



**Staff Recommendation**

June 16, 2026

Item 5b

**Action Item:**

**Consideration and Approval of Disbursement of Funds to Advance  
30x30 in Coastal Waters**

Michael Esgro, Senior Biodiversity Program Manager (Supervisor) & Tribal Liaison

**Recommended Action:** Authorize disbursement of up to \$3,887,222 to support 1) the following grantees for tribally-led projects selected through a competitive solicitation to advance 30x30 in coastal waters, and (2) California Sea Grant’s administration of projects previously approved by OPC to advance 30x30 in coastal waters:

- 5b.1: Up to \$1,846,600 to the California Marine Sanctuary Foundation for the project “Indigenous-led biocultural indicators: Supporting a holistic framework for coastal and marine biodiversity monitoring in Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary”
- 5b.2: Up to \$1,004,500 to the Kashia Band of Pomo Indians for the project “Advancing 30x30: Indigenous leadership in kelp forest restoration”
- 5b.3: Up to \$318,900 to Reef Check California, with a subaward to the Amah Mutsun Land Trust, for the project “Amah Mutsun – Reef Check Dive Into Science program”
- 5b.4: Up to \$315,600 to Creek Lands Conservation, with a subaward to the yak tit’yu tit’yu yak tiłhini Northern Chumash Tribe, for the project “Restoring coastal wetlands and lifeways”
- 5b.5: Up to \$401,622 to support California Sea Grant’s administration of projects previously approved by OPC to advance 30x30 in coastal waters

**Location:** Statewide

**Strategic Plan Goals and Objectives:** Goal 2: Maximize Community Benefits and Stewardship, Objective 2.1: Strengthen Partnerships with California Native American tribes; Goal 3: Safeguard Coastal and Marine Biodiversity, Objective 3.1: Conserve 30% of California’s Coastal Waters by 2030

**Equity and Environmental Justice Benefits:** Direct benefit to California Native American tribes and tribal communities; tribal capacity building and workforce development; mentorship for undergraduate and graduate students, including Native students; research relationships with minority-serving institutions; meaningful inclusion of tribal communities in research and restoration efforts; investment in tribal communities impacted by biodiversity loss; supporting improved tribal access to coastal and marine resources and ecosystem services

### Findings and Resolution:

Staff recommends that the Ocean Protection Council (OPC) adopt the following findings:

“Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibit(s), OPC hereby finds that:

1. The proposed projects are consistent with the purposes of Division 26.5 of the Public Resources Code, the California Ocean Protection Act;
2. The proposed projects are consistent with OPC’s Proposition 68 Grant Guidelines, adopted September 10, 2024; and
3. The proposed projects are not ‘legal projects’ that trigger the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Public Resources Code section, section 15378, since they either involve only: a) data collection, research, experimental management and resource evaluation activities; or b) small scale restoration. Neither will result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource.”

Staff further recommends that OPC adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 35500 *et seq.* of the Public Resources Code:

“OPC hereby approves the disbursement of up to \$3,887,222 to support 1) the following grantees for tribally-led projects selected through a competitive solicitation to advance 30x30 in coastal waters, and (2) California Sea Grant’s administration of projects previously approved by OPC to advance 30x30 in coastal waters:

- 5b.1: Up to \$1,846,600 to the California Marine Sanctuary Foundation for the project “Indigenous-led biocultural indicators: Supporting a holistic framework for coastal and marine biodiversity monitoring in Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary”
- 5b.2: Up to \$1,004,500 to the Kashia Band of Pomo Indians for the project “Advancing 30x30: Indigenous leadership in kelp forest restoration”
- 5b.3: Up to \$318,900 to Reef Check California, with a subaward to the Amah Mutsun Land Trust, for the project “Amah Mutsun – Reef Check Dive Into Science program”

- 5b.4: Up to \$315,600 to Creek Lands Conservation, with a subaward to the yak tit<sup>y</sup>u tit<sup>y</sup>u yak ti<sup>h</sup>ini Northern Chumash Tribe, for the project “Restoring coastal wetlands and lifeways”
- 5b.5: Up to \$401,622 to support California Sea Grant’s administration of projects previously approved by OPC to advance 30x30 in coastal waters

This authorization is subject to the condition that prior to disbursement of funds, that all projects receive necessary permits for all project components and that grantees shall submit for the review and approval of the Executive Director of the OPC detailed work plans, schedules, staff requirements, budgets, and the names of any contractors intended to be used to complete the projects, as well as discrete deliverables that can be produced in intervals to ensure the projects are on target for successful completion. All projects will be developed under a shared understanding of process, management, and delivery.”

