



Staff Recommendation
September 17, 2020

Consideration of Authorization to Disburse Funds for Implementation of a State Sea-level Rise Communications Strategy

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RECOMMENDED ACTION: Staff recommends that OPC approve the disbursement of up to \$550,000 to the California Marine Sanctuary Foundation to implement a strategic sea-level rise communications plan for the state.

LOCATION: Statewide

STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS AND OBJECTIVES: **Goal 1: Safeguard Coastal and Marine Ecosystems in the Face of Climate Change; Objective 1.1:** Build Resiliency to Sea-Level Rise, Coastal Storms, Erosion, and Flooding

EXHIBITS:

Exhibit A: Support Letters

FINDINGS AND RESOLUTION:

Staff recommends that the Ocean Protection Council (OPC) adopt the following findings:

“Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibit(s), OPC hereby finds that:

- 1) The proposed projects are consistent with the purposes of Division 26.5 of the Public Resources Code, the Ocean Protection Act;
- 2) The proposed projects are consistent with OPC's Proposition 84 grant program and environmental license plate funding guidelines(Interim Standards and Protocols, August 2013); and
- 3) The proposed projects are not 'legal projects' that trigger the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Public Resources Code section, section 15378.”

Staff further recommends that OPC adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 35500 *et seq.* of the Public Resources Code:

“OPC hereby approves the disbursement of up to \$550,000 to the California National Marine Sanctuary Foundation (CMSF) to implement a strategic sea-level rise communications plan for the state.

This authorization is subject to the condition that prior to disbursement of funds, California Marine Sanctuary Foundation shall submit for the review and approval of the Executive Director of the OPC detailed work plans, schedules, staff requirements, budgets, and the names of any contractors intended to be used to complete the projects, as well as discrete deliverables that can be produced in intervals to ensure the projects are on target for successful completion. All projects will be developed under a shared understanding of process, management and delivery.”

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This project will implement a comprehensive statewide communications plan on sea-level rise with strategies that include traditional public relations, earned and social media, a campaign microsite and face-to-face events. Sea-level rise (SLR), is threatening the overall health and longevity of California’s natural resources, critical infrastructure, coastal access, and public health and safety. The State’s SLR Leadership Team has recognized the need to increase public awareness of SLR and develop clear and consistent statewide communication about SLR, its