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March 23, 2026

Item 4

Informational Item:
2026 California Coast and Ocean Report

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Location: Statewide

Strategic Plan Goals and Objectives: Tracking Change Over Time: Ensuring that monitoring results are effectively communicated to decision-makers and the public, through OPC's Coast and Ocean Report and other products.

Exhibits:

Exhibit A: 2026 California Coast and Ocean Report

Exhibit B: 2026 Coast and Ocean Assessment Methodology

Exhibit C: 2025 Ocean Protection Council (OPC) Annual Report

Executive Summary:

The 2026-2030 Ocean Protection Council Strategic Plan: Safeguarding Our Coast and Ocean for All Californians commits OPC to an overarching objective of Tracking Change Over Time. The 2026 California Coast and Ocean Report (2026 Report; Exhibit A) advances this objective by assessing 14 indicators of coastal and ocean health across three dimensions: Status, Progress, and Looking Ahead. This item also includes the scientific evaluation underpinning the indicator assessments (2026 Assessment Methodology; Exhibit B) and a retrospective summary of OPC's 2025 activities and accomplishments (Exhibit C).

The 2026 Report was developed through a partnership between OPC and the California Ocean Science Trust (OST). It builds on prior work by OPC staff and summer interns, informed by consultation with the OPC Science Advisory Team and Environmental Justice Advisory Board, and collaboration with the West Coast Ocean Alliance. The scientific evaluation process engaged more than 120 scientists from academic, government, tribal, and nonprofit organizations. The 2026

Report serves as a useful assessment of the current status of California's coast and ocean, a report on state progress to protect the coast and ocean from climate change and other stressors, and as a foundation for moving forward into the future.

The 2026 report shows that California's coast and ocean are generally healthy, but climate change is causing continued disruptions to species, habitats, and ecosystem services. Through monitoring, restoration, and technological innovation, the state is committed to advancing ocean-climate solutions and driving toward a healthy coast and ocean for all.

Background:

OPC's 2022, 2023, and 2024 Annual Coast and Ocean Reports were foundational first steps in identifying indicators to assess the health of California's coast and ocean, as well as providing a retrospective of activities and accomplishments made to advance the priorities in the OPC Strategic Plan. Recognizing that a dedicated effort was needed to deliver an indicator-based evaluation of ocean and coastal health, OPC approved funding in December 2023 to OST to lead the scientific process to develop and assess indicators, in partnership with the West Coast Ocean Alliance (WCOA).

Many existing long-term monitoring efforts in California currently report on status and trends. For example, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)'s California Current Integrated Ecosystem Assessment produces an annual Ecosystem Status Report that assess the health of ocean waters off of California, Oregon, and Washington. This report has been produced every year for over a decade and is aimed at a scientific audience. Other efforts, such as the NOAA National Marine Sanctuaries Condition Reports, are aimed at a more public audience, but are limited to the regional boundaries and priorities of individual National Marine Sanctuaries. Finally, while many local or topical monitoring and reporting efforts are active in California, they are generally focused on particular ecosystems, species, or stressors. In contrast, the 2026 Report provides the first comprehensive assessment of coastal and ocean health in California.

Report Summary:

The 2026 Report includes an assessment of 14 indicators of coastal and ocean health in California across three thematic areas in concise, two-page formats to serve as public education and communication tools for each indicator:

Wildlife and Habitats

- Seabirds and Shorebirds
- Fish

- Kelp
- Marine Mammals
- Rocky Intertidal
- Sandy Beaches

People

- Community Benefits
- Beach Water Quality
- Coastal Access
- Commercial Fisheries

Stressors

- Sea Level Rise
- Ocean Acidification
- Harmful Algal Blooms
- Ocean Temperature

The 2026 Assessment Methodology further explores four data-limited indicators that could be included in future evaluations (Eelgrass and Seagrass, Coastal Flooding, Invasive Species, Marine Debris and Microplastics). These indicators were chosen from an initial list of 42 indicators suggested by the OPC Science Advisory Team and were prioritized based on understandability, data availability, and relevance to state management and policy priorities. Indicators were further refined through an iterative process of expert feedback, public and tribal input, and discussions among OPC and OST staff.

Indicator selection and development was led through a partnership between OPC, OST and WCOA, with WCOA participation led by the Southern California Coastal Research Program (SCCWRP). OST and SCCWRP collaborated closely, endeavoring to find opportunities for efficiency, synergy, and alignment. They convened expert working groups to collaboratively develop appropriate methods, identify and evaluate the most relevant data, and produce an assessment of system conditions using statewide metrics. The specific data sources and methodologies that supported indicator assessment are included in the 2026 Assessment Methodology.

