

Ocean Protection Council Program Priorities for 2009 through 2010

The Ocean Protection Council (OPC) is charged with implementing the California Ocean Protection Act (COPA). In June 2006, the OPC adopted its five-year strategic plan entitled “A Vision for Our Ocean and Coast.” The strategic plan identifies six areas of focus: governance, research and monitoring, ocean and coastal water quality, physical processes and habitat structure, ocean and coastal ecosystems, and education and outreach. The OPC grant program funding guidelines specify that the OPC will adopt and periodically update specific program priorities that will reflect the issues the OPC is working to resolve. Not all of the priorities of COPA can be addressed in any given year, but it is the OPC’s intent to address all priorities over time.

The purpose of this document is to establish the OPC’s program priorities for 2009 through 2010. These program priorities will also be the OPC’s funding priorities for unsolicited proposals, so this document is designed to provide potential project applicants with a clear idea of the types of projects the OPC will entertain for funding during this period. Occasionally staff will recommend directed projects on issues that are not captured in these priorities to achieve the purposes outlined in the funding guidelines and capitalize on unique opportunities.

The OPC’s grant program funding guidelines, which include application instructions, can be found on the OPC website.

Governance

Agency Coordination and Ocean Management Activities

One of the OPC’s primary mandates is to help coordinate the ocean and coastal resource protection activities spread amongst numerous state and federal agencies. The OPC will continue to show leadership on key ocean protection issues, identify and address policy gaps, conflicts and overlaps between state entities responsible for ocean and coastal management, and contribute to projects not undertaken by other agencies, focusing on those projects that contribute most to improved ocean health. The OPC will also work with community groups that are often well-situated to affect positive change in local communities. Because area-based management (ABM) could be a new approach to interagency coordination, the OPC will hold one or more public workshops to gather input from stakeholders regarding ocean ABM.

Regional Coordination

The governors of Washington, Oregon, and California formed a landmark partnership on September 18, 2006 when each signed the West Coast Governors’ Agreement on Ocean Health. In the agreement, the governors identified seven issues of regional significance. The governors released a final action plan on July 29, 2008, which contains 26 actions to be undertaken to address concerns within the region. Subject area teams focused on topics including climate change, water quality, ocean energy, research, amongst others have been assembled to work toward implementing specific actions. The OPC will play a leadership role in this effort by developing and supporting pilot projects related to these actions and serving on relevant subject area teams.

Enforcement

Coordination: The OPC has been working to improve coordination among agency enforcement programs. The OPC has facilitated a pilot enforcement project between the State and Regional Water Boards and the Enforcement Division of the Department of Fish and Game (DFG) to maximize the complementary strengths of the two organizations and promote enforcement personnel conducting dual enforcement efforts. Staff will continue to develop this pilot in the test region and, if successful, will export this coordination approach to additional agencies and other appropriate local and federal enforcement efforts. The OPC will also support efforts to provide additional wardens and develop innovative enforcement tools.

Endangered Species Acts: The OPC will focus on the California and federal endangered species acts in an effort to determine how they can be applied to better protect identified species and the habitat they need for survival. Protecting critical habitat will not only protect the listed species, but other species that share that habitat as well.

Research and Monitoring

Seafloor Mapping

The OPC has made significant progress toward completing seafloor maps in California state waters – to date, maps for approximately one third of state waters have been completed. A comprehensive state seafloor map will provide foundational data to support numerous management decisions, most notably those involving establishing marine protected areas (MPAs) in state waters. Staff will continue to leverage contributions from the federal government and other sources to finish data collection and deliver these data to different users. The OPC will also examine the cost and feasibility of completing maps for the nearshore area to a depth of 10 meters.

MPA Baseline Characterization and Information Management

California is well on its way to establishing a coastwide network of MPAs. The OPC has contributed nearly \$4 million to support baseline characterization along the Central Coast. The MPA Monitoring Enterprise is currently beginning a process to obtain input from scientists and stakeholders to develop a monitoring plan for the north central coast. That plan will include both baseline characterization and long-term monitoring and will contribute to the development of a statewide plan for long-term monitoring in all regions as required under Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA). The OPC will work to find support dollars to conduct future monitoring in all regions and to create an information management system to synthesize MPA information from all regions into useful products for decision makers and the public.

