

## Staff Summary for February 11-12, 2026

**11A. Commission Executive Director's Report****Today's Item****Information** ☒**Action** ☐

Receive updates from the executive director and staff on items of note since the previous Commission meeting in December 2025.

**Summary of Previous/Future Actions (N/A)****Background**

The Commission employs an executive director to manage the Commission's operations and ensure that its broad responsibilities and authorities are fulfilled daily to the extent resources allow. To maintain functionality across all capacities, the Commission has delegated various authorities to its executive director, who "...shall report to the Commission at each regular meeting on important delegated actions."

Today's report covers five topics:

- Year in Review – 2025
- Intergovernmental Affairs
- Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI) Awareness
- Personnel
- California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)

***Year in Review – 2025***

Despite significant challenges, the Commission achieved a successful and impactful year in 2025. See Exhibit 1 for the first *Year in Review* presented to the Commission in over 20 years!

***Intergovernmental Affairs***

As authorized by the Commission, your executive director submitted a comment letter (Exhibit 2), written and signed by Marine Resources Committee co-chairs Murray and Sklar, in response to the U.S. Bureau of Ocean Energy Management's 11<sup>th</sup> National OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Draft Proposed Program, which proposes six oil and gas leases off California's coast.

The letter articulates the Commission's opposition to expanding oil and gas leases off California as proposed, citing: California's longstanding opposition to offshore drilling; the State's environmental stewardship efforts; and risks to marine ecosystems, California's coastal communities, tribes, cultural resources, the economy, and national security.

***JEDI Awareness: JEDI Work Plan Update – Phase II Outreach Survey***

Commission staff continues to advance the JEDI Work Plan approved in 2021. As part of Phase II, the Commission partnered with KH Consulting Group to develop and launch an external stakeholder survey. The survey assessed stakeholder familiarity with the Commission and its mission, and gathered demographic insights into its stakeholders. A few questions addressed interest in and familiarity with JEDI concepts.

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### *Outreach Strategy and Results*

The survey received over 7,200 responses through three outreach efforts:

- December 2024: Targeted email invitations sent to existing contacts in the Commission's email database → *676 responses*
- Early October 2025: Broader outreach via the California Department of Fish and Wildlife electronic mailing list → *6,539 responses*
- Mid-October 2025: Outreach through partner networks → *13 responses*

The process prioritized accessibility and inclusivity through multi-channel digital outreach and trusted networks. However, staffing constraints and a hiring freeze led to an 11-month delay between assessment activities, which may affect the relevance of the findings. Nevertheless, the responses and analyses provide unprecedented insight into the Commission's stakeholder demographics and perspectives across four general categories.

#### 1. Demographic Profile

- *Age and Gender*: 82% of respondents were aged 45 or older; 86% identified as male (86%), 9% as female.
- *Race and Ethnicity*:
  - ~ 70% White (Non-Hispanic) – a significant overrepresentation compared to California's makeup
  - ~ 7% Hispanic/Latino – underrepresented
  - ~ 6% Asian respondents – underrepresented
  - ~ 4% American Indian/Alaska Native – a higher proportion than in the state
- *Language*: 97% reported English as their primary language, significantly higher than California's rate
- *Geography*: Responses came from all California counties, although just over half came from southern California (29%) and San Francisco Bay Area (23%), combined
- *Other Indicators*: Low representation of immigrants, individuals with disabilities, and the LGBTQIA+ community.

#### 2. Outdoor Engagement

- 96% cited recreation as their primary motivation
- Other top motivations: Sustenance (23%), education (14%), cultural or religious (7%), and resource management (13%)
- Popular activities: Fishing, camping, and hiking; hunting and wildlife watching also ranking highly

#### 3. Commission Engagement and Awareness

- 55% have never interacted with the Commission

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- Preferred communication channels among those who do engage: email (68%), website (30%), and social media (17%), with Facebook and YouTube being most used
- Barriers to engagement: lack of clarity on how to engage, time constraints, and inconvenient and/or inaccessible meetings

## 4. Access and Inclusion

- Accessibility concerns: Inconvenient meeting times and locations, lack of materials for non-English speakers, or accommodations for individuals with disabilities
- Trust gaps: Low confidence in the Commission's application of diversity, equity, and inclusion principles

Overall: These findings highlight the need for the Commission to broaden outreach, improve accessibility, and build trust through clearer engagement pathways and inclusive practices. Staff will provide a more robust JEDI work plan update at a future meeting.

***JEDI Awareness: Black History Month***

2026 marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of historian Carter G. Woodson's establishment of Negro History Week, the precursor to Black History Month. Woodson aimed to highlight contributions of Black Americans often overlooked in mainstream history, strategically choosing February to align with the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass, both pivotal figures in Black history.

Negro History Week evolved into Black History Month, officially recognized in 1976 by President Gerald Ford. Today, it celebrates Black achievements and promotes education and reflection on the ongoing struggle for racial equality. Black history is American history—an essential part of our shared story.

The California Natural Resources Agency honors Black History Month annually with statewide special events. While Black History Month broadly celebrates the achievements and contributions of Black Americans, this year's theme highlights their pivotal role in environmental stewardship. The theme, "Honoring the Past, Protecting the Future: 100 Years of Black Leadership in Environmental Action," celebrates a century of vision, resilience, and advocacy that has shaped environmental justice and sustainability. From early conservationists and community organizers to scientists, policymakers, and grassroots leaders, this theme recognizes the profound impact of Black Americans leading in these roles and who have profoundly influenced efforts to protect land, air, water, and public health—often while confronting systemic inequities. For more information, visit <https://resources.ca.gov/blackhistorymonth>.

***Personnel***

For each Commission meeting, staff provides a workload update and a summary of activities for the previous two months (Exhibit 3). There have been a few personnel changes over the last couple of months (see Exhibit 4 for updated staff biographies and backgrounds).

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### *California Sea Grant State Fellowship – 2026 Appointment*

Amanda Specht joined the Commission in January as its newest California Sea Grant state fellow. Amanda recently earned her master of science degree in environmental policy and management from the University of California, Davis, focusing on ocean and coastal policy, marine ecology, and climate-ready sustainable fisheries. She previously earned a bachelor of science degree in biology with honors from the University of Puget Sound, and worked with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Learn more in Exhibit 4.