This 2026 Report is based on non-indigenous science. Bringing together non-indigenous science with tribal science and Traditional Knowledges, through co-production and other approaches, can improve our collective understanding of the ocean, support the priorities of California Native American tribes, uplift tribal stewardship, and lead to the development of innovative solutions to social or environmental challenges. Future efforts to track change over time should include

improved inclusion of tribal science and Traditional Knowledges in ocean monitoring and evaluation. This will help ensure approaches to understanding and communicating about the ocean are more comprehensive, accurate, and equitable.

OPC 2025 Activities and Accomplishments:

OPC accomplishments include efforts that were completed or had significant findings in 2025, with ongoing efforts and progress made highlighted when appropriate. Also included in the 2025 OPC Annual Report is an update on the ongoing partnership with the Ocean Science Trust as OPC Science Advisor and the 2025 Summer Internship Program. Key accomplishments across OPC's Strategic Goals include:

Goal 1: Building Resilience to Climate Change

- **SB 1 Sea Level Rise Adaptation Grant Program:** Throughout 2025, the Senate Bill 1 Sea Level Rise Adaptation Grant Program (SB 1 Grant Program) provided local assistance for sea level rise adaptation planning projects through 18 local projects across California – from Humboldt County to Los Angeles County – amounting to $18,770,352. Projects included 11 San Francisco Bay shoreline projects and 7 outer coast projects. As a complementary effort, OPC's Senate Bill 1 Technical Assistance Program (SB 1 TA Program), administered in partnership with Coastal Quest, was extended in December 2025 through 2027 to continue providing tailored application support to SB 1 Grant Program applicants as they prepare Track 1, Track 2, or Tribal Track applications. View all funded projects on the interactive map of SB 1-funded projects.
- **Launch of SB 1 Sea Level Rise Tribal Cultural Resources Grant Program (Tribal Track)**: In 2025, OPC launched the Senate Bill 1 Sea Level Rise Tribal Cultural Resources Funding Program, which is intended to provide funding to California Native American tribes to assess and plan for the impacts of SLR on their ancestral lands, cultural sites, lifeways, and resources.
- **Resolution on Ocean Acidification and Hypoxia (OAH):** Recognizing the role of land-based nutrient inputs in contributing to OAH and impacting the health of California's marine environment, with implications for ecologically and economically important marine species, the Council adopted a Resolution on Ocean Acidification and Hypoxia.

Goal 2: Maximizing Community Benefits and Stewardship

- **Environmental Justice and Tribal Small Grants:** OPC funded a second round of environmental justice small grants, in partnership with the California Coastal Commission's 2025–26 cycle of the WHALE TAIL® Competitive Grants Program to advance coastal

education, cultural practices, stewardship, and resilience while strengthening community connections to the coast and ocean. This small grant program includes $1,000,000 dedicated for tribal communities.

- **Equity Plan Assessment:** OPC completed its first Equity Plan Assessment to assess the progress made since the OPC Equity Plan to evaluate progress made to-date and inform future actions to strengthen implementation of the Equity Plan, and ensure the impact of OPC's investments and actions are inclusive and benefit the diverse communities of California.

Goal 3: Safeguarding Coastal and Marine Biodiversity

- **IUCN Green List:** 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.
- **Conserving 30% of Coastal Waters by 2030 (30x30):** OPC developed an ambitious, world-leading approach to conserving 30% of California's coastal waters by 2030 (the "30 by 30" or"30x30" initiative) with the release of a *Roadmap to 30x30 in Coastal Waters* that defines 30x30 Conservation Areas for coastal and marine ecosystems.
- **Kelp:** OPC-funded research and restoration activities are helping to support kelp forest resilience in the face of a changing ocean, with one restoration project on California's north coast resulting in a 900% increase in kelp cover this year due to a combination of purple urchin removal and innovative kelp outplanting techniques.

Goal 4: Enabling a Sustainable Blue Economy that Protects Ocean Health

- **Draft Blueprint for Building a West Coast Science Collaborative for Offshore Wind**: OPC released the *Draft Blueprint for Building a West Coast Science Collaborative for Offshore Wind* to inform the establishment a West Coast Science Collaborative for Offshore Wind (WCSC) to provide objective scientific expertise, elevate tribal science and Traditional Knowledges, and inform coordinated environmental research, monitoring, and analysis.
- **Offshore Wind Environmental Monitoring Framework:** OPC has continued to advance development of a comprehensive environmental monitoring framework for offshore wind, in partnership with the California Marine Sanctuary Foundation. Five working groups of technical experts were convened and met regularly throughout 2025 to support the project. The framework will serve as a foundation for building comprehensive monitoring statewide, offering insights into the long-term impacts of

offshore wind development from local to regional scales. The framework will be released in Summer of 2026.