### Executive Summary:

California has committed to the goal of conserving 30% of state lands and coastal waters by 2030 (also known as the “30 by 30” or “30x30” initiative). OPC is leading the state’s efforts to achieve 30x30 in coastal waters. Currently, 21.9% of coastal waters are conserved. Conserving an additional 275,000 acres of coastal waters by 2030 will require science to identify additional areas to prioritize for conservation, active work to restore and steward ecosystems associated with coastal and marine 30x30 Conservation Areas, and support for tribally-led stewardship. In summer 2025, OPC released a \$10 million competitive solicitation for projects to advance these priorities, split into three separate solicitation “tracks”: Track 1 (Action-Oriented Science), Track 2 (Accelerating Environmental Restoration and Stewardship), and Track 3 (Revitalizing Tribally-Led Stewardship).

This solicitation was highly competitive. 73 proposals were received for Track 1 (Action-Oriented Science), 36 for Track 2 (Accelerating Environmental Restoration and Stewardship), and 13 for Track 3 (Revitalizing Tribally-Led Stewardship). Proposals were reviewed for scientific and technical merit by expert panels convened by California Sea Grant, and by OPC for alignment with 30x30 priorities. Projects awarded under Track 1 and Track 2 were presented and approved at the [March 2026 OPC meeting](#). Additional funding recommended here will support California Sea Grant’s administration of these previously approved Track 1 and Track 2 projects.

The projects recommended for approval here are for Track 3 (Revitalizing Tribally-Led Stewardship) only, following a 60-day tribal consultation period with all California Native American tribes statewide, which was initiated in April.

The suite of projects recommended for funding will support OPC’s efforts to achieve 30x30 in coastal waters, and revitalize tribally-led stewardship of the coast and ocean more broadly, in multiple ways. One project will focus on developing a tribally-led research and monitoring framework for tracking the health of the recently designated Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary, the only tribal stewardship area in California’s coastal waters that currently counts toward 30x30. Additional projects are focused on tribally-led research, monitoring, and restoration of vulnerable coastal and marine ecosystems such as wetlands and kelp forests.

The projects recommended here are directly responsive to key actions identified in the California Natural Resources Agency’s [Pathways to 30x30](#) strategy and priorities in OPC’s [Roadmap to Achieving 30x30 in Coastal Waters](#). Together, they represent a major step forward in supporting tribally-led stewardship of California’s unique coastal and marine biodiversity.

## Project Summary:

### Background:

In October 2020, Governor Gavin Newsom issued [Executive Order N-82-20](#), advancing environmental conservation as a state priority and elevating the role of nature in fighting climate change. As part of this Executive Order, California committed to the goal of conserving 30% of state lands and coastal waters by 2030 (also known as the “30 by 30” or “30x30” initiative). 30x30 was codified into state law by Senate Bill 337 in 2023.

In April 2022, the California Natural Resources Agency released [Pathways to 30x30: Accelerating Conservation of California’s Nature](#), which defines 30x30 Conservation Areas, highlights the breadth of conservation that is consistent with this definition, and establishes 10 pathways for achieving 30x30 in California. Building on [Pathways to 30x30](#), in June 2025, OPC released its [Roadmap to Achieving 30x30 in Coastal Waters](#), which outlines the specific ways in which California will conserve 30% of coastal waters by 2030. As of the [2025 Pathways to 30x30 Annual Progress Report](#), 21.9% of California’s coastal waters are conserved.

Accomplishing the actions in OPC’s [Roadmap](#) and conserving an additional 275,000 acres of coastal waters by 2030 will require science to identify additional areas to prioritize for conservation, active work to restore and steward ecosystems associated with current or potential 30x30 Conservation Areas, and support for tribally-led stewardship. In summer 2025, OPC released a \$10 million competitive solicitation for projects to advance these priorities, split into three separate solicitation “tracks”:

- Track 1: Action-oriented science
- Track 2: Accelerating environmental restoration and stewardship

- Track 3: Revitalizing tribally-led stewardship

This solicitation was highly competitive. 73 proposals were received for Track 1, 36 for Track 2, and 13 for Track 3. Proposals were reviewed for scientific and technical merit by expert panels convened by California Sea Grant, and by OPC and agency partners for alignment with 30x30 priorities. In March 2026, [OPC approved disbursement of \\$6,048,000 to California Sea Grant to support four Track 1 projects and five Track 2 projects](#). These projects, which are now under way, will help identify biodiversity “hotspots” to prioritize for conservation and bolster biodiversity in vulnerable ecosystems impacted by climate change, wildfire, and other threats.

