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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

October 1 – December 9, 2025

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

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Federal Actions Impacting California's Coast and Ocean

Inclusion of California Coast in Federal Offshore Oil Drilling Plan

On November 20, 2025, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management released its [11th National Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program](#), which proposes [34 potential lease sales](#) in federal waters. This includes six lease areas that stretch across the entire California coast, in addition to areas off the coast of Alaska and the Gulf. Governor Gavin Newsom issued an [immediate response](#) to the proposal to open California's coast to offshore oil drilling, voicing his strong opposition and committing to using "every tool at our disposal to protect our coastline." Secretary Crowfoot also joined a [press conference](#) with Congressman Jared Huffman, Senator Alex Padilla and other Congressional leaders to amplify California's opposition to this harmful plan that threatens California's economy, environment and coastal communities. The release of this Leasing Program initiates a 60-day public comment period; OPC is working with leadership from the Coastal Commission, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, State Lands Commission and the Department of Conservation on coordinated comments on behalf of the State of California, which are due on January 23, 2026.

Federal Impacts to California's Coast and Ocean Programs

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.

As of October 2025, survey responses from 25 entities ranging from local governments, academic research institutions, national laboratories, and federal agencies, indicated over **\$450 million** federal funds have been delayed, reduced, or eliminated for programs supporting California's coast and ocean. The top three most reported impacts included (1) delays or elimination of federal funding, (2) uncertainty driving programmatic pause, and (3) federal workforce reductions. Implications from these federal impacts include loss of personnel, student fellowships, and data through key information distribution programs, as well as paused or eliminated research projects and monitoring operations.

Of the impacts reported, over half (56%) were to programs or projects intended to benefit priority populations, including California Native American tribes or disadvantaged communities.

Updates By Strategic Plan Goal

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

Nutrient Management Evaluation Report Released for the Southern California Bight

In October 2025, HDR, Inc. and the California Association of Sanitation Agencies (CASA) released the [Southern California Bight Nutrient Management Evaluation](#). This report quantifies the amount of nitrogen discharged into the Southern California Bight from several publicly owned treatment works and estimates the potential impacts of water recycling and planned future technological upgrades that could reduce nitrogen discharge loads to the coastal ocean in this region. This information on current and potential planned nutrient discharge reductions could help inform coordinated strategies for improved management of ocean acidification, hypoxia, and harmful algal blooms off California's coast.

Coastal Habitat Mapping White Paper Released

OPC, in partnership with San Francisco Estuary Institute (SFEI) and Southern California Coastal Water Research Project (SCCWRP), 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 across 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. This effort supports [OPC's Strategic Plan goals](#) for coastal habitat acreage targets and helps other state agencies meet mandates to track habitat acreages under AB 1757, California's [Nature-Based Solutions Climate Targets](#). An informational [webinar](#) will be held December 1, 2025.

Update on SB 1 Tribal Cultural Resources Solicitation

On September 12, OPC received five proposals under the [SB 1 Tribal Cultural Resources Funding Program](#), representing strong interest from tribes in advancing sea level rise planning and cultural resource protection. Staff are currently reviewing all submissions and preparing for formal tribal consultation, which will begin in mid-December. The proposed projects range from community-led vulnerability assessments, cultural site documentation, ecological monitoring, to the development of tribally defined adaptation strategies.

Additionally, the Track Two (Implementation Projects) solicitation for the SB 1 Program will be released following Proposition 4 Emergency Regulations approval by the Office of Administrative Law.

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](#) (EJ Advisory Board, or Board) met virtually on November 4, 2025, for its final quarterly session of the year, facilitated by OPC staff and the Better World Group. The meeting focused on collecting final reflections and feedback on the Equity Plan Assessment, with members identifying priority areas for OPC to elevate in future implementation of the Equity Plan to strengthen meaningful engagement, maximize community benefits, and better support partnerships with underserved communities and California Native American tribes. Members also encouraged OPC to continue advancing workforce diversity, including geographic and experiential diversity, and to expand opportunities for tribes and community-based organizations to participate in OPC-funded projects.

