



State of California – Natural Resources Agency  
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE  
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**GAVIN NEWSOM, Governor**  
**CHARLTON H. BONHAM, Director**



September 26, 2025

Wade Crowfoot, Secretary for Natural Resources  
Chair, Ocean Protection Council  
California Natural Resources Agency  
1416 9th Street, Suite 1311  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**SUBJECT: Consideration and Approval of Disbursement of Funds to Support Sunflower Sea Star Reintroduction (Action Item 9)**

Dear Chair Crowfoot and Members of the Ocean Protection Council:

The Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) has worked closely with Ocean Protection Council (OPC) staff and supports authorization of funding on Action Item #9 to support reintroduction of the Sunflower Sea Star as part of OPC's Strategic Goal Plan Objective 3.1 Protect and Restore Coastal and Marine Ecosystems. By approving the distribution of these funds, OPC will support research on Sea Star Wasting Disease (SSWD) in California through captive breeding of resilient sea stars, experimental outplanting, and monitoring of wild and captive populations.

9.1 and 9.2 Captive Breeding Program Support: to inform future success of sunflower star populations, these objectives support a comprehensive understanding of genetic diversity and disease resilience among wild and captive populations. Deliverables are critical to determine appropriate breeding designs and enhance captive breeding techniques for future outplanting experiments. This will provide Department to make more informed and risk adverse approach for future outplants.

9.2 and 9.3 Natural Species Research and Reintroduction: Further understanding of the location of natural sea star populations and SSWD presence is essential to support potential outplanting efforts. To protect wild sunflower star populations in the state of California it is necessary to develop and implement rapid diagnostic tools to quantify the presence of pathogens both in state waters and in captive populations used for reintroduction. Capacity in the Department's Shellfish Health Lab is necessary to support placement of animals into state waters. This will provide the Department with the tools and capacity to make informed health decisions.

Support for 9.1, 9.2., and 9.3 will directly inform marine health management for Sunflower Sea Stars by filling some gaps in the understanding of genetic diversity, disease resilience, and pathogen presence. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact me at (707) 495-3231 or by e-mail at [Colleen.Burge@wildlife.ca.gov](mailto:Colleen.Burge@wildlife.ca.gov).

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Colleen A. Burge".

Colleen A Burge, PhD  
Research Scientist Supervisor 1  
Marine Health Unit  
Fisheries Branch



# GREATER FARALLONES ASSOCIATION

September 29, 2025

Jenn Eckerle  
Executive Director  
California Ocean Protection Council  
*Sent via email: [COPCpublic@resources.ca.gov](mailto:COPCpublic@resources.ca.gov)*

RE: Comments on agenda items 5c, 7, and 9

Dear Jenn Eckerle,

The Greater Farallones Association (GFA) appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on agenda items 5c, 7, and 9 of the September Ocean Protection Council meeting. As the nonprofit partner to the Greater Farallones and Cordell Bank National Marine Sanctuaries, GFA advances coordinated science, restoration, policy, management, and community engagement to support a healthy and resilient North-central California coast. Through collaborative partnerships, GFA facilitates innovative and cost-effective initiatives that strengthen coastal resilience and restore critical ecosystems. We offer the following comments in that same spirit of collaboration and shared stewardship.

**Agenda Item 5c.** Consideration and approval of Competitive Solicitation for Track 2: Sea-Level Rise Implementation Project Funding Solicitation under the SB 1 Sea-Level Rise Adaptation Planning Grant Program

GFA coordinates the [North-central California Coastal Sediment Coordination Committee](#) (NCCSCC), a unique state, federal, and local government partnership that advances coastal resilience initiatives across a 300-mile stretch of shoreline, representing approximately 25% of California's coast (see attachment).

OPC's leadership was pivotal in the development of the [Greater Farallones National Marine Sanctuary Coastal Resilience Sediment Plan](#), which - for the first time - aligned diverse planning efforts and guidance documents across jurisdictions into a shared, holistic, and nature-based roadmap for increasing shoreline resilience. This groundbreaking effort directly led to the establishment of the NCCSCC, which now serves as a critical forum for coordination and implementation at scale.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has recognized and expressed appreciation for OPC's leadership in coastal resilience. NOAA has specifically asked GFA to convey to the State of California the national importance of California's sea-level rise adaptation planning and implementation, and the need to share lessons learned, successes, and innovative approaches with other coastal states. California's leadership in this arena has a far-reaching impact, serving as a model for coastal adaptation nationwide.



