

Staff Summary for June 17-18, 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 April 2026.

Summary of Previous/Future Actions (NA)**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 four topics:

- Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI) Awareness
- Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA)
- Personnel
- California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)

JEDI Awareness*Mental Health Awareness – May*

Mental Health Awareness Month began in the United States in May 1949, established by what was then the National Association for Mental Health. Now known as Mental Health America its goal is to raise awareness, education, and advocacy around mental health issues. In 2013, President Barack Obama issued an official presidential proclamation formally recognizing Mental Health Awareness Month on a national level. The month is still led each year by Mental Health America, with a new theme and toolkit released annually to support public engagement in mental health promotion. This year's theme is **More Good Days, Together.**

This May, the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) reinforced its commitment to employee wellness through the May Wellness Newsletter. The newsletter offered practical tips, simple daily practices, and direct links to mental health resources. It highlighted three key themes: *Mind Your Mental Health This May*, *Beat Burnout and Reclaim Your Energy*, and *Reduce Stress and Anxiety*. Additionally, the newsletter promoted an Employee Assistance Program live webinar, "Understanding Burnout: Causes and Solutions," providing employees with deeper insight into recognizing and addressing burnout.

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Pride Month – June

Pride Month is recognized and celebrated in more than 100 countries, honoring the history, achievements, and ongoing struggles of the LGBTQ2S+ community. Each June, we reflect on the movement's roots in the 1969 Stonewall uprising in New York City, a pivotal moment in the fight for LGBTQ2S+ rights. Pride Month received official U.S. presidential recognition in 1999 by President Bill Clinton and continues to serve as a powerful catalyst for promoting equality, building community, celebrating identity, and advocating for the rights and well-being of LGBTQ2S+ people.

This year, CNRA celebrates Pride Month with the theme ***Exist. Resist. Have The Audacity.*** This message encourages all of us to embrace authenticity, challenge inequity, and uplift one another with courage and compassion. It serves as a reminder that Pride is not only a celebration, but also a powerful affirmation of visibility, resilience, and progress.

In partnership with the California Environmental Protection Agency, CNRA is hosting several in-person events in the Sacramento area, along with a virtual event led by CNRA Secretary Wade Crowfoot in conversation with environmental leaders, including former Natural Resources Secretary Senator John Laird. A complete list of events and additional Pride Month resources are available at resources.ca.gov/Pride

Western Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA)

Executive Director Miller-Henson attended WAFWA's 2026 Summer Meeting, held June 1-5 in Boise, Idaho. The meeting convened wildlife professionals from the western U.S. and Canada to discuss shared biological, management, and land-use issues affecting member agencies. On Monday, directors (including Director Hertel) and commissioners visited Lake Lowell and participated in a fishing trip with sonar demonstration, learned about the history of Lake Lowell Wildlife Refuge, and discussed some of the challenges faced by refuge managers as the local community rapidly expands and begins to abut the edges of the refuge. The day continued at the Archives of Falconry and, ultimately, the World Center for Birds of Prey headquarters for The Peregrine Fund, an international non-profit organization founded in 1970 that conserves endangered raptors around the world. The field tour included an opportunity to observe a live burrowing owl demonstration and to see California condors up close.

Commissioners convened on Tuesday and Wednesday to hear about the latest changes and projects at WAFWA, received and asked questions about individual state of the state reports, highlighted recent successes as well as a few of the issues each is state is facing, shared experiences for addressing various fish, wildlife and habitat issues, discussed the differing structures and responsibilities of commissions in the west, and shared meals together to encourage small group conversations. Wednesday ended with an introduction to fish and wildlife agency partner foundations, highlighting some of their successful projects, and providing examples of how partnerships with them bring value to state agencies.

[WAFWA and its supporting foundations](#) represent 23 states and Canadian provinces, an area covering nearly 3.7 million square miles of some of North America's most wild and scenic country, inhabited by over 1,500 premier wildlife species.

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Personnel*Welcome Our New Program Manager!*

While staff announced during the April Commission meeting that we hired Program Manager Gabe Lopez, it wasn't until the week after that he officially joined the team for his first day. Gabe will join us for parts of this meeting, so please stop and say hello. If you'd like to learn more about Gabe and the experience he brings to the team, the staff biographical document has been updated and is provided as Exhibit 2.

Tribal Advisor and Liaison Position

Since the April 2026 Commission meeting, staff received notification that the Commission's tribal advisor and liaison position was eliminated as part of the 2025–26 statewide budget negotiations. The position had remained vacant since December 2024 due to a statewide freeze on filling vacancies; responsibilities of the role have been assumed by Executive Director Miller-Henson. To request that the position be reestablished, the Commission will need to initiate a budget change proposal once such proposals are being entertained again. As a result, the "Staff Time Allocation and Activities" report (Exhibit 1) has been updated to reflect the removal of this position.

Leave Reduction Plans

As staff has reported in the past, 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. With the regional marine protected area meetings completed, staff will resume efforts at reducing leave balances, a multi-year effort. The team remains focused on prioritizing essential work which, at times, includes deferring certain tasks and projects to the future.

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)

The Commission has delegated authority to its executive director to take actions necessary to comply with CEQA. 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 April 2026 meeting, your executive director determined that renewal of an existing state water bottom lease for aquaculture purposes with no operational changes is categorically exempt from CEQA.