The Board also received a presentation on the Statewide Plastics Monitoring Plan and discussed opportunities to support outreach and encourage community participation during an upcoming public comment period. Looking ahead to next year, OPC and Better World Group are identifying priority areas for engagement aligned with the new [2026-2030 OPC Strategic Plan](#), and a survey will be circulated to members to identify member interests and improvements for strengthened EJAB facilitation and engagement practices for the year ahead.

Equity Plan Assessment

The [Equity Plan Assessment](#), formerly referred to as the Biennial Assessment, summarizes progress made since the OPC [Equity Plan](#) was adopted in 2022, and outlines a framework for continued accountability for achieving equity outcomes across the Plan's four goal areas. Over the past year, OPC collaborated closely with the EJ Advisory Board and Better World Group through subgroup discussions, focused sessions, and draft reviews to identify meaningful metrics and provide targeted input that strengthened the Assessment's focus on accountability, data, and implementation follow-through, including future actions to strengthen implementation of the Equity Plan. The Assessment also incorporates findings from the public [OPC Engagement and Partnerships Survey](#) to help contextualize outcomes and highlight areas for improvement. The Assessment will be presented to the Council at this December meeting as an informational item ([Item 7a](#)).

Goal 3: Enhance Coastal and Marine Biodiversity

OPC Represents California at the International Union for Conservation of Nature World Conservation Congress

In October 2025, OPC Executive Director Jenn Eckerle and Senior Biodiversity Program Manager & Tribal Liaison Mike Esgro attended the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) World Conservation Congress in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. The World Conservation Congress is the largest environmental convening on the planet and only happens once every four years, drawing leaders from across the globe to set the global conservation agenda for the next decade and beyond. At the Congress, [Governor Newsom announced in a video address that California would make history as one of two U.S. states, alongside Massachusetts, to officially join IUCN as subnational government members](#). Director Eckerle also [accepted the globally renowned IUCN Green List Award](#), which recognizes the most successful examples of place-based conservation worldwide, on behalf California's marine protected area network – the first nature network in the world to receive this honor.

OPC's participation at World Conservation Congress built on previous successful engagement with key international partners at United Nations biodiversity summits in 2022 and 2024 and helped lay groundwork for California's history-making participation in the recent United Nations climate summit (COP 30). A detailed summary of the trip's major outcomes and key takeaways, can be found here: [Cathedral Thinking: Finding Inspiration at the IUCN World Conservation Congress](#).

OPC Shares Lessons from the MPA Network and Strengthening Biodiversity in Chile

In November, OPC participated in a Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) Learning Forum in La Serena, Chile to share lessons learned from the California Marine Protected Area (MPA) Network, and on how to balance multiple uses in ocean and coastal waters. This forum was sponsored by [Proyecto Humboldt II](#), the second phase of a five-year binational project between Chile and Peru entitled "Catalyzing the Implementation of a Strategic Action Program for the Sustainable Management of Shared Living Marine Resources in the Humboldt Current System."

The Learning Forum was designed to share case studies and expertise from around the globe including the U.S., Canada, and Brazil to support Chile's ongoing commitment to strengthen marine governance, improve cross-sectoral coordination, and align national priorities with global best practices. Representing California, Dr. Staci Lewis, OPC's MPA Network Program Manager, presented the MPA Network design and adaptive management processes, and facilitated discussions with Chilean government officials during the five-day event. Each stage of the Marine Spatial Planning (MSP/PEM) process in Chile was assessed and critical opportunities, challenges, and enabling conditions required for effective implementation were identified. This trip was

foundational in continuing the budding collaboration between California and Chilean governments to advance biodiversity priorities and to achieve 30x30.

Conserving 30 Percent of State Coastal Waters by 2030

On November 13, the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) hosted a legislative briefing on the state's goal to conserve 30% of its lands and coastal waters by 2030 (30x30). Five years into the initiative, California is on track to meet the 30x30 goal, with this year's [Annual Progress Report](#) showing 26.1% of California's lands and 21.9% of its coastal waters under long-term conservation and care. With the California Legislature deeply committed to 30x30, this briefing was intended to showcase progress and continue momentum as the state moves into the last five years of the initiative. Director Eckerle joined leaders from CNRA, Wildlife Conservation Board, and the State Coastal Conservancy and provided remarks highlighting progress to date as well as top priorities for conserving an additional 275,000 acres of coastal waters by the end of the decade. The briefing was attended by key staff from the offices of the Senate President Pro Tem and Assembly Speaker as well as consultants from the Assembly Natural Resources Committee and the Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee.