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For these reasons, **GFA strongly supports Item 5c - Approval of Competitive Solicitation for Track 2: Sea-Level Rise Implementation Project Funding Solicitation.** This investment will strengthen the state's ability to implement effective, science-based, and coordinated adaptation projects, and will help maintain California's position at the forefront of coastal resilience innovation.

### **Agenda Item 7.** Consideration and Approval of Disbursement of Funds for Tribal and Environmental Justice Small Grants

GFA commends and strongly supports the Ocean Protection Council's leadership in advancing Tribal and environmental justice at a time when federal action has been limited. OPC's commitment to meaningful investment and partnership is critical to ensuring that California's coastal stewardship is inclusive, equitable, and grounded in long-standing cultural relationships with the ocean.

As a past recipient of WHALE TAIL grants, GFA has witnessed firsthand the transformative impact of these investments. We are deeply committed to serving diverse communities and youth by providing enriching ocean science programs and immersive coastal experiences for schools that have historically been excluded from such opportunities. Through this work, we strive to reduce socioeconomic barriers to accessing and caring for California's coast, fostering the next generation of ocean stewards.

**We strongly support OPC's proposal to invest \$2 million in Tribal and Environmental Justice small grants through the WHALE TAIL program,** including the decision to dedicate half of these funds to Tribal-led projects. This approach affirms the central role of California Native American tribes in stewarding our coast and waters, while ensuring that cultural practices, ancestral connections, and Indigenous Knowledge are recognized and integrated into statewide ocean conservation efforts.

### **Agenda Item 9.** Consideration and Approval of Disbursement of Funds for Sunflower Sea Star Reintroduction

**GFA strongly supports the Ocean Protection Council's proposed investment in the recovery and reintroduction of the sunflower sea star.** Restoring this keystone species is a critical step toward rebuilding healthy and resilient kelp forest ecosystems along California's coastline.

GFA leads collaborative kelp restoration efforts within Greater Farallones National Marine Sanctuary and along the Sonoma coast - the region that has experienced the greatest loss of kelp in the state. Working in partnership with tribes, commercial divers, universities, agencies, and nonprofit organizations, we implement large-scale urchin population management and pilot innovative kelp culturing and outplanting strategies. These efforts have already produced measurable ecological gains, including significant kelp canopy recovery at key restoration sites.



## GREATER FARALLONES ASSOCIATION

The proposed OPC investments in captive breeding, disease testing, and experimental outplanting will directly complement and strengthen ongoing in-water restoration efforts. By pairing active kelp restoration with the strategic reintroduction of sunflower stars, California can accelerate the rebuilding of functional kelp forests and advance scientific understanding of the ecological interactions that support long-term ecosystem resilience.

We are encouraged that the proposed funding recipients are members of the Pacific Coast Ocean Restoration Initiative (PCOR), of which GFA is also a member. A coordinated statewide approach is essential for meaningful, landscape-scale recovery of kelp habitats and associated species, and this investment represents a significant step toward that goal.

A key component of our restoration work is our partnership with the Kashia Band of Pomo Indians, the first peoples of the Sonoma coast. Together, we are restoring kelp habitat at Sea Ranch - an ecologically critical and culturally sacred site within Kashia territory. Earlier this year, up to 20 sunflower stars were observed at this jointly managed site, a hopeful sign of natural recovery. We encourage OPC to coordinate these investments with GFA and Kashia to ensure a holistic approach to sunflower sea star monitoring and kelp restoration in the sanctuary.

Finally, GFA commends OPC's leadership in advancing climate-resilient restoration and the statewide Kelp Restoration and Management Plan (KRMP). As an active member of the KRMP Community Working Group, GFA is deeply engaged in supporting the Plan's vision and priorities. **We invite OPC to deepen its partnership with GFA and our collaborators in Sonoma County - the region that has experienced the most severe kelp decline in the state - to leverage our demonstrated expertise and proven restoration strategies.** By working together, we can accelerate the implementation of the KRMP and strengthen the recovery of kelp forest ecosystems along the California coast.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide public comment on the OPC agenda items. We commend OPC for its commitment to inclusive, science-based coastal and ocean stewardship. GFA is proud to contribute to the success of this work and looks forward to working with OPC in the years ahead. Please feel free to contact me at [mkrach@farallones.org](mailto:mkrach@farallones.org) with any questions or to further explore opportunities for collaboration.

