 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, and 2025. Appropriates \$54,500,000 to the Ocean Protection Council from the Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Fund (Prop 4, Climate Bond). **Chapter 104 of Statutes of 2025.**

## Personnel

In September, OPC welcomed two fellows who will help advance OPC's strategic priorities while gaining meaningful professional experience within state government. **Fiona Vogler** will join OPC through the Executive Fellowship Program, where she will support both executive-level functions of OPC and the California Natural Resources Agency's Legislative Affairs team. Fiona graduated from University of California, Berkeley with a degree in Geography and Political Economy. **Emily Majluf** will join OPC through the California Climate Action Corps Fellowship program, where she will support the Natural Resources Agency and OPC in advancing California's goal to conserve 30%

of state lands and water by 2030 (30x30). Emily graduated from the University of Colorado, Boulder with a degree in Astrophysics.