### *Program Manager Position*

Program Manager Dixie Van Allen retired in November 2025. This role oversees the Commission's regulatory program, the California Endangered Species Act petition process, CEQA compliance, and general administrative functions. Until a new program manager is hired, the Commission regulatory staff – Jenn Bacon, Sherrie Fonbuena, and David Haug – are filling program manager responsibilities in an acting capacity. Adjustments to staff workload expectations are also being introduced to manage the significant gap. Recruitment is underway, with interviews expected later this month.

### *Tribal Advisor and Liaison Position*

This position has remained vacant since December 2024 due to a statewide hiring freeze and is expected to be permanently eliminated.

### *State Job Classification Consolidation*

California is modernizing its hiring system to improve transparency, accessibility, and efficiency. With nearly 2,600 job classifications currently in use, the state is consolidating roles to better reflect evolving workforce needs and to simplify hiring for applicants and employees.

Recent reforms include merging 67 generalist job titles—covering more than 32,000 positions—into just 8 classifications. Such consolidations are intended to make it easier for applicants to find the right role and for employees to advance without being limited by narrow job categories. Early results are promising; in the first pilot, application screening time dropped by nearly 87% while maintaining merit-based standards.

Looking ahead, strategies such as shared applicant pools and centralized verification of qualifications, aim to further streamline hiring and reduce repetitive processes. These efforts are part of a broader strategy to build a more agile, inclusive, and applicant-friendly civil service system.

### *Leave Reduction Plans*

Several senior staff members hold leave balances exceeding allowable limits — up to more than 200%. State policy requires annual leave reduction plans to limit liability and prevent delays in filling vacancies. Staff must take an average of four to five days of leave per month without generating additional leave balances. While progress has been made, reducing the balances is a multi-year effort. The team is actively exploring ways to improve efficiency and remains focused on prioritizing essential work, which at times includes deferring certain tasks and projects for future consideration.

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**California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)**

The Commission has delegated authority to its executive director to take actions necessary to comply with CEQA, the guidelines generally implementing CEQA, and the Commission's certified regulatory program approved by the secretary for natural resources. The authority includes conducting—or causing to be conducted—initial studies and deciding whether to prepare draft environmental impact reports, negative declarations, mitigated negative declarations, or determinations of exemption.

Since the December 2025 meeting, your executive director determined that three regulatory actions are exempt from CEQA:

- Amending Section 29.15 of Title 14, California Code of Regulations (CCR), regarding the recreational take of abalone.
- Re-adoption of emergency amendments to Section 180.15 of Title 14, CCR, regarding the commercial coonstripe shrimp trap fishery.
- Re-adoption of emergency amendments to sections 1.91, 27.25, 27.30, 27.35, 27.40 and 28.55, Title 14, CCR, for recreational take of rockfish, cabezon, greenling, and lingcod.

Additionally, your executive director authorized publication of a notice of intent to adopt a negative declaration for the proposed amendments to regulations for recreational take of rockfish, cabezon, greenling, and lingcod through a regular rulemaking.

**Significant Public Comments (N/A)****Recommendation (N/A)****Exhibits**

1. [Year in Review – 2025](#)
2. [Comment letter to the U.S. Bureau of Ocean Energy Management](#), dated January 23, 2026
3. [“Staff Time Allocation and Activities](#),” dated February 6, 2026
4. [Commission staff and contractor biographies](#), dated January 2026

**Motion (N/A)**

# **California Fish and Game Commission**

## ***Year in Review – 2025***

*Prepared for the February 2026 Meeting*

In decades past, it was customary at the beginning of each year for the Commission's executive secretary (now executive director) to report to the Commission in a detailed staff report the previous year's activities. While staff currently prepares short reports for the six regularly scheduled commission meetings throughout the year, a more detailed annual report has not been presented to the commission in over 20 years. This report is the first effort to build upon the regular reporting; in future years, it will expand upon today's brief summary.

Last year was filled with science-driven decisions and collaborative efforts that advanced conservation, sustainable management, and public engagement. Guided by a mission to protect California's fish, wildlife, and ecosystems in the public trust for current and future generations, the Commission conducts its work in collaboration with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife; both organizations originated from the California Board of Fish Commissioners over 150 years ago in 1870.

Building on the successes of 2025 and looking ahead to the remainder of 2026, we have significant opportunities to deepen partnerships, enhance transparency, and foster innovation to ensure long-term sustainability of our fish and wildlife. Modernizing regulatory processes to respond swiftly to emerging environmental challenges, streamlining internal operations, and embracing new technologies will be key priorities. As we move forward, 2026 represents a pivotal year to translate these opportunities into measurable progress—strengthening California's commitment to conservation and resilience for generations to come.

### **Commission Vision Statement**

A healthy, biodiverse and natural California in which native fish and wildlife thrive within dynamic ecosystems and inspire human interaction and enjoyment.

### **Commission Core Values**

Integrity | Transparency | Innovation | Collaboration | Excellence | Stewardship

### **Public Engagement and Transparency: Commission and Committee Meetings**

- Regular and teleconference commission meeting days – **13**
- Executive session meetings – **6**
- Marine Resources Committee meeting days – **4**
- Wildlife Resources Committee meeting days – **3**
- Tribal Committee meeting days – **3**

## **Resource Management and Conservation: Regulatory Amendments**

- Regular rulemakings – **22**
- Emergency rulemakings – **8**
- Section 100 rulemakings – **4**
- Approved amendment to fishery management plan – **1**
- Approved state's first conservation plan for at-risk Western Joshua Tree – **1**

## **Species Protection: California Endangered Species Act (CESA)**

- Petitions received – **24**
- Petitions acted upon – **5**
- CESA findings adopted and species listed – **2** |
- New status reviews considered and species noticed as a candidate – **3 (15 total candidates)**

## **Petitions for Regulation Change**

- Received and accepted as complete – **15**
- Granted – **2**
- Denied – **10**
- Referred for review and recommendation – **4**
- Referred and still under review from previous years – **25**

## **Sustainable Use: Experimental Fishing Permits**

- Permits approved – **2**
- Major amendments approved – **2**

**Commissioners**  
**Erika Zavaleta**, President  
Santa Cruz

**Samantha Murray**, Vice President  
La Jolla

**Jacque Hostler-Carmesin**, Member  
McKinleyville

**Eric Sklar**, Member  
Saint Helena

**Darius W. Anderson**, Member  
Kenwood

STATE OF CALIFORNIA  
Gavin Newsom, Governor

## Fish and Game Commission



*Wildlife Heritage and Conservation  
Since 1870*

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January 23, 2026

Ms. Kelly Hammerle  
U.S. Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (VAM-LD)  
45600 Woodland Road  
Sterling, VA 20166-9216

Submitted via <https://www.regulations.gov/document/BOEM-2025-0483-0001>

### **Re: Comments on the 11th National OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Draft Proposed Program (2026-2031), Document ID BOEM-2025-0483-0001**

Dear Ms. Hammerle:

On behalf of the California Fish and Game Commission (Commission), we write to express our strong opposition to the expansion of Pacific offshore oil and gas leasing activities, as proposed in the 11th National Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Draft Proposed Program (11th OCS DPP), dated November 2025. The six proposed leases off California conflict with the mission of the Commission and the will of California's nearly 40 million residents, as well as decades of state-led efforts to protect our marine resources and coastline. The proposed California leases pose unacceptable risks to the long-term sustainability of our ecologically significant, culturally important, and economically valuable ocean and coastal ecosystems and put national security and shipping lanes at risk, while also adding unnecessary strain on the federal government.

