

Staff Summary for April 15-16, 2026

4A. 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 February 2026.

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 three topics:

- Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI) Awareness
- Personnel
- California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)

JEDI Awareness*Women's History Month – March*

March was Women's History Month, a time to celebrate and recognize the influential contributions and achievements of women through history, society, and culture. Women's History Month began in 1978 as a local celebration called, "Women's History Week" in Sonoma County, California. National recognition followed in 1980 after advocacy led by the National Women's History Project, prompting President Jimmy Carter to issue the first proclamation declaring the week of March 8 as National Women's History Week, intended to coincide with International Women's History Day. Presidents continued the annual observance until 1987, when Congress designated March as Women's History Month.

The California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) departments, boards, commissions, and conservancies organized both virtual and in-person events throughout March, to celebrate women leaders in environmental fields who champion the importance of protecting our natural resources and inspiring others to become environmental stewards. This year's theme, "Women Cultivating Community: Leading Her Way", honored the women shaping our communities and leading with purpose. In Secretary Crowfoot's Speaker Series, he hosted an hour-long panel discussion titled *Forces for Nature: Women Driving Conservation Amid National Challenges*, with female leaders in natural resource conservation, including the Department's new director, Meghan Hertel. For more information, visit <https://resources.ca.gov/Initiatives/Equity-and-Environmental-Justice/Celebrating-Cultural-Diversity/Womens-History-Month>.

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World Health Day – April 7

April 7, 2026, marks the anniversary of the World Health Organization’s founding in 1948. This year’s World Health Day theme was, “Together for health. Stand with science.” The year-long campaign highlights the power of scientific collaboration to protect the health of people, animals, plants, and the planet. Throughout the year, WHO is showcasing scientific achievements and the global cooperation needed to turn evidence into meaningful action.

CNRA’s mission aligns with the 2026 World Health Day theme by helping Californians and nature thrive together through the protection, management, and restoration of the state’s natural, cultural, and historical resources—guided by science, inclusion, and collaboration. For more information on World Health Day 2026, visit <https://www.who.int/campaigns/world-health-day/2026>.

Earth Day – April 22

April 22, 2025, marks the 55th anniversary of the birth of the modern environmental movement known as Earth Day, with over 1 billion people expected to participate from 192 countries. The theme for 2025, “Our Power, Our Planet”, continues through 2026 and focuses on building a healthy, sustainable, equitable and prosperous future through clean energy, with a goal of tripling the use of clean energy by 2030. Each of us is a catalyst for change, by engaging in community initiatives, participating in local and national elections with renewable energy in mind, making sustainable choices in daily life, and more. As a people-powered transformation, uniting voices and actions can create a cleaner, more equitable energy future for all.

CNRA celebrates Earth Day with three themed days. April 20 is “People and Plants Day” as CNRA hosts a plant swap meetup. April 21 is “Waste-Less Day” and hosts a clothing repair workshop. April 22 is Earth Day and CNRA will host a family-friendly celebration where attendees can join in interactive exhibits, hands-on activities, and connect with teams across the agency. For more information about CNRA’s events for 2026, visit <https://resources.ca.gov/About-Us/campusconnect>.

Personnel

For each Commission meeting, staff provides a workload update and a summary of activities for the previous two months (Exhibit 1).

Program Manager

After a robust recruitment, including two rounds of interviews, staff is pleased to announce that a new program manager will soon be joining the team. Gabriel (Gabe) Lopez joins us from the private sector and brings more than 20 years of management experience in the financial services industry. He is known for leading strong teams and creating collaborative, people-first work environments.

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A Monterey Bay Peninsula native, Gabe holds a bachelor's degree in international business management from CSU Monterey Bay. Outside of work, he enjoys exploring the outdoors with his wife and children. A passionate reader and world traveler, he has visited more than 35 countries—experiences that continue to shape his global perspective and deep appreciation for diverse communities.

The program manager oversees the Commission's regulatory program, California Endangered Species Act petition process, California Environmental Quality Act compliance, and general administrative functions. Gabe's first day will be April 23, and his initial focus will be on training in the Commission's regulatory processes and becoming familiar with the Administrative Procedure Act.

Tribal Advisor and Liaison Position

This position became vacant in November 2024 with the departure of the incumbent for a federal position; in December that year, the position was swept up in a statewide hiring freeze and has now been eliminated as part of the 2025/26 budget negotiations. To request that the position be reestablished, the Commission will need to initiate a budget change proposal; such proposals are unlikely to be successful until the state budget improves.

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 February 2026 meeting, your executive director determined that two regulatory actions and three actions related to experimental fishing permits are exempt from CEQA.