Management-Driven Research

For the past three years, the OPC has funded a yearly grant round in partnership with the University of California and University of Southern California Sea Grant Programs. Projects are selected based on their relevance to resource management issues. This past year, the OPC worked with UC Sea Grant to fund an innovative multi-institution initiative, a model that is designed to provide useful data for resource managers, as well as promote on-going partnerships among academic researchers, government scientists, and research managers. The OPC is committed to supporting this effort as long as it continues to generate information useful to resource managers.

Technology Development

Monitoring and enforcement needs are increasing in the marine environment in California, especially with the implementation of a statewide MPA network. New technologies may hold the

promise of conducting real-time enforcement surveillance and monitoring, while lowering costs and reducing the burden on limited staff resources. OPC staff will hold a workshop to examine new and existing technologies that can be implemented to help enforce and monitor MPAs, bringing the extensive capacity of California's technology industry to bear on these important issues and providing objective and reliable advice to resource managers. Staff may develop ideas and possible funding recommendations to capture unique opportunities that arise during this workshop. In addition, the OPC will continue to work with the regional ocean observing systems in California to coordinate new technologies with established systems – with the goal of providing needed information to coastal managers.

Ocean and Coastal Water Quality

Marine Debris

The OPC adopted a resolution in February 2007 that directed staff to focus on providing solutions to the marine debris problems in the Pacific Ocean. In July 2008, OPC staff and the marine debris coordinating committee released the draft Ocean Litter Implementation Strategy. Once the plan is final, the OPC will continue to work with state agencies and other organizations to implement the actions called for in the strategy.

Polluted Runoff

Coastal runoff is the largest source of pollution impacting California's coastal waters. In 2008, the OPC adopted a resolution on low impact development (LID) to address the problem of polluted runoff. To further address this issue, the OPC will initiate a competitive grant process to seek projects that address polluted runoff in various ways, including encouraging California communities to remove impediments to LID. The OPC staff is in discussions with other state entities in an effort to increase the pool of funds available for projects to promote LID or reduce polluted runoff by other means.

Harmful Algal Blooms

Harmful algal blooms (HABs) have negative impacts on human and marine wildlife health and on coastal economies (particularly the aquaculture, fisheries, and tourism industries). OPC staff will work with resource managers, researchers, and the regional ocean observing systems to develop a pilot HAB alert system to provide bloom forecasts and facilitate information exchange between HAB researchers, managers, and the public to reduce response time and the risks to human health. This pilot program, if successful, can be expanded region-wide as called for in the West Coast Governors' Agreement on Ocean Health. Better understanding of the cause and spread of HABs may provide the basis for future policy actions related to coastal water quality and reductions in HABs.

Once-through Cooling

Once-through cooling will remain as a high priority for the Ocean Protection Council.

Physical Processes and Habitat Structure

Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation

Climate change is the defining environmental issue of our time. Compelling evidence shows that significant impacts to ocean and coastal resources will result from sea level rise, ocean acidification, and ocean regime shifts. The OPC will promote actions that mitigate climate change impacts and will develop adaptation policies to address impacts, consistent with maintaining natural coast and

ocean processes. OPC staff is currently working with coastal agencies and the Resources Agency to develop a Climate Adaptation Strategy for Ocean and Coastal Resources (one sector in the statewide strategy). If the adaptation strategy is adopted, the OPC will work to implement the recommendations within and support research on data gaps. For example, coastal managers have already expressed a need for statewide LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) data to produce high-resolution coastal inundation maps, better erosion models and predictions, and greater understanding of beach processes and sediment dynamics in light of changing sea levels.

Ocean and Coastal Ecosystems

Sustainable Fisheries Management – Maintaining California’s Fishing Heritage

COPA directs the OPC to work to improve fisheries management throughout California by supporting further implementation of the Marine Life Management Act (MLMA) and pursuing innovative community-based or cooperative management. The OPC plans to fulfill this mandate through a multi-faceted approach.