For these reasons, we urge you to remove all California Program Areas from consideration for future oil and gas leasing activities and halt development of a new 2026-2031 National OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Program.

### **The Commission's Mission Emphasizes Abundant and Diverse Fish, Wildlife and Habitats**

Established in 1870, the Commission is one of the nation's first wildlife conservation agencies, predating even the U.S. Commission of Fish and Fisheries. The Commission's vision is a healthy, biodiverse, and natural California in which native fish and wildlife thrive within dynamic ecosystems and inspire human interaction and enjoyment. The Commission is committed to supporting abundant and diverse fish and wildlife, with a management approach that fosters public confidence and participation.



We hold California's resources in the public trust and implement scientifically sound policies that protect, enhance, and restore California's native fish and wildlife species and ecosystems, securing a rich and sustainable outdoor heritage for all generations. To carry out this mission, we have a wide range of responsibilities, including regulating fishing and hunting; establishing marine protected areas (MPAs), wildlife areas, and ecological reserves; listing threatened and endangered species under the California Endangered Species Act; and leasing state water bottom lands for aquaculture and kelp harvest.

In our effort to effectively protect and sustain the State's resources in a way that fosters public confidence and participation, we must respectfully request that any National Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program better reflect the will of Californians.

### **Californians Oppose New Offshore Oil and Gas Leasing**

There are 30 active leases in federal waters off southern California, many of which were granted in the 1960s and 1970s. However, a new offshore oil and gas lease hasn't been approved in federal waters off the California coastline since 1984; this is due to the overwhelming, ongoing, bipartisan and largely statewide opposition to new offshore oil and gas drilling by California congressional delegates, state and local elected officials and governments, Tribes, and members of the public.

### **California Has Invested in Durable Ocean Protections**

California has invested more than 45 years in creating durable ocean protections. Over the last four decades, Californians have worked with federal partners to create five national marine sanctuaries in federal waters (designated from 1980 to 2024). The California State Legislature designated the California Coastal Sanctuary in unleased state waters in 1994. And, following 13 years of public process, in 2012 the Commission established the first science-based, statewide network of MPAs in the world.

Each of these spatial protections is designed to protect California's marine natural heritage, both in state and federal waters. And in all cases, they explicitly prevent commercial extraction of oil, gas, and minerals.

As proposed, the 11th OCS DPP would undermine 45 years of California-led efforts to protect our ocean from new oil and gas development.

### **Californians Support Strong Coastal Protections on Land**

Following the 1969 Santa Barbara oil spill, the biggest U.S. oil spill in history at the time, Californians spoke with a unified voice to also protect our coastal resources on land. In 1972, voters passed Proposition 20 and declared that "the permanent protection of the remaining natural and scenic resources of the coastal zone is a paramount concern to present and future residents of the State and nation."<sup>1</sup> The California State Legislature subsequently passed the California Coastal Act in 1976 to carry forward this California vision.

The California Coastal Program, approved by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) in 1978, has since been recognized as one of the most successful in

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<sup>1</sup> Cal. Pub. Resources Code Section 27000 (1972)

the world. Hundreds of public beach accessways, coastal trails, wetlands, unique terrestrial habitats, and threatened and endangered species have been protected from encroaching development. Indeed, thousands of acres of coastal lands have been preserved.

After more than forty years of work, it would be irresponsible to expose these vulnerable areas to damage from new oil and gas development.

California has lived the consequences of oil spills along our shoreline. Just in the last 10 years, the Plains All American and Amplify Energy oil spills have impacted California wildlife and habitats, cultural values and communities, and our state's economy. Today we feel the impacts of climate change and environmental disruptions in new, concrete ways that we didn't 40 years ago. Catastrophic wildfires, drought, domoic acid events, sea star wasting disease, and substantial kelp loss are just some of the acute impacts California faces due to climate change.

The Pacific leases proposed in the 11th OCS DPP would put California's long-protected coastal resources at risk from oil spills and exacerbate the already-palpable impacts of our changing climate.

### **The Proposed Lease Sales in California Program Areas Pose Significant Risks to Our Marine Ecosystems and Wildlife**

California's coastline is part of the California Current Large Marine Ecosystem (CCLME), which runs along the West Coast of the United States and is one of the most productive upwelling systems in the world. This dynamic system draws cold, nutrient-rich waters from the deep to the surface, fueling phytoplankton growth and sustaining a biodiversity hotspot of fish, seabirds, and marine mammals. Beyond its ecological importance, the CCLME helps regulate California's mild, temperate climate.

In recognition of this critical ecosystem and the impressive diversity it supports, nearly 17,000 square miles of ocean and seafloor habitats are protected in five national marine sanctuaries along California's coastline. To further support ecosystem-based management of this ecologically important area, the Commission established a network of 124 MPAs along our entire 1,100-mile coastline.<sup>2</sup> California's statewide MPA network was recently included on the International Union for the Conservation of Nature Green List of Protected and Conserved Areas<sup>3</sup> and recognized as the international gold standard for science-based marine conservation — the first nature network in the world to receive this status.

The proposed expansion of offshore oil and gas development in the 11th OCS DPP threatens to undermine these protections and the wildlife protected therein and must be duly considered by BOEM in proposing any new industrial uses off California. Construction and operation of platforms, pipelines, and onshore infrastructure —combined with increased vessel traffic and shipping lane congestion — pose significant risks to marine life, sensitive habitats, unique and protected species, and water quality. The increased likelihood and magnitude of oil spills,

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<sup>2</sup> <https://wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Marine/MPAs>

<sup>3</sup> <https://iucn.org/press-release/202506/californias-marine-protected-area-network-joins-iucn-green-list-more-doubling>

seafloor disturbance, discharge of drilling debris and fluids, and cumulative industrial impacts could irreparably harm ecosystems that have taken decades to safeguard.