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

1. ["Staff Time Allocation and Activities."](#) dated June 9, 2026
2. ["Staff and Contractor Biographies."](#) dated June 2026

Motion (N/A)

California Fish and Game Commission Staff Time Allocation and Activities

June 9, 2026

For the months of April 2026 and May 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 | April Staff Time | May Staff Time |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Regulatory Program | 7% | 10% |
| Non-Regulatory Programs | 3% | 3% |
| Commission and Committee Meetings | 52% | 38% |
| Legal Matters | 3% | 4% |
| External Affairs | 7% | 8% |
| Special Projects | 8% | 6% |
| Administration | 26% | 29% |
| Leave Time | 6% | 13% |
| Unfilled Positions ¹ | 5% | 0% |
| Total Staff Time ² | 117% | 111% |

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 *Commission and Committee Meetings*, *Administration*, *Unfilled Positions* and *Total Staff Time*.

The *Commission and Committee Meetings* category increased significantly this period due to an unusually high number of meetings within the two-month span, resulting from the addition of three regional marine protected area meetings for an additional four full meeting days in San Mateo, Goleta and San Clemente. With a total of six meetings over eight days, three of which had a high volume of public participation, staff dedicated additional time to travel, public comment processing, and ensuring that meeting logistics ran smoothly.

Administration hours rose in large part due to onboarding the new program manager, which required staff time for training and orientation, while the first six weeks of the program manager's time was dedicated to required state training and learning internal processes and procedures. Additional staff time was needed to meet the administrative requirements associated with the marine protected area regional meetings, including creating and

processing dozens of travel advances and claims. Time in this category also reflects work on the application for next year's California Sea Grant state fellow.

With the hiring of the program manager in late April and official elimination of the tribal advisor and liaison position in May, the *Unfilled Position* is remarkable. The month of May was the first time the Commission has had no vacancies in many years; it also has the least number of permanent positions since the 2021-22 fiscal year.

Lastly, and most importantly, the *Total Staff Time* numbers represent a significant and unsustainable jump in staff overtime for about one-third of the team. The next reporting period will see those numbers decline and an increase in leave time as staff are encouraged to regain their personal lives.

Sample Activities for April 2026

- Attended California Ocean Day panel discussions and reception to connect with leaders in California ocean conservation
- Participated in a Facilitation Basics training with NOAA associates during the California Sea Grant 2026 State Fellowship Annual Meeting
- Participated in the immersive two-day RUBIN Inclusive Engagement Model training to develop more equitable and inclusive public partner engagement
- Engaged with petitioners for the 2023 MPA petitions and members of the public at the Commission's regional MPA meeting in San Mateo
- Furthered progress on a variety of pending lease action requests for existing state water-bottom aquaculture leaseholders
- Participated in a Phase-0 interagency coordination meeting to inform a potential aquaculture state water-bottom lease applicant
- Participated in a webinar on chronic wasting disease
- Participated in the California Natural Resources Agency monthly tribal affairs coordination meeting with tribal liaisons from across the agency
- Attended a meeting regarding federal impacts on large-scale solar development
- Prepared for and conducted three publicly noticed meetings (Tribal Committee, Commission, and Commission regional MPA meeting) and prepared for three publicly noticed meetings (Commission, Commission regional MPA meeting, and Wildlife Resources Committee)

Sample Activities for May 2026

- Attended two MPA site visits: one at a proposed MPA location off the coast of Carpinteria with a local sport fishing charter operation, and another at MPAs with a proposed boundary change off the coast of Laguna with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife Law Enforcement Division
- Visited a state water bottom lease to learn from a grower about the challenges and operations of marine aquaculture in state waters

- Engaged with petitioners for the 2023 MPA petitions and members of the public at the Commission’s regional MPA meetings in Goleta and San Clemente
- Participated in final reviews of the Aquaculture Action Plan as a member of the Aquaculture Statewide Leadership Team
- Attended a University of Washington Environment webinar titled “Lessons Learned from the First 10 Years of the Marine Life Protection Act: A Scientific Discussion on MPAs and California’s MPA Network”
- Engaged with hunting and fishing partners during the quarterly meeting of the California Hunting & Conservation Coalition
- Participated in the California Natural Resources Agency agency-wide leaders meeting
- Attended the “Leading Through Change: RTO Transition” forum for state leaders to help prepare the team for returning to the office four days per week
- Prepared for and conducted three publicly noticed meetings (Wildlife Resources Committee and two Commission regional MPA) 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/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

California Fish and Game Commission Staff and Contractor Biographies

Updated June 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 the 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 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. Ari 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, where her 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 while assisting 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: Travel and Administrative Analyst (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, contributes to meeting material development, supports internal administrative 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)

David began with the Commission in November 2017 and serves as a member of the executive leadership team, focusing on advising the executive director and executive team in implementing administrative priorities and resolving administrative issues, aiding in strategic planning, overseeing Commission meeting preparation, directing the activities of the Commission's professional staff, ensuring timely response to Public Records Act requests, and overseeing records management. He steps into the role of executive director when the executive director is unavailable.

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.

Gabe Lopez: Program Manager (supervisor I)

Gabe joined the Commission in April 2026 as a member of the executive leadership team, where he oversees 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.

Gabe 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.

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.

Jenn Bacon: California Endangered Species Act 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 and ensure timely implementation of Commission work, interfaces with members of the public, supports stakeholders wanting to engage with 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 (her second job).

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

Mike became the Commission's legal counsel in 2015, where 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.