Regulatory Actions

- Amend regulations regarding the commercial coonstripe shrimp trap fishery
- Re-adopt emergency amendments for the recreational take of rockfish, cabezon, greenling, and lingcod

Experimental Fishing Permits

- Expand pop-up gear testing in the brown box crab and king crab fisheries and add the target species scarlet king crab and spiny king crab
- Expand pop-up gear testing in the California Dungeness and rock crab fisheries and add commercial spot prawn testing
- Increase testing of traditional longline gear for Dungeness crab

Additionally, your executive director authorized publication of a draft environmental document for the migratory game bird hunting (waterfowl, coot, and moorhen hunting) rulemaking.

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Significant Public Comments (N/A)

Recommendation (N/A)

Exhibits

1. [“Staff Time Allocation and Activities,”](#) dated April 11, 2026

Motion (N/A)

California Fish and Game Commission Staff Time Allocation and Activities

April 11, 2026

For the months of February 2026 and March 2026, this report identifies 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	February Staff Time	March Staff Time
Regulatory Program	7%	13%
Non-Regulatory Programs	5%	5%
Commission and Committee Meetings	31%	18%
Legal Matters	3%	3%
External Affairs	9%	9%
Special Projects	5%	5%
Administration	29%	29%
Leave Time	8%	10%
Unfilled Positions ¹	14%	14%
Total Staff Time ²	109%	105%

¹ *Unfilled positions are skewed downward due to contract and temporary help*

² *Total staff time is greater than 100% due to overtime*

Trends

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

The Commission’s *Regulatory Program* activities were slightly elevated due to staff engaging with colleagues and stakeholders in new, complex rulemakings. Additionally, staff dedicated time finalizing numerous documents and submitting rulemakings approved by the Commission at its December 2025 and February 2026 meetings.

The *Unfilled Positions* category remained elevated through February and March. As of March, both the tribal advisor and program manager positions remain unfilled. The tribal advisor position has been swept through the legislative budget process as part of the 2025/26 budget agreement and, in April, will be removed from the Commission’s organizational chart. The program manager position is expected to be filled effective April 23, 2026.

Administration activities remained elevated through February and March, due to staff trainings, continued recruitment efforts for a new program manager, and staff working on

facility contracts and travel arrangements for three regional marine protected area petitions Commission meetings to be held in April and May. Staff also dedicated a significant amount of time to the solicitation of a two-year contract for the Commission's audio/visual and webcast provider that supports all Commission meetings.

Sample Activities for February 2026

- Attended the Benioff Ocean Institute's screening of "Ocean" to gather perspective on topics of concern around ocean sustainability.
- Attended a webinar hosted by Ocean Rainforest to learn about its pilot-scale non-commercial research project on the feasibility of offshore seaweed cultivation.
- Participated in a webinar on chronic wasting disease.
- Attended a fishing community briefing for the Coastal Commission's Statewide Strategy for the Coexistence of California Fishing Communities and Offshore Wind Energy
- Participated in the state's MPA Statewide Leadership Team meeting to discuss management priorities
- 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
- Furthered progress in addressing existing aquaculture lease amendment requests
- Prepared for and conducted one publicly noticed meeting (Commission) and prepared for one publicly noticed meeting (Marine Resources Committee)

Sample Activities for March 2026

- Reviewed the next iteration of a draft aquaculture action plan as a member of OPC's Aquaculture Statewide Leadership Team.
- Participated in an Aquaculture Development Committee meeting to support fulfillment of the committee's statutory duties and to support and advance aquaculture in California
- Participated in an offshore aquaculture interagency working group to advance collaboration in aquaculture management across state and federal agencies
- As a member of the MPA Statewide Leadership Team, participated in discussions about fulfilling MSLT's recently released [work plan for FY 25/26 – 29/30](#)
- Attended the Department's western Joshua tree public forum
- Attended a webinar on wild pig control
- Participated in the Department's barred sand bass pre-stock assessment workshop to follow the Department's developments in gathering information to support management
- Attended the March OPC meeting to follow developments related to ocean research and stewardship
- Met with partners from the Department and OPC to discuss marine protected area bin 2 petition assessments and regional meeting planning

- Prepared for and conducted one publicly noticed meeting (Marine Resources Committee) and prepared for three publicly noticed meetings (Tribal Committee, and two 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/kelp harvest lease applications and amendments
- Review and process experimental fishing permit applications and amendments

Commission and Committee Meetings and Support

- Research subject-specific information
- Develop and distribute meeting agendas and materials
- Conduct agenda and debrief meetings
- Prepare meeting outcomes, audio files, and voting records
- Develop meeting correspondence
- Prepare for and conduct meeting management activities
- 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/analyze non-regulatory requests
- Process/analyze regulation change petitions
- Engage and educate legislative staff, monitor legislation
- Respond to general public inquiries
- Review/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, sick, jury duty, bereavement