The environmental value of California's ocean and coastal resources far outweigh any potential benefits from additional oil and gas development. The risks would jeopardize a functioning offshore ecological engine and compromise the unique and irreplaceable California coast.

### **New Offshore Oil and Gas Leasing Would Put Tribes and Cultural Resources at Risk**

California is home to approximately 170 California Native American Tribes and Tribal communities, including 109 federally recognized Tribes. Many have deep ties to the ocean and coast that date back to time immemorial. California Native American Tribes have inhabited and stewarded California's coast and ocean for many thousands of years. Historical wrongs, including war, violence, attempted genocide, and the forced removal of Native peoples from their homelands, continue to impact Tribal communities to this day. Historically, Tribes in California have had limited ability to purchase and access land, minimal opportunity for economic development, and an increased risk of exposure to air and water pollution resulting from resource extraction.

California Native American Tribes did not cede their inherent rights and responsibilities to steward the lands, waters, or ocean territory of what is now known as California. Many continue to rely on marine ecosystems for food, medicine, and cultural use, and are actively engaged in research, monitoring, and stewardship work to protect these ecosystems. Some California Tribal citizens participate in ocean-based industries such as aquaculture or commercial fishing. And inland Tribes often have direct ties to the coast through trade, seasonal ceremonies, or kinship with coastal Tribes.

In consultations with State government, California Native American Tribes have consistently expressed that food security, economic prosperity, and cultural lifeways depend on a healthy coast and ocean. The environmental risks associated with additional offshore oil and gas development have the potential to undermine this relationship and negatively impact California Native American Tribes in unacceptable ways. Additionally, development has the potential to negatively impact Tribal cultural resources, including archaeological and historical resources such as villages, places of ceremony, burial sites, and shell mounds, as well as viewsheds, landscapes, and species of cultural importance.

The 11th OCS DPP acknowledges in Section 13.5 that “[p]lanning areas under consideration for inclusion in the 11th Program include the traditional lands and waters of American Indian and Alaska Native communities.”<sup>4</sup> However it goes on to say that Tribes were only notified via letter and given just 45 days to respond and inform the first draft of the proposal. Although it appears that 12 Tribes and Tribal entities provided feedback to BOEM within this abbreviated timeline, only two California Native American Tribes — the Yurok Tribe and the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians — submitted comments. Notably, all 12 Tribal commenters

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<sup>4</sup> Bureau of Ocean Energy Management. 2025. 11th National Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Draft Proposed Program: 1st Analysis and Proposal. BOEM 2025-046. Available online at <https://www.boem.gov/11th-National-Program-1st-Analysis>. November 2025.

expressed opposition and/or asked for specific geographic exclusions. Many asked for improved Tribal consultation.

In developing any proposal for offshore oil and gas leasing, BOEM must prioritize early, often, intentional, and meaningful consultation with Native American Tribes. Indeed, page 4 of BOEM's own Tribal Consultation Guidance says "[i]t is the policy of the Department to recognize and fulfill its legal obligations to identify, protect, and conserve Tribal trust resources; carry out its trust relationship with Federally recognized Tribes and Tribal members; and invite Tribes to consult on a government-to-government basis whenever there is a Departmental Action with Tribal Implications."<sup>5</sup>

BOEM's reliance on a single letter and a 45-day response window falls short of the early, often, intentional, and meaningful consultation that its own guidance calls for. To meet its legal obligations and stated commitments, BOEM must strengthen its approach by implementing a proactive, ongoing process that provides adequate time and resources for Tribal engagement before advancing any offshore oil and gas leasing proposals. This is essential to protect Tribal rights, cultural resources, and the integrity of BOEM's decision-making.

### **Proposed Leasing Would Threaten Coastal Communities**

Nearly 70% of all Californians live in coastal counties, and millions visit the coast each year. Expanded offshore oil and gas threatens these communities by degrading air and water quality, increasing the risk of oil spills, and compromising public health, safety, and access to California's iconic coastal zone.

The Commission's adopted policies emphasize decisions that ensure safe access to California's natural resources, foster public confidence, and are made in a fair, equitable, and inclusive manner, while ensuring California's fish and wildlife are managed with robust public participation. BOEM's proposal runs counter to these principles by introducing risks that disproportionately impact vulnerable populations and undermine equitable access to healthy coastal environments.

Coastal offshore oil exploration, development, and transportation pose serious health and safety risks to coastal communities through increased emissions, environmental contamination, and heightened spill potential. Pollutants from drilling operations and vessel traffic can reach nearby coastal communities exposing residents to toxins and carcinogens linked to acute symptoms and chronic conditions such as cancer, liver damage, immune dysfunction, and neurological harm.

New or expanded oil and gas activity off the California coast would also increase reliance on pipelines, inland refineries, and other infrastructure, compounding environmental burdens for adjacent communities. Historically underserved and marginalized populations — including Tribal communities, communities of color, and low-income neighborhoods — face disproportionate exposure due to proximity to industrial sites associated with oil and gas development, including the San Francisco Bay Area, Los Angeles, and the Central Valley. Vulnerable groups such as children and the elderly bear heightened health risks and greater barriers to recovery. California already contends with thousands of toxic sites along its

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<sup>5</sup> Bureau of Ocean Energy Management Tribal Consultation Guidance, Dec 9, 2024 at pages 4-5.

shoreline, many in disadvantaged areas; expanded oil development would exacerbate these inequities.

Access to the coast is a constitutional right in California and a cornerstone of the California Coastal Act. Clean beaches and ocean waters provide recreation, community and cultural connection, and mental and physical well-being for California residents and visitors. Increased oil activity and spill risk threatens this access, disconnecting people from nature and diminishing community health.

Oil spills also jeopardize food security for tens of thousands of fishermen — many from Tribal and low-income communities — who rely on shore-based fishing for subsistence. Contaminated seafood and fishery closures due to oil-related toxins or spills eliminate an essential food source and increase exposure to harmful toxins for people who rely on these fish to feed themselves and their families.

For all these reasons, the proposed Pacific oil and gas leases are in direct conflict with the Commission's policies and the deeply held values of California.

### **New Offshore Drilling Threatens California Economies**

California has some of the healthiest fisheries in the world, thanks to the implementation of forward-thinking ocean and coastal protections over the last four decades and smart fisheries management. We are home to dozens of well managed commercial fisheries that, in 2024, landed 178 million pounds of catch worth nearly \$200 million, a significant contribution to national seafood production. But oil spills and development threaten this American economic engine.