MLMA Lessons Learned: The OPC will support an assessment of successes and challenges of MLMA implementation to date that will provide lessons learned and recommended future actions. Staff will work to implement these recommendations when the assessment is complete.

Electronic Reporting Methods: The OPC will promote improved commercial and recreational fishery data collection and reporting. OPC staff is working with the DFG to identify electronic reporting methods that may be implemented in California to improve fishery data collection and reporting and will secure the software and hardware needed to implement a new system statewide. This will be coordinated, where appropriate, with the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission.

Community- and Market-Based Management Reform: The OPC will continue to work with fishing communities and non-governmental organizations to formulate cutting-edge approaches to existing management challenges, including market-based approaches to preserve California’s marine resources and fishing heritage. In addition, the OPC will continue work with DFG and the California Fish and Game Commission (FGC), when appropriate, to support their efforts to prepare for these potential reforms. The OPC will also promote and support fishery demonstration projects that explore alternative management methods.

Collaborative Fisheries Research Organization: The OPC will develop a collaborative fisheries research (CFR) organization. The CFR organization will develop, solicit, and fund projects that create partnerships among fishermen and academic scientists to address the fishery data needs of DFG, the FGC, and the OPC. This CFR organization could be expanded region-wide, creating partnerships with Oregon and Washington.

In addition to state management actions, the OPC will examine federal and international fisheries issues and decide where the council can act to help protect species important to pelagic ecosystems as well as California communities.

Salmonids Statewide

Salmonid populations throughout California have been severely impacted by human actions since the mid-1800s. Despite a century and a half of attention, salmon populations are declining, as evidenced by the coastwide salmon fishery closure in 2008. OPC staff will continue to work with experts to determine the most important causes of salmonid decline and develop viable solutions to address these impacts.

Aquatic Invasive Species

California currently lacks an invasive species rapid response program, emergency fund, and management program to adequately prevent the introduction of aquatic invasive species. The OPC, in partnership with the Ocean Science Trust, is funding teams of experts who will complete individual vector risk assessments by summer 2009 and a report synthesizing the results and developing recommendations for priority management actions by fall 2009. These studies will lay the groundwork for the OPC to provide leadership on this crucial issue affecting biodiversity and ocean and estuarine habitats. In addition, OPC staff is formulating ideas for management improvements that can take place while the vector risk assessments are ongoing.

Ocean Energy

Wave and tidal energy conversion devices are being evaluated to determine if they are a viable technology for meeting California's renewable energy goals. At the same time, little is known about potential impacts to the environment and the potential for marine user conflicts. The OPC is currently collecting preliminary data about potential environmental impacts from ocean energy development and is coordinating interagency discussions on state and federal regulatory processes for ocean energy. With regard to ocean energy, the OPC will: (1) continue to serve as a facilitator between the state agencies, federal agencies, local organizations, and west coast states; (2) address future research needs and leverage research dollars; and (3) develop state policies.

Education and Outreach

OPC Communications and Outreach

OPC staff will work to better disseminate information on the council's actions and actions taken by other agencies or organizations. The public needs to know how well the state is spending public funds to protect coastal and ocean resources. The OPC plans to improve the way it communicates the results of its efforts and will require the same of the grantees who receive funds from the OPC. Along these lines, staff is currently creating a new OPC website that will provide more information about the status and outcomes of funded projects. Different mechanisms will be developed to advertise success stories and allow the public to see not only know what projects are being supported, but the outcomes of those investments. In addition, staff will work to develop a set of indicators that can provide both the public and policymakers with an indication of California's collective success in protecting ocean and coastal resources.

Thank You Ocean Campaign

The OPC will continue to support the activities of the Thank You Ocean Campaign, a partnership between the State of California and NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries to educate the public about the importance of the ocean. The OPC will work with staff of the Thank You Ocean Campaign to further messages that are consistent with OPC priorities related to issues such as marine debris and climate change. A key component of this effort is establishing partnerships with education organizations throughout the state to promote coordinated outreach messages.

Education and the Environment Initiative (EEI)

OPC staff will continue to work with the Education and the Environment Initiative Curriculum Advisory Committee—an effort that is designed to re-invent the way California fulfills its obligation to improve environmental literacy among children.