

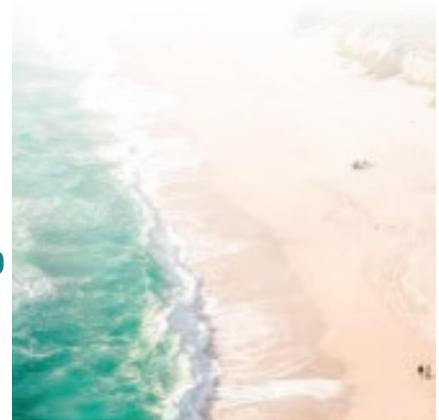


OCEAN PROTECTION COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

September 18, 2020 – December 15, 2020

Providing an update on outcomes and accomplishments since the previous OPC Meeting.



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UPDATES BY STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL

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GOAL 1: SAFEGUARD COASTAL AND MARINE ECOSYSTEMS AND COMMUNITIES IN THE FACE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Ocean Acidification and Hypoxia Expert Panel

In response to the Ocean Acidification and Hypoxia (OAH) Science Task Force’s [Enhancing California’s Ocean Acidification and Hypoxia Monitoring Network](#) report, OPC and Ocean Science Trust (OST) have convened an Expert Panel to focus on implementing coupled biological-chemical monitoring coordination. The Expert Panel is comprised of Dr. Jim Barry (Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute and Task Force), Dr. Francis Chan (Oregon State University and Task Force), Su

Sponaugle (Oregon State University), and Jan Newton (University of Washington). The Panel will provide specific recommendations to guide 2021 investments in standardized biological and chemical measurements and synthesis products. The outcome of this effort will support California managers' ability to describe the spatial extent of biological effects from acidification, where OAH has the most consequential effects, where the most rapid changes are observed, or how fast those effects are changing. This ambitious effort is the first of its kind and could serve as a model for other regions.

Sea-Level Rise Coordination

In October, OPC convened the first working group meeting for the Sea-Level Rise Leadership Team. The working group is comprised of staff at multiple state agencies who are working towards implementing the [Statewide Sea-level Rise Principles](#). The working group plans to meet quarterly to align statewide actions on sea-level rise.

Proposition 68 Call for Proposals: Coastal Resilience

On August 7, OPC released a Prop 68 solicitation for projects that build coastal resiliency and nature-based adaptation strategies to sea-level rise impacts. OPC received close to 100 letters of intent and invited a subset of those applicants to submit full proposals. Staff are currently finalizing proposal review and scoring and intend to bring recommended projects for consideration and possible approval at the Council's February 16, 2021 meeting.

GOAL 2: ADVANCE EQUITY ACROSS OCEAN AND COASTAL POLICIES AND ACTIONS

Working Through the Lens of Equity

On October 13, 2020, in advancement of Target 2.2 of the Strategic Plan, OPC staff began a ten-session diversity, equity and inclusion training program entitled "Working Through the Lens of Equity." The program connects the principles of cultural proficiency to the values and vision of OPC, exploring intersections, barriers and bridges to our work. It will provide strategies for building diversity, equity and inclusion into all the work of the Council and inform plan development to improve inward and outward-facing efforts to advance equity.

GOAL 3: ENHANCE COASTAL AND MARINE BIODIVERSITY

Governor Newsom's Executive Order on Biodiversity

On October 7, Governor Newsom signed [Executive Order N-82-20](#), which directs the California Natural Resources Agency to work with state agencies and partners to advance strategies that will conserve at least 30% of California's land and waters by 2030, in support of biodiversity conservation and climate resilience. Half a million acres, or approximately 16%, of state waters are currently protected by California's statewide network of 124 marine protected areas (MPAs). The MPA network will be undergoing a science-based management review in December 2022; no changes to the network will be recommended until after that review process is complete. California's commitment to reaching 30% of coastal marine conservation is based on advancing measures beyond the MPA network (such as enhancing biodiversity safeguards in National Marine Sanctuaries, National Estuary Programs, and Areas of Special Biological Significance) and through the collaborative stakeholder process.

Restoring and Protecting California's Kelp Ecosystems

On February 26, OPC [authorized](#) funding for removal of purple urchins by commercial fishermen, as well as associated ecological monitoring, in support of kelp forest recovery on California's north coast. COVID-19 delayed the start of this project, but in early August, Reef Check California and a team of 13 fishermen initiated urchin removal operations at Noyo Bay in Mendocino County. Since then, fishermen have completed multiple passes through the restoration site, clearing approximately 8.5 acres of reef and landing a total of 26,535 pounds of purple urchin. Maintenance work and ecological monitoring will continue at Noyo Bay throughout the winter, and urchin removal operations are anticipated to begin at a second restoration site in Mendocino County in early spring 2021.