Sincerely,

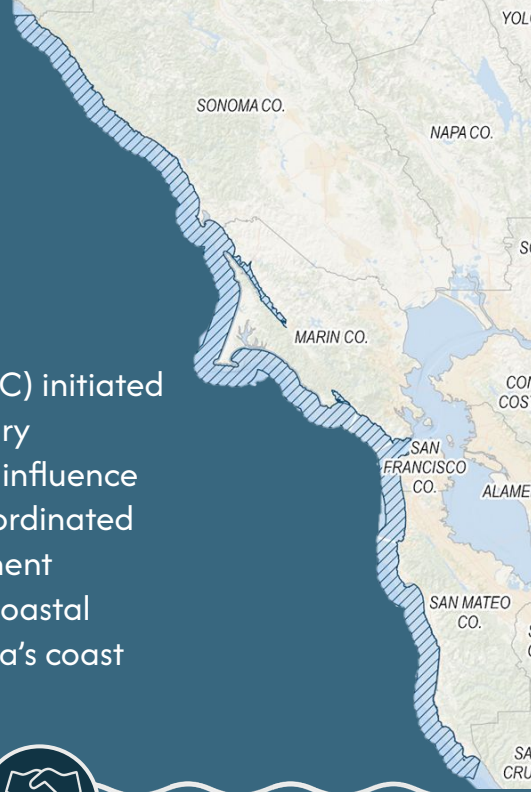
Monika Krach  
Executive Director  
Greater Farallones Association



# Building Coastal Resilience North-Central California Marine Region:

## OPC Funding Leads to Statewide & National Impact

**Model for Coastal Resilience** – In 2018 the Ocean Protection Council (OPC) initiated a collaboration with NOAA's Greater Farallones National Marine Sanctuary (GFNMS) which set in motion actions to safeguard California's coast and influence coastal resilience nationally. Through a State and Federal partnership coordinated by the non-profit Greater Farallones Association, a coastal regional sediment management program was formed, which catalyzed local and regional coastal resilience initiatives across a 300-mile region addressing 25% of California's coast and advances OPC's strategic priorities.



### **Inclusive community- based process.**

OPC supports the Sonoma- Marin Coastal Resilience Sediment Management Plan (CRSMP). The most recent CRSMP, developed through the Sanctuary Advisory Council community-based process.

**Creative Approach.** OPC supports a 300-mile "super region" Coastal Resilience Sediment Plan combining 4 CRSMPs, identifies beaches and coastal parks most at risk from sea level rise. Identifies 3 priority adaptation projects to preserve public access and habitat.

**Collaborative partnership.** North Central California Sediment Coordination Committee composed of 17 local, state, and federal agencies adopt the Coastal Resilience Plan as a guiding document becoming the first region to establish an active, interagency team to implement CRSMPs.



### **Effective communication between agencies and the public.**

NOAA supports the Efficient Permitting Roadmap: A first-of-its-kind guide for sediment management in California and a model for a 7-state Mid-Atlantic guide.

### **Strengthened coordination across agencies.**

NOAA supports Coastal Agency Review for Sediment (CORESED), a one-stop forum where project leads meet with key permitting agencies for coordinated feedback to expedite permitting.

**Innovative scientific research.** NOAA and USGS supports Coastal Storm Modeling System (CoSMoS) Dune Modeling Research to test beach nourishment performance and produce a tool for smarter West Coast projects.

**Improved cost-effectiveness.** NOAA supports cell phone visitation study to map beach visitation to link recreational use with restoration planning.

**Federal-State partnership achieves results** – Greater Farallones Association's leadership in facilitating a partnership between OPC and NOAA has led to innovative, effective, and cost sharing collaborative initiatives to restore and build a resilient California coastline.



**GREATER FARALLONES  
& CORDELL BANK**  
NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARIES



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Learn more about our work at:  
[nccscc-noaa.hub.arcgis.com/](https://nccscc-noaa.hub.arcgis.com/)