Microplastics Research and Implementation

Microplastics Research Webinar and Panel: OPC and California Sea Grant provided \$1.9 million to fund [five research projects](#) addressing microplastics in California. These projects were selected through two competitive research calls focused on 1) improved understanding of aquatic microplastic contamination sources and ecological sensitivity, and 2) microplastic removal efficacy of low-impact development structural best management practices. A public webinar sharing findings from these research projects was held on November 25, 2025. State staff are actively considering how this work could inform California state agency research and management of microplastics in the future.

State Agencies Contribute to Implementation of Statewide Microplastics Strategy: The California Coastal Commission published [Guidelines for Addressing Plastic Pollution in Coastal Development Permits and Local Coastal Programs](#), which formalizes plastic pollution reduction measures in coastal planning and regulatory work. The Department of Toxic Substance Control additionally [conducted preliminary research on microplastics in specific consumer products](#) (including artificial turf infill, detergents, paints, plastic film mulch, single-use cigarette filters, single-use food contact articles, among others), assessing potential for exposure, potential alternatives, and relevant regulations already in place both in and outside of California.

Both of these efforts directly align with the [Statewide Microplastics Strategy](#), adopted by OPC in 2022.

Sunflower Sea Star Research and Experimental Reintroduction Efforts

Once abundant on rocky reefs from Alaska to Baja California, the Sunflower Sea Star has been nearly wiped out in California following the onset of Sea Star Wasting Disease (SSWD) in 2013. For nearly a decade, no Sunflower Sea Stars were positively identified in California's waters. However, in 2024 and 2025, wild sightings of Sunflower Sea Stars were verified by scientific divers in Mendocino and Sonoma counties. OPC staff have been engaged on statewide efforts to support a captive breeding program and experimental outplantings of captive-bred stars and [advanced a staff recommendation at the September 2025 Council meeting](#) to further facilitate this work. In October, as part of OPC-funded efforts to bring this species back, 48 Sunflower Stars were outplanted in individual cages in the Monterey Harbor for a short-term experiment – the first individuals to be reintroduced to the wild, potentially helping to pave the way for larger-scale reintroduction in the future.

Reducing Entanglement Risk in the Dungeness Crab Fishery

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) assesses marine life entanglement risk for the Dungeness crab fishery through the Risk Assessment and Mitigation Program (RAMP). Updated [RAMP regulations](#) came into effect this October, which include a pathway for the approval of alternative gear during a fishery closure after April 1. [CDFW conducted the first risk assessment](#) of the 2025/2026 Dungeness crab season on October 24, which delayed the opening of the commercial season until at least January 1, 2026. The next risk assessment is expected to occur in mid-December 2025.

OPC continues to reduce the risk of marine life entanglement in fishing gear while ensuring thriving fisheries by supporting entanglement response, investing in research and monitoring, piloting ropeless gear, and expanding collaborations. In 2024, [OPC approved funding](#) to support the purchase of purple and black marked line for the commercial Dungeness crab fleet. Updated RAMP regulations require that commercial fishermen use marked line to enable CDFW and the National Marine Fisheries Service to better identify the fishery source of marine life entanglements. This fall, the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission and CDFW purchased and distributed of 4,000 coils (4,800,000 feet) of marked line to 365 fishermen through five distribution events in Eureka, Crescent City, and Morgan Hill. Additionally, in October, OPC staff attended annual meetings of the [Dungeness Crab Working Group](#) and the [Dungeness Crab Task Force](#). Topics of discussion at the [Task Force meeting](#) included the new RAMP regulations, lost gear recovery, and updating [regulations for the fishery](#).