Following the Plains All American oil spill offshore of Santa Barbara County in 2015, catch volume and value in the area declined dramatically relative to prior years and was slow to recover. OCS oil and gas production infrastructure (platforms, pipelines, and cables) and exploration (including high-energy seismic surveys) can also result in loss of productive fishing grounds and reduced catch rates.

The Commission's Coastal Fishing Communities Policy says, "[i]t is the policy and practice of the California Fish and Game Commission to support, in its decision-making and actions, the long-term needs, social well-being, and economic health of coastal fishing communities in a manner that aligns with the primary conservation and management goals of the Commission's and Department's missions and mandates, and other applicable laws."<sup>6</sup>

California's fishing industry should not be put at risk by new oil and gas leasing activities.

Tourism and recreation within California's coastal and offshore environments are also essential to state and national economic interests. In 2021, California's marine economy supported \$26.7 billion in wages and \$51.3 billion in gross domestic product (GDP).<sup>7</sup> From 2010 to 2016, California's coastal economy GDP outpaced the national average by nearly 2:1. Tourism and

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<sup>6</sup> <https://fgc.ca.gov/About/Policies/Fisheries>

<sup>7</sup> National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). 2023. 2020 Marine Economy Report: California. Office for Coastal Management: <https://coast.noaa.gov/data/digitalcoast/pdf/marine-economy-california.pdf>

recreation is the largest sector in California's marine economy, contributing 47% of the total GDP. These sectors rely heavily on clean, accessible beaches and coastal waters, as well as diverse and abundant populations of marine wildlife for whale watching, diving, and fishing. Increased oil and gas development in California's OCS will eliminate or reduce access to coastal waters for these activities and will increase risk of an oil spill from production and pipeline transport, threatening the significant economic benefits that result from a healthy ocean.

Putting these valuable tourism and recreation resources at risk with additional offshore oil and gas development is not in the interest of Californians or visitors to California's coast.

### **Proposed Leasing Puts National Security and Shipping Lane Integrity at Risk**

The Commission has long recognized that California's ocean is a shared space with multiple, sometimes competing priorities. In fulfilling our mandates for fishery access and conservation planning, we have consistently constrained our own actions to respect the nation's high priorities of preserving military-designated security zones and maintaining the integrity of shipping lanes and maritime commerce. Even when doing so would advance conservation goals, we have avoided encroachment because we understand the critical importance of these national interests.

We now ask BOEM to apply the same principle. Offshore oil and gas leasing in the California Program Areas would introduce industrial infrastructure into mission-critical spaces for U.S. defense readiness and global trade. California ports handle over 40 percent of the nation's containerized imports, and the Pacific fleet depends on open, unobstructed sea lanes. for rapid deployment. These priorities are embedded in California's policies and align with federal objectives under this U.S. Administration.

To safeguard national security and shipping lane integrity we urge BOEM to exclude the California Program Areas from consideration.

### **Launching a New National OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Program for 2026-2031 is Inefficient and Unnecessary**

Currently, BOEM is only 18 months into implementing the 10th National Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program, which remains in effect through June 2029. Developing and vetting the existing program required 17 months of work, extensive public engagement, and significant government resources to comply with the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act, the Administrative Procedure Act, and the National Environmental Policy Act. The current program reflects input from 762,000 comments nationwide from governments, Tribes, agencies, stakeholders, and the public, and was upheld by the D.C. Circuit Court last year.

Restarting this process now would duplicate work already completed and divert limited agency capacity and taxpayer dollars. BOEM manages 3.2 billion acres of the OCS with fewer than 600 employees,<sup>8</sup> and Congress has already mandated 36 additional leases by BOEM through 2040, outside the current 2024-2029 Program.<sup>9</sup> Adding 1.3 billion additional acres under the

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.boem.gov/factsheet/about-boem>

<sup>9</sup> Section 50102 of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA, Pub. L. No. 119-21)

11th OCS Draft Proposed Program would strain resources and undermine efficient governance.

Rather than initiating a costly, unnecessary, and wasteful new planning process with nearly 3.5 years left under the existing program, BOEM should focus on fulfilling current commitments. Doing so will ensure government efficiency, avoid waste, and uphold BOEM's responsibilities under existing law and policy.

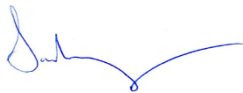
## **Conclusion**

For all the reasons above, the California Fish and Game Commission urges you to remove all California Program Areas from consideration for any future oil and gas leasing activities.

Additionally, with the 10th National OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Program (2024-2029) underway, and in an effort to conserve government resources and taxpayer dollars, we encourage you to halt development of a new, unnecessary 2026-2031 National OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Program.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact Commission Executive Director Melissa Miller-Henson at [FGC@fgc.ca.gov](mailto:FGC@fgc.ca.gov) or (916) 653-4899.

Sincerely,



Samantha Murray  
Vice President and  
Marine Resources Committee Co-Chair



Eric Sklar  
Commissioner and  
Marine Resources Committee Co-Chair

Cc: Wade Crowfoot, Secretary for Natural Resources, State of California  
Valerie Termini, Acting Director, California Department of Fish and Wildlife

# California Fish and Game Commission Staff Time Allocation and Activities

February 4, 2026

This report identifies, for the months of December 2025 and January 2026, where California Fish and Game Commission staff (including limited term and temporary help) allocated its time in general activity categories, trends in staff time allocation, and examples of specific activities in which staff engaged.

## General Time Allocation

Task Category	December Staff Time	January Staff Time
Regulatory Program	11%	11%
Non-Regulatory Programs	4%	7%
Commission and Committee Meetings	26%	18%
Legal Matters	3%	4%
External Affairs	5%	9%
Special Projects	4%	2%
Administration	17%	27%
Leave Time	14%	12%
Unfilled Positions <sup>1</sup>	21%	14%
Total Staff Time <sup>2</sup>	105%	103%

<sup>1</sup> Unfilled positions are skewed downward due to contract and temporary help

<sup>2</sup> Total staff time is greater than 100% due to overtime

## Trends

Time allocations of note for this period are *Non-Regulatory Programs*, *External Affairs*, *Administration*, and *Unfilled Positions*.

The Commission's *Non-Regulatory Program* activities have been slightly elevated recently due to an influx of California Endangered Species Act (CESA) petitions and work related to the Commission's potential listing of mountain lion under CESA. *External Affairs* also increased in January as more email campaigns began taking shape for the February Commission meeting and additional stakeholders began engaging with staff regarding the MPA petition process.