The projects recommended for approval here are for Track 3 (Revitalizing Tribally-Led Stewardship) only and are being recommended to the Council following a 60-day tribal consultation period with all California Native American tribes statewide, which was initiated in April.

### **Project Descriptions:**

The suite of projects recommended for funding will support OPC’s efforts to achieve 30x30 in coastal waters by restoring and revitalizing tribal stewardship of California’s coast and ocean, for the benefit of both people and nature.

#### **5b.1: Indigenous-led biocultural indicators: Supporting a holistic framework for coastal and marine biodiversity monitoring in Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary (California Marine Sanctuary Foundation)**

This project will bring together the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians, the yak tit’u tit’u yak tiłhini Northern Chumash Tribe, the Barbareño Band of Chumash Indians, and staff at the recently designated Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary to develop a suite of biocultural indicators, rooted in tribal knowledge, that will inform Sanctuary monitoring, research, and stewardship activities. The project will center tribally-led biodiversity conservation and establish a framework for management strategies based on multiple different ways of knowing, ensuring that Sanctuary management accurately represents the needs of Chumash communities and knowledge holders.

Relevant *Pathways to 30x30* Key Actions: 4.4 (Strengthen monitoring and evaluation of ocean and coastal health to improve conservation outcomes of federal and state management); 4.5 (Explore possible new measures and initiatives to address threats to biodiversity within National Marine Sanctuaries); 4.6 (Identify high priority science needs related to strengthening conservation within National Marine Sanctuaries); 7.7 (Develop programs that provide stable, long-term support for

tribal establishment and administration of tribally protected landscapes and other tribally managed or co-managed areas)

**5b.2: Advancing 30x30: Indigenous leadership in kelp forest restoration (Kashia Band of Pomo Indians)**

This project will support the Kashia Band of Pomo Indians in conserving and restoring kelp forests within the Tribe’s ancestral territory on the Northern California coast. Through an approach grounded in both western marine science and Traditional Knowledges, the Kashia Band of Pomo Indians will train tribal community members as scientific divers to lead ecological monitoring and in kelp forest ecosystems, collaborate with the California Academy of Sciences on efforts to reintroduce the sunflower sea star, and directly restore degraded kelp forest habitat through culturing and outplanting kelp at Mé·ti·ni (Fort Ross Cove) and removing purple urchins at Mé·ti·ni and Tule qh’a le yo (Shell Beach). The Tribe will also initiate development of a co-stewardship framework with the State of California for kelp and intertidal ecosystems.

Relevant *Pathways to 30x30* Key Actions: 6.12 (Prioritize coastal habitats and degraded seascapes for restoration through science-based assessments); 6.13 (Partner with California Native American tribes to apply tribal expertise and traditional and tribal knowledges to restoration efforts for the coast and ocean); 6.14 (Restore coastal wetlands, seagrass beds, and kelp forests); 7.7 (Develop programs that provide stable, long-term support for tribal establishment and administration of tribally protected landscapes and other tribally managed or co-managed areas)

**5b.3: Amah Mutsun – Reef Check Dive Into Science program (Reef Check California, with a subaward to the Amah Mutsun Land Trust)**

This project will train members of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band in advanced scientific diving, kelp forest monitoring protocols, and kelp restoration techniques. Reef Check California will provide SCUBA training and certification for ten members of the Amah Mustun Tribal Band, enhancing the tribe’s capacity to monitor and steward kelp forests in their ancestral waters off California’s central coast in the Monterey Bay region. Additionally, the Tribe will collaborate with Reef Check to create culturally relevant kelp forest monitoring, stewardship, and restoration resources, including outreach and education materials.

Relevant *Pathways to 30x30* Key Actions: 4.4 (Strengthen monitoring and evaluation of ocean and coastal health to improve conservation outcomes of federal and state management)

**5b.4: Restoring coastal wetlands and lifeways (Creek Lands Conservation, with a subaward to the yak tit'yu tit'yu yak tiłhini Northern Chumash Tribe)**

This project will support the yak tit'yu tit'yu yak tiłhini Northern Chumash Tribe in restoring two degraded wetlands within the Tribe's ancestral territory. Tribal members will engage in planting and harvesting events that focus on tule rush and other wetland species of ecological and cultural significance. Additionally, the project will support the development and implementation of long-term access agreements with landowners that will provide tribal members with long-term access rights to continue stewarding these wetlands.