In response to a 2024 recommendation from the Task Force, OPC funded The Nature Conservancy and the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations to expand an industry-led effort to recover lost Dungeness crab gear. In 2025, the [Fishermen's Gear Recovery Network](#) expanded

statewide and launched an [online reporting form](#) for ocean users. The Network trains and employs Port Coordinators to orchestrate lost gear recovery across the state; through this partnership-based model, fishermen or other “eyes on the water” report lost gear using an online form, commercial fishermen are paid to recover lost gear, and Port Coordinators across the state process lost gear and sell it back to its owner at low cost. This collaboration is empowering fishermen to take an active role in ocean stewardship and thereby ensure vibrant fisheries and healthy ecosystems.

Adaptive Management of the Marine Protected Area Network

OPC continues to advance several of the 2023 Marine Protected Area (MPA) Network [Decadal Management Review Recommendations](#), including developing a Social Science Research and Monitoring Plan and a Community Science Strategy. OPC is working with the Ocean Science Trust and CDFW to convene a working group of social science experts to develop social science research and monitoring recommendations. The Social Science Research and Monitoring Plan and Community Science Strategy are anticipated to be finalized by early 2026. Additionally, OPC is supporting CDFW's ongoing evaluations of the MPA petitions received by the California Fish and Game Commission in December 2023.

The MPA Statewide Leadership Team is seeking nominations to fill its eight tribal representatives seats with applications due January 13, 2026. Primary and Alternate seats across four regions are currently available: North Coast, North Central Coast, Central Coast, and South Coast. More information can be found on the [nomination announcement](#) webpage.

Update on Intertidal Biodiversity DNA Barcode Library

As approved by the Council on February 29, 2024, OPC awarded Coastal Quest funds to support the development of the California Intertidal Biodiversity DNA Barcode Library. As the project transitions to field collection, analysis, and application, the Southern California Coastal Water Research Project has been identified as a new grantee to lead the technical efforts of developing the Intertidal Library, and associated coast and ocean resource management applications. A new grant agreement is being developed to reflect this update.

Goal 4: Support Ocean Health Through A Sustainable Blue Economy

Statewide Aquaculture Action Plan

OPC staff has convened the Aquaculture Leadership Team to develop a Statewide Aquaculture Action Plan (Plan), to increase coordination among state agencies and improve consistency, transparency, and efficiency in planning, facilitating, permitting, managing, and fostering

sustainable commercial marine aquaculture. On October 13, OPC invited early tribal consultation to hear tribal priorities and early feedback on concepts of the Plan, with two virtual roundtables held on November 3. The 60-day early consultation period will conclude on December 14. OPC staff anticipate inviting a second round of tribal consultation on the draft Plan in March 2026.

On October 23, OPC staff [presented](#) to the [Aquaculture Development Committee](#) to discuss industry perspectives on the Plan, and determine how best to engage these partners in Plan development. OPC staff are currently planning listening sessions for this winter to ensure that the Plan reflects the needs of the industry, California Native American tribes, NGOs, and other partners. OPC staff anticipate releasing the draft Plan for 30-day public comment period in April 2026, with final adoption of the Plan at the June 2026 Council meeting.

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. **Signed by the Governor on October 11, 2025. (Chapter 606, Statutes of 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. **Vetoed by the Governor on October 1, 2025.**

[SB 682 \(Allen\)](#): Environmental health: product safety: perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). This bill would prohibit the distribution and sale of cleaning products, dental floss, juvenile products, food packaging, or ski wax intentionally containing PFAS. **[Vetoed by the Governor on October 13, 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. **Vetoed by the Governor on October 11, 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. **Signed by the Governor on October 6, 2025. (Chapter 385, Statutes of 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). **Signed by the Governor on October 3, 2025. (Chapter 286, Statutes of 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. **Signed by the Governor on October 13, 2025. (Chapter 720, Statutes of 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. **Signed by the Governor on October 6, 2025. (Chapter 397, Statutes of 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. **This is a two-year bill.**

[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. **Signed by the Governor on September 19, 2025. (Chapter 117, Statutes of 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. **Vetoed by the Governor on October 13, 2025.**

[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. **Signed by the Governor on September 19, 2025. (Chapter 121, Statutes of 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.**