In December, *Unfilled Positions* was elevated relative to January due to the transition of Caroline Newell from her role as California Sea Grant state fellow to environmental scientist, vacating the former position. January likewise demonstrates a reduction to *Unfilled Positions* with the arrival of Sea Grant State Fellow Amanda Specht. The Commission's regulatory program manager and tribal advisor/liaison positions remained vacant throughout December and January.



*Administration* increased significantly in January, due to onboarding and training of the new Sea Grant fellow, continued onboarding of the new environmental scientist, recruitment efforts to hire a new program manager, mandatory training, and technical issues with file servers and staff computers. While not highlighted, *Leave Time* will continue to be elevated for the near future as leave balances are reduced.

### **Sample Activities for December 2025**

- Participated in the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) all directors' convening
- Participated in offshore aquaculture interagency working group to receive updates from state and federal agencies and discuss shared goals for aquaculture management
- Attended aquaculture and plastic advisory committee meeting
- Met with partners from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) and California Ocean Protection Council (OPC) to discuss evaluations of marine protected area (MPA) petitions
- Attended OPC's December meeting to observe relevant topics before the council
- Began onboarding new environmental scientist
- All staff participated in annual cybersecurity training
- Attended Department's conservation lecture series
- Prepared for and conducted two publicly noticed meetings (Tribal Committee and Commission) and prepared for one publicly noticed meeting (Wildlife Resources Committee)

### **Sample Activities for January 2026**

- Engaged with federal partners (NOAA National Marine Sanctuaries) and state partners to evaluate MPA petitions
- Regulatory staff received training on "lead person" roles
- Welcomed and began onboarding the 2026 California Sea Grant state fellow
- Led field trip to and discussion of Duxbury Reef State Marine Conservation Area with Vice President Murray, petitioners and local stakeholder groups
- Met with external partners to discuss Coastal Fishing Community Policy implementation
- Attended public forum on Western Joshua Tree Conservation Act fee change regulations
- Participated in Governor's Office of Tribal Affairs quarterly statewide tribal liaisons meeting
- Participated in the California Offshore and Fisheries Working Group meeting to learn more about the considerations for offshore wind development along California's coast
- Participated in Department's monthly operations committee meeting
- Bid farewell to Department Director Chuck Bonham during evening event
- Prepared for and conducted one publicly noticed meeting (Wildlife Resources Committee) and prepared for one publicly noticed meeting (Commission)

## **Sample Tasks for the General Allocation Categories**

### ***Regulatory Program***

- Coordinate with the Department to develop timetables and rulemaking documents
- Prepare and file notices, re-notices, and initial/final statements of reasons
- Prepare administrative records
- Track and respond to public comments
- Consult, research, and respond to inquiries from the Office of Administrative Law
- Facilitate California Environmental Quality Act document review, certifications of findings, and filings with the state clearinghouse

### ***Non-Regulatory Program***

- Department partnerships in jointly developing management plans and concepts
- Develop, review, and amend Commission policies
- Review and process California Endangered Species Act petitions
- Manage aquaculture and kelp harvest lease applications and amendments
- Review and process experimental fishing permit applications and amendments

### ***Commission and Committee Meetings and Support***

- Research and compile subject-specific information
- Develop and distribute meeting agendas and materials
- Conduct agenda and debrief meetings
- Prepare meeting outcomes, audio files, and voting records
- Develop and distribute after-meeting letters
- Conduct onsite meeting management
- Process submitted meeting materials
- Provide commissioner support

### ***Legal Matters***

- Public Records Act requests
- California Law Review Commission
- Process appeals and accusations
- Respond to litigation
- Process kelp and state water bottom leases
- Prepare administrative records

### ***External Affairs***

- Engage with stakeholders
- Maintain state, federal, and tribal government relations
- Process and analyze non-regulatory requests
- Process and analyze regulation change petitions
- Engage and educate legislative staff, monitor legislation
- Respond to general public inquiries
- Review and respond to correspondence
- Website maintenance
- Workshops

### ***Special Projects***

- Coastal Fishing Communities
- Streamlining routine regulatory actions

***Administration***

- Staff training and development
- Purchases and payments
- Contract management
- Personnel management
- Budget development and tracking
- Health and safety oversight
- Internal processes and procedures
- Document archival

***Leave Time***

- PLP 2025, Holiday, Vacation. Annual Leave, Sick, Jury Duty, Bereavement



# **California Fish and Game Commission Staff and Contractor Biographies**

*Updated January 2026*

Meet the team of staff, contractors and individuals assigned to the work of the California Fish and Game Commission, dedicated to helping protect California's native fish and wildlife in their natural habitats, and to secure a rich and sustainable outdoor heritage for all generations to experience and enjoy!

Listed alphabetically by first name, gain a glimpse into the backgrounds and contributions of each team member. Every individual has a unique story, and this document aims to share a small piece of their accomplishments and role at the Commission.

## **Amanda Specht: 2026 California Sea Grant State Fellow (contractor)**

Amanda joined the Commission's staff in January 2026 as the 2026 California Sea Grant State Fellow working with the "marine super team" on multiple marine issues. She is assisting with the Commission's work on the marine protected area (MPA) petitions review, MPA decadal management review implementation, the Coastal Fishing Communities Project, and various fishery management plans. In 2025, Amanda completed her Master of Science in environmental policy and management with a specialization in marine resource management from the University of California Davis.

Prior to working with the Commission, Amanda worked with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as a regulatory biologist focused on Endangered Species Act Section 10 permits while in graduate school. She also was a zookeeper for six years at Zoo Atlanta and San Francisco Zoo and Gardens. She primarily worked with a wide variety of bird species including penguins, flamingos, birds of prey, parrots, cassowary, and songbirds. She was also trained to work with various carnivorous mammals, small primates, reptiles, and amphibians. Amanda completed her Bachelor of Science in biology at the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma, Washington.

Outside of work, Amanda enjoys spending time in nature through hiking, camping, snorkeling, and birding with her husband or close friends. She can also be found looking through a camera photographing wildlife, reading sci-fi and fantasy books, baking, gardening, or caring for her two cats.