Relevant *Pathways to 30x30* Key Actions: 6.12 (Prioritize coastal habitats and degraded seascapes for restoration through science-based assessments); 6.13 (Partner with California Native American tribes to apply tribal expertise and traditional and tribal knowledges to restoration efforts for the coast and ocean); 6.14 (Restore coastal wetlands, seagrass beds, and kelp forests)

**5b.5: California Sea Grant administrative costs**

This funding will support California Sea Grant's continued administration of the Track 1 (Action-Oriented Science) and Track 2 (Accelerating Environmental Restoration and Stewardship) projects previously approved by OPC at the [March 2026 OPC meeting](#).

**Contribution to 30x30 Priorities:**

The projects recommended here are directly responsive to key actions identified in the California Natural Resources Agency's *Pathways to 30x30* strategy and priorities in OPC's *Roadmap to Achieving 30x30 in Coastal Waters*. Together, they represent a major step forward in supporting tribally-led stewardship of California's unique coastal and marine biodiversity.

**Equity and Environmental Justice Benefits:**

The recommended suite of projects will support multiple equity and environmental justice benefits, including: direct benefit to California Native American tribes and tribal communities; tribal capacity building and workforce development; mentorship for undergraduate and graduate students, including Native students; research relationships with minority-serving institutions; meaningful inclusion of tribal communities in research and restoration efforts; investment in tribal communities impacted by biodiversity loss; supporting improved tribal access to coastal and marine resources and ecosystem services

**Project Timeline:**

September 2026 - September 2028

**Project Financing:**

Staff recommends that the Ocean Protection Council (OPC) authorize encumbrance of up to \$3,887,222 to the following grantees for projects selected through a competitive solicitation to advance 30x30 in coastal waters.

5b.1 California Marine Sanctuary Foundation	\$1,846,600
5b.2 Kashia Band of Pomo Indians	\$1,004,500
5b.3 Reef Check California, with a subaward to the Amah Mutsun Land Trust	\$318,900
5b.4 Creek Lands Conservation, with a subaward to the yak titʻu titʻu yak tihini Northern Chumash Tribe	\$315,600
5b.5 California Sea Grant	\$401,622
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$3,887,222</b>

The anticipated source of funds will be from Proposition 68 Chapter 9 Fund, provided by The California Drought, Water, Parks, Climate, Coastal Protection and Outdoor Access for All Act of 2018. Chapter 9 funds (Section 80120) may be used to support projects that “conserve, protect and restore marine wildlife and healthy ocean and coastal ecosystems with a focus on the state’s system of marine protected areas and sustainable fisheries.” The proposed projects support the goals of Proposition 68, Chapter 9 to restore and protect marine wildlife and healthy ocean and coastal ecosystems.

**Consistency with California Ocean Protection Act:**

The proposed project is consistent with the Ocean Protection Act, Division 26.5 of the Public Resources Code, because it is consistent with trust-fund allowable projects, defined in Public Resources Code Section 35650(b)(2) as projects which:

- Eliminate or reduce threats to coastal and ocean ecosystems, habitats, and species.
- Allow for increased public access to, and enjoyment of, ocean and coastal resources, consistent with sustainable, long-term protection and conservation of those resources.
- Improve management, conservation, and protection of coastal waters and ocean ecosystems.
- Provide monitoring and scientific data to improve state efforts to protect and conserve ocean resources.
- Protect, conserve, and restore coastal waters and ocean ecosystems.

### **Compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA):**

The proposed projects 5b.1, 5b.3, and 5b.5 are not ‘legal projects’ that trigger the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Public Resources Code section 21068 and Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations section 15378. If a project were determined to be a ‘legal project’ under CEQA, the proposed projects are categorically exempt from review under CEQA pursuant to 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15306 because the projects involve information collection, consisting of data collection, research, and resource evaluation activities that will not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource.

Proposed projects 5b.2 and 5b.4 are categorically exempt from review under CEQA pursuant 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15333 because the projects qualify as small habitat restoration projects not exceeding five acres in size to assure the maintenance, restoration, enhancement, or protection of habitat for fish, plants, or wildlife.