Communications Strategy for 2022 Adaptive Management Review

At its June 19, 2020 meeting, the Council [approved up to \\$500,000](#) to develop a comprehensive communications plan that will help raise awareness of the first decadal management review of California's MPA network. [Two Requests for Proposals were released](#) and eligible proposals were reviewed for experience, creativity, and expertise in communications and California natural resources. Kearns & West was selected to carry out the communications plan for the state's MPA Management Program, and Strategic Earth Consulting was selected to create the outreach strategy to share information ahead of the first decadal management review occurring in December 2022. The contracts are being finalized and work is anticipated to begin in January 2021.

MPA Statewide Leadership Team Renews Memorandum of Understanding

In April 2014, the MPA Statewide Leadership Team (Leadership Team) was convened as a standing advisory body to ensure communication, collaboration, and coordination among entities that have significant authority, mandates, or interests that relate to the MPA Network. The founding membership of the Leadership Team was guided by the [Marine Managed Area Improvement Act](#) (PRC 36800) which describes a State Interagency Coordination Committee to ensure coordinated management of marine managed areas and includes state, federal, and key non-profit partners that are actively engaged in the MPA Management Program and are signatories on the original [MLPA Implementation Memorandum of Understanding](#) (MOU). With the MOU set to expire at the end of December 2020, the Leadership Team worked together throughout the year to update the MOU language to better reflect the unique and important role each entity contributes to the statewide MPA network and has renewed their commitments to the Leadership Team for another five years. During the past five years, regional Tribal representation on the Leadership Team was established and increased. With the renewed MOU, the Bureau of Land Management has joined the Leadership Team to work in coordination with the MPA network and the California Coastal National Monument.

Microfibers Workshop

In mid-November, OPC staff participated in the [California Microfiber Workshop: Science, Innovation & Connection](#). The workshop brought together textile development professionals, brand representatives, and water quality managers to inspire more collaboration among diverse stakeholder groups, build on existing microfiber research, innovation, and action, and identify new ideas and messaging that can drive solutions to microfiber pollution. The workshop was hosted by the sustainable textile consultancy Materevolve LLC and was funded by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Marine Debris Program. A report of key findings will be publicly available at the end of January 2021.

Microplastics Health Effects Workshop Series

In mid-October, OPC staff participated in an inaugural webinar on the impacts of microplastics on human and ecological health. The webinars are now leading into a virtual workshop series, with a goal of convening international experts to identify the primary pathways by which microplastics affect biota, prioritize microplastics characteristics that are of greatest biological concern, and identify critical thresholds at which the biological effects of microplastics become more pronounced. The [webinar series was recorded](#) and is available online, and the outcomes of the virtual workshop series are expected to be available in summer 2021.

Science Advisory Team Microplastics Working Group

The [Ocean Protection Council Science Advisory Team Working Group on microplastics](#) has completed their meetings and is developing a qualitative risk assessment framework to assess the risk of microplastics to the marine environment in California. The Working Group was led by Ocean Science Trust in close partnership with OPC. The Working Group's report will go through peer review early next year before being finalized and will provide scientific input to the Microplastics Strategy under development by OPC and due to the Legislature at the end of 2021.

Plastic Pollution Steering Committee

In early November, the Plastic Pollution Steering Committee, an interagency coordination group, finalized its charter and two-year workplan. The Committee includes representatives from CalRecycle, the Coastal Commission, the Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Department of Toxic Substances Control, the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment, the State Lands Commission, State Parks, State Water Resources Control Board, the California Water Quality Monitoring Council, and the California Department of Public Health Tobacco Control Program. The Committee's mission is to leverage State agency expertise and authority on complementary efforts to achieve a goal of zero plastic pollution entering State waters by 2030. The Committee's workplan is divided into four goals: reducing plastic pollution in the environment, improving the science surrounding plastic pollution, understanding the effectiveness of policies and approaches to reduce plastic pollution, and developing effective public outreach and behavior change. The Committee will begin implementation of its workplan in February 2021.

California Dungeness Crab Fishing Gear Working Group

The California Dungeness Crab Fishing Gear Working Group (Working Group) has been providing recommendations to the CDFW Director in alignment with the Risk Assessment and Mitigation Program (RAMP). The 2020-21 season is the first fishing season where RAMP regulations have been implemented, convening the Working Group every two weeks to assess whale entanglement risk with the best available data. As of November 24, 2020, CDFW further delayed the start of the commercial Dungeness crab fishery in the Central Management Area (Fishing Zones 3-6) to at least December 16, 2020. The central management area extended is delay due to the presence of whales within fishing grounds and the potential for entanglement, whereas the northern management area delay was due to low meat quality. The facilitation of the Working Group has been supported through a contract with Strategic Earth, which recently expired in November 2020. CDFW has taken on the role of facilitator for the Working Group.