## **Ari Cornman: Wildlife Advisor (senior environmental scientist specialist)**

Ari joined the Commission staff in May 2018 and functions as the staff expert on terrestrial wildlife and inland fisheries for issues throughout the state. Previously, Ari ran the wildlife program for a tribe in Michigan and worked at the Attwater Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge in Eagle Lake, Texas, where he helped restore endangered bird populations and their habitat. He also worked in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Colorado Field Office and the Mountain-Prairie Regional Office on wetlands, endangered species, waterfowl, wildfire, and regulations. He has studied and coauthored papers on carnivore biology and human-wildlife interactions. He teaches and facilitates conservation planning and adaptive management using the Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation as a member of the international Conservation Coaches Network.

Ari earned a Bachelor of Science degree in ecology and philosophy (dual major) from Juniata College in Pennsylvania and an M.S. in biology from Truman State University in Missouri.

### **Caroline Newell: Marine Scientist (environmental scientist)**

Caroline is the Commission's environmental scientist focused on marine issues. She earned her master's degree in ecology at UC Davis in 2025. Her master's research focused on developing methods to apply long-term monitoring data to climate vulnerability assessments, focusing on wetland fishes in the San Francisco Estuary. She joined the Commission in February 2025 as a California Sea Grant state fellow and successfully interviewed for the environmental scientist position as a Commission employee in December 2025. As a Sea Grant fellow, Caroline helped coordinate efforts to evaluate marine protected area petitions. As an environmental scientist, Caroline serves as the Commission's lead for aquaculture and experimental fishing permits and assists with other Commission marine topics.

Caroline is originally from Fairfield and earned her Bachelor of Science in wildlife, fish and conservation biology with minors in statistics and geographic information systems at UC Davis. As an undergraduate, Caroline dabbled in bird research that took her to the arctic, coloration research that resulted in two publications in the Journal of Mammalogy, and fish research studying Suisun Marsh (her hometown marsh!).

Caroline is passionate about science education and outreach, having written two science articles for kids in the journal *Frontiers for Young Minds*. She also led school visits for local public schools near Suisun Marsh to inspire enthusiasm, curiosity, and stewardship of marsh habitat. Caroline is an avid outdoorswoman – hiking, whitewater kayaking, waterfowl hunting, and ocean fishing any chance she gets.

### **Cynthia McKeith: Analyst I**

Cynthia joined the Commission in March 2020 as an executive analyst for the executive director, performing a wide variety of analytical, administrative, consultative, and executive-level support duties. In December 2023 she joined another state agency (that won't be named) for a promotional opportunity; by May 2024 she realized she belonged at the Commission and returned! In her new role she researches and negotiates with potential meeting facilities and hotels, arranges travel itineraries and completes commissioner expense claims, helps facilitate site management for Commission and committee meetings, supports internal functions, and manages special initiatives for increasing office efficiencies and effectiveness.

Cynthia completed two years at UC Berkeley with concentrations in math and science and then transferred to Scripps College, graduating with a bachelor's degree in fine art. She has a great love of the outdoors and is a certified California Naturalist, an active member of the Sierra Club, and a regular contributor to a number of citizen science projects. She enjoys volunteering for the American River Parkway Foundation and Sacramento SPCA, hiking, kickboxing, and mountain biking.

### **David Haug: Regulatory Analyst (analyst II)**

David has served as a regulatory analyst with the Commission since March of 2021. He graduated from Sacramento State University in 2023 with a Master of Arts in political science, with an emphasis on the state of California and its political environment. To conclude his

undergraduate career at Sacramento State, where he also earned a bachelor's degree in political science, David interned for Lieutenant Governor Eleni Kounalakis, giving him firsthand experience in a supportive capacity to an executive serving on important environmental boards, including the California State Lands Commission and the California Ocean Protection Council.

In his free time, David can usually be found with his face in a book or playing guitar along to his favorite records. He is a passionate aviation enthusiast, flying around the world with virtual airliners on his home flight simulator or with his eyes to the sky to see what's flying overhead, where it's coming from, and where it's going. And fishing has been part of his life since before (yes, before) he was born; as far back as he can remember, David has fished California's lakes and rivers. He is married to Isabel, a native of Germany, and they enjoy traveling as much as possible, whether on day trips into California's countless scenic attractions or to visit friends and family across the Atlantic Ocean.

### **David Thesell: Deputy Executive Director (career executive assignment)**

The deputy executive director focuses on advising the executive director in implementing administrative priorities and resolving administrative issues, aiding in strategic planning, overseeing Commission meeting preparation, and directing the activities of the Commission's professional staff. David began with the Commission in November 2017 and serves as a member of the executive leadership team, oversees general functions to ensure the Commission's daily office operations promote accountability, effectiveness and efficiency; administers a statewide regulatory program to meet statutory mandates; renders management advice that impacts Commission programs and policies; manages special projects; ensures timely response to Public Records Act requests; and oversees records management.

Previously, David worked for the California Department of Conservation (DOC) for over ten years. He served as deputy chief for the DOC Division of Land Resource Protection, where he was the administrative chief overseeing daily operations and programs dedicated to preserving farmland. In 2012, David was named program manager for the division's various grant programs, which included the department's popular watershed coordinator program, a statewide, bond-funded program to improve natural resource conditions on a watershed basis. He also served as program manager and liaison to the California Strategic Growth Council, to issue grant funds to assist local agencies in adopting sustainable and climate-friendly strategies into their planning updates. Prior to joining the state, David was a grants and financial manager for a private family foundation in San Francisco.

David earned his bachelor's of science degree in business administration from California State University, Sacramento. A Sacramento native, he enjoys camping with his wife and two daughters, long-distance trail running, and volunteering as a ski patroller with the Eldorado Backcountry Ski Patrol. Since 2011, he serves as an advisory council member for Save the American River Association, a local grassroots environmental organization.

### **Jenn Bacon: California Endangered Species Act Analyst and Regulatory Analyst (analyst II)**

Jenn joined the Commission in April 2020. In addition to managing a suite of rulemakings, she reviews, analyzes and develops regulatory files related to threatened and endangered species, as well as other subjects related to hunting and commercial and recreational fishing, and consults with Office of Administrative Law staff attorneys regarding, and provides research

related to, rulemaking files. She also reviews and processes petitions for listing threatened, endangered and other protected species, and prepares administrative records of regulatory and petitioned actions for court challenges.

Jenn graduated from Sacramento State University with a bachelor's degree in psychology and criminal justice, and a certificate in applied behavioral analysis. She worked for many years as a behavioral therapist, teaching autistic adolescents school curriculum, social, and life skills. She returned to earn a master's degree in justice and security. Before joining the Commission staff, Jenn worked as a data analyst at the California Department of Social Services.

