

Ocean Protection Council update

California Fish and Game Commission Marine Resources Committee Meeting July 14, 2022

30x30

On April 22, California released the final draft of [Pathways to 30x30: Accelerating Conservation of California's Nature](#), which details the state's approach to conserving 30% of our lands and coastal waters by 2030. OPC coordinated closely with California Natural Resources Agency leadership on the coastal and ocean components of *Pathways to 30x30*. Currently, OPC estimates that 16% of coastal waters are conserved through the state's marine protected area (MPA) network. Moving forward, OPC will be working with California Native American tribes, the research community, other state and federal agencies, and coastal stakeholders to conserve an additional half a million acres of coastal waters by implementing science-based protections that address the most serious threats to coastal and ocean biodiversity. As a first step, in the coming weeks, OPC will meet with NOAA leadership to discuss strengthened biodiversity protections for National Marine Sanctuaries in California. Additionally, OPC will serve on the state's new 30x30 Coordinating Committee to support integration of the coast and ocean into 30x30 implementation efforts.

Equity Plan and Tribal Engagement Strategy

OPC has developed an Equity Plan that represents a commitment to advancing equity across ocean and coastal policies and actions in California and strengthening internal efforts to create a more inclusive workplace and workforce. In May 2022, OPC released a draft of the Equity Plan for a 45-day public review and comment period. The public comment period closed on June 23; feedback and outcomes from members of the public will inform the final proposed Equity Plan, which OPC staff anticipate bringing to the Council for consideration and possible adoption at its September 14 meeting. At that meeting, OPC will also consider funding for a dedicated Environmental Justice Small Grants Program.

On July 6, 2022, OPC released its draft Tribal Engagement Strategy for a 90-day tribal consultation period. The draft Strategy, which was developed by OPC staff based on early consultations and listening sessions with coastal tribes held in fall 2021, is intended to provide a framework for enhanced partnership between OPC and tribes on coastal and ocean issues. OPC looks forward to consulting with tribes on the draft, and anticipates bringing a final Strategy, developed in meaningful partnership with tribes, to the Council for consideration and possible adoption at its December 8 meeting. OPC will also consider

additional funding for the Tribal Marine Stewards Network and a dedicated Tribal Small Grants program at its September 14 meeting.

Restoration and Mitigation Policy

OPC staff have developed a draft policy to guide restoration and mitigation activities in coastal and ocean habitats. This new policy will provide a consistent, standardized foundation for evaluation and approval of such efforts. The draft policy is currently being reviewed by an expert scientific panel that provided initial feedback to OPC on June 15. The panel is now working to provide additional feedback and revision to OPC's draft, and a revised version will be shared with partner agencies for input in the coming weeks. OPC anticipates finalizing and publicly releasing the policy at the end of 2022.

Kelp Restoration

An unprecedented partnership for kelp restoration between OPC, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), Reef Check California, The Nature Conservancy, and North Coast communities has concluded with the removal of nearly 50,000 pounds of purple urchin and positive signs of kelp forest recovery. In 2020, OPC approved funding to support removal of purple urchins in support of bull kelp restoration at two sites in Mendocino County: Noyo Bay and Albion Cove. This project directly engaged commercial red urchin fishermen, whose livelihoods have been significantly impacted by kelp collapse. Over the course of two years, fishermen were able to successfully reduce urchin densities below the threshold expected to facilitate a shift from urchin barren back to kelp forest. Urchin removals appear to have had a positive impact on kelp recovery: scientific monitoring documented a limited, but statistically significant increase in bull kelp density at the Noyo Bay restoration site. Project outcomes will directly inform resource managers' efforts to protect and restore threatened kelp forests across the state. The final report is available here: [Restoration of Northern California Bull Kelp Forests \(PDF\)](#).

Updated coastal habitat inventory and sea-level rise vulnerability assessment

In 2020, OPC funded the San Francisco Estuary Institute (SFEI) to develop an updated inventory of wetland, beach, dune, rocky intertidal, and eelgrass habitats to support conservation and restoration. At its June 14, 2022 meeting, the Council approved the next phase of this work, which leverages remote sensing expertise from both SFEI and NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory to further improve the inventory. Additionally, this project will result in a sea-level rise vulnerability assessment of these coastal habitats that will support resiliency planning and investments.

MPAs: Ask the Researcher webinar series, funding opportunity related to MPAs & climate, and upcoming MPA compliance grant

On May 24, OPC, in partnership with CDFW and Strategic Earth Consulting, kicked off an eight-part virtual summer webinar series that unpacks the results of the latest state-funded MPA long-term monitoring projects. Each one-hour webinar is open to the public and recordings are posted online. Webinars on kelp forest ecosystems and rocky intertidal habitats were held at the end of May; webinars on sandy beach ecosystems and ocean conditions observing systems were held at the end of June. Additional webinars will be held through July and August. The full webinar schedule, as well as technical reports and “snapshot” reports for each long-term monitoring project, are available on [OPC's website](#).

On July 1, OPC released a request for proposals (RFP) for projects that explore the role that MPAs may play in enhancing climate resilience. \$2 million is available through this RFP to support research-based projects that advance our understanding of this relatively unexplored question. Specific areas of interest to OPC include: characteristics of climate refugia, vulnerability assessment, distribution of habitats and species under various climate scenarios, and social resilience outcomes for coastal communities. Letters of intent are due on July 29; more information is available on [OPC's funding webpage](#).

At its September 14 meeting, the Council will consider disbursement of Once-Through Cooling Interim Mitigation Funds to Resources Legacy Fund to support Phase II of the MPA Compliance Initiative. This effort will build on the success of Phase I and support the implementation of action items related to MPA enforcement and compliance listed in the MPA Statewide Leadership Team's 2021-2025 Work Plan. Specifically, OPC funds will provide support to several partners, including the MPA Collaborative Network, to further enhance compliance with MPA regulations in partnership with state agencies.