California Drift Gillnet Transition Program

In February 2020, [OPC approved \\$1,000,000](#) to the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission to support administration of CDFW's implementation of the California Drift Gillnet Transition Program. The program is active, and participants can relinquish permits and nets, as appropriate,

to CDFW and the net recycling entities, respectively, in exchange for payment per the program. So far, eleven participants have relinquished their permits and/or nets. OPC's \$1 million will support payments for the first 10 participants as well as associated net recycling fees. Net Your Problem and Bureo are approved by CDFW as "net destruction entities" and will be supporting recycling the nets.

Entanglement Competitive Call

At its June 2020 meeting, [OPC approved up to \\$2,000,000](#) to fund and administer projects identified through a competitive process that directly support OPC's strategy for Reducing the Risk of Entanglement in California Fishing Gear. The grantee, Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission, is currently developing the competitive call to be initiated in early 2021 with the aim to support individual projects after selection in spring 2021. Individual projects could be supported until January 2024, allowing for projects of up to 2.5 years.

GOAL 4: SUPPORT OCEAN HEALTH THROUGH A SUSTAINABLE BLUE ECONOMY

Promoting Sustainable Aquaculture

On November 16, OPC convened a meeting of state agency leadership and staff from OPC, DFW, Fish and Game Commission, Coastal Commission, State Coastal Conservancy, State Lands Commission, the Department of Public Health, the Department of Food and Agriculture, and the State Water Resources Control Board to discuss and co-develop a set of Aquaculture Principles. These Principles will inform California's upcoming Aquaculture Action Plan and its goal of improving the state's effectiveness in researching, planning for, facilitating, permitting, managing, and promoting sustainable aquaculture in California. The Principles will provide consistent interim guidance until the Action Plan is finalized and focus on the following priorities: 1) develop and utilize best available science, 2) ensure aquaculture sustainability, 3) build governance and management partnerships, 4) ensure effective aquaculture planning, 5) develop and implement efficient aquaculture oversight, and 6) protect public health and food safety.

PERSONNEL NOTES

Two long-term OPC staff members, Paige Berube and Chris Potter, have left OPC for other positions. Paige, who worked as OPC's Sustainable Fisheries Program Manager, has joined The Nature Conservancy as an Oceans Program Associate and is helping advance the TNC's ocean conservation priorities related to sustainable fisheries, kelp forest ecosystems and island resilience. Chris Potter, who led OPC's work on offshore renewable energy, wetlands, coastal sediment management, and oil platform decommissioning, has taken a position as a Senior Environmental Scientist with the Department of Fish and Wildlife where he will continue to focus on offshore renewables and artificial reefs. Both Paige and Chris were valuable and beloved members of the OPC team and made incredible contributions to our conservation and policy efforts over the years. They will be greatly missed, and we wish them both the best in their next endeavors. A [job announcement](#) for an Environmental Scientist in our Sustainable Fisheries program has been posted; applications are due on December 28, 2020.

BUDGET

The Governor's FY20/21 Budget included additional appropriations of Proposition 1 funds (\$9.3 million) and Proposition 68 funds (\$14,610,000). OPC anticipates releasing our final Prop 1 solicitation in spring 2021 and advancing Prop 68 funds throughout 2021 (through both competitive and discretionary processes) for projects that support healthy marine ecosystems and build climate resilience.

COMMUNICATIONS

Media Highlights

"How the waters off Catalina became a DDT dumping ground"

<https://www.latimes.com/projects/la-coast-ddt-dumping-ground/>

"Scientists solve mystery of mass coho salmon deaths. The killer? A chemical from car tires"

<https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-12-03/coho-salmon-tire-chemical>

"45 charged with poaching marine life from fragile San Pedro tide pools"

<https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-09-17/45-charged-poaching-marine-life-san-pedro-white-point-tide-pools>

"City Attorney Mike Feuer Protects Dwindling Sea Life and Fragile Ecosystem in San Pedro"
(related to LA Times article above)

<https://www.lacityattorney.org/post/city-attorney-mike-feuer-protects-dwindling-sea-life-and-fragile-ecosystem-in-san-pedro>

"Along the crumbling Sonoma Coast, an ambitious project paves the way for 'managed retreat'"

<https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-11-27/gleason-beach-managed-retreat>

"Marine ecosystems: No refuge from the heat"

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2020/12/201207131301.htm>

"Iconic sunflower star listed Critically Endangered by IUCN"

<https://sanctuarysimon.org/2020/12/iconic-sunflower-star-listed-critically-endangered-by-iucn/>

"Stanford researchers explore potential for kelp to relieve ocean acidification"

<https://news.stanford.edu/2020/11/19/kelp-help-relieve-ocean-acidification/>

"US generates more plastic trash than any other nation, report finds"

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/2020/10/us-plastic-pollution/>

"New research explains why salmon are dying in the Pacific Northwest. The danger lurks in California too."

<https://www.sfchronicle.com/environment/article/New-research-explains-why-salmon-are-dying-in-the-15773283.php>

"A struggling recycling industry faces new crisis with coronavirus."

<https://www.latimes.com/environment/story/2020-12-05/coronavirus-recycling-crisis>

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