Jenn volunteered for many years at the Folsom Zoo and Sanctuary, assisting with animal rehabilitation and conducting educational outreach. She and her husband are the proud parents of two non-human boys (a black labrador and a red-tailed boa) and one girl (cat). They enjoy spending time outdoors, traveling, and checking off their national park bucket list.

### **Jessica Shaw: Seasonal Clerk**

Jessica joined the Commission staff in November of 2023, where she assists the Commission in its mission of protecting California's fish and wildlife in a wide variety of administrative and supportive functions and in tackling challenging administrative initiatives.

Jessica has years of experience in the private sector performing reception, administrative, and support functions from a wide range of positions in education, nonprofit management, and retail. She earned her associate of arts degree from Brooks College in Long Beach, California. Jessica has spent the last few years teaching art to children in grades K-8. In her spare time, she can be found tending to her cactus and succulent collection, enjoying outdoor activities, and exploring the American River with her two sons, trail walking, or enjoying a good novel.

### **Kelsey Leaird: Executive Analyst (analyst I)**

Kelsey joined the Commission in February 2024, where she provides support to the executive director, deputy executive director, Commission members, and staff. She coordinates travel itineraries, facilitates site preparation and management for all Commission and committee meetings, creates a schedule for and implements hundreds of annual deadlines and internal meetings to facilitate interagency coordination, interfaces with members of the public, supports stakeholders wanting to engage in the work of the Commission, provides support to the Commission's legal counsel, and manages correspondence.

Prior to joining the Commission, Kelsey worked for the California Department of Fish and Wildlife training team as a management services technician, and at the California Department of Developmental Services as an office technician. Before her state service, she worked on the administrative team for a commercial landscaping company and has many years of experience working in the food service industry. Kelsey enjoys attending theater, crafting, cooking, and taking road trips.

### **Melissa A. Miller-Henson: Executive Director (Commission appointee)**

Melissa began her work at the Commission in 2012 focused on organizational effectiveness and efficiency as the program manager, became the deputy executive director in 2017, and was the acting executive director from September 2018 until appointment by the Commission



as executive director in September 2019. She is responsible for creating an environment where the public, scientists, government agencies, and tribal nations can work with the Commission to realize sound stewardship of California's fish and wildlife.

In the first two decades of her career with the state, Melissa worked for the California Natural Resources Agency on various natural resource management issues, including the Marine Life Protection Act Initiative and the California Fish and Wildlife Strategic Vision Project. Melissa's experience includes policy analysis, facilitating multi-disciplinary teams, project management, media and stakeholder communications, translating science for policy-makers, and strategic planning.

Melissa received a bachelor's of science degree from UC Davis in environmental policy analysis and planning with an emphasis in environmental toxicology. Her master's in business administration work emphasized public sector and human resources management. She loves spending time with family and friends, puzzles of all types, reading, live shows, and outdoor activities such as snowboarding, hiking, backpacking, and whitewater rafting.

### **Michael Yaun: Legal Counsel (attorney IV assigned to the Commission)**

Mike became the Commission's legal counsel in 2015. He provides legal advice to the Commission in both open and closed sessions of all regular, special and emergency meetings. He conducts legal research and provides advice to the commissioners, the executive director, and other Commission staff members on issues before the Commission to help implement direction from the Commission and prepare for Commission meetings. He also coordinates with litigation counsel provided by the California State Attorney General's office.

Prior to working for the Commission, Mike worked for almost 14 years as an attorney for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. In various roles at the Florida commission, he worked on a wide variety of issues dealing with both state and federal regulation of fish and wildlife; his focus was on state- and federally-listed species.

Mike has a bachelor's degree from the University of Florida and a law degree from Florida State University. When he's not working, Mike loves to explore nature with his wife, usually by trail running, mountain biking, and whitewater kayaking.

### **Sherrie Fonbuena: Administrative Officer and Regulatory Analyst (analyst II)**

Sherrie joined the Commission staff in 1998. She reviews, analyzes and develops regulatory documents, with a general focus on marine issues; consults with Office of Administrative Law staff attorneys regarding, and provides research related to, rulemaking files; serves as the administrative officer for the Commission, coordinating documents with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and advising the executive director on personnel, budget/fiscal and business service activities, and recommending solutions to administrative problems; administers the Commission website; assists in developing regulatory training materials and providing training to other staff; and researches and responds to correspondence. She acts as the Commission's informal historian; when a question cannot be answered, you can hear "Ask Sherrie" echoing down the hall! She also has a wicked sense of humor.

**Susan Ashcraft: Marine Advisor (senior environmental scientist specialist)**

Susan joined the Commission in February 2014 as a senior environmental scientist, where she provides independent guidance and recommendations on a wide range of marine policy and management issues; supports the activities of the Commission Marine Resources Committee; conducts scientific, regulatory and policy review and analysis; and is the Commission's liaison to partners, stakeholders, and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) Marine Region. In 2019 she served as the acting deputy executive director for a year, a responsibility she also held in 2016 for a year.

Prior to joining the Commission, she worked for CDFW's Marine Region for over 16 years on a range of marine fisheries and resource management projects with state and federal agencies and stakeholders, served as a California representative on the Pacific Fishery Management Council Groundfish Management Team, and supported the marine protected areas planning project as supervisor and specialist under the Marine Life Protection Act Initiative. Her many years of service with the Marine Region provide a unique foundational working relationship among Commission and department leadership, project staff, and stakeholders.

Susan received a bachelor's degree from UC Santa Cruz in biology, with an emphasis in marine biology, and completed master's work in marine science at Boston University's Marine Program in Woods Hole, Massachusetts.

**Vacant: Program Manager (supervisor I)**

The program manager serves as a member of the executive leadership team and is a critical hub for multiple Commission programs — administration, personnel, regulatory, the California Environmental Quality Act, and the California Endangered Species Act. The program manager ensures the Commission's daily office operations promote accountability, effectiveness and efficiency; renders management advice that impacts Commission programs and policies; manages special initiatives; and supervises multiple staff. These and other responsibilities have been distributed among staff while recruitment is underway.

**Vacant: Tribal Advisor and Liaison (supervisor I)**

The Commission's tribal advisor and liaison provides guidance on issues related to tribal policy and engagement, supports the activities of the Commission's Tribal Committee, coordinates government-to-government consultations with tribes, and serves as the Commission's liaison to California's Native American tribes and tribal communities. This position has been vacant since December 2024 and subsequently frozen as part of budget negotiations; the position is ultimately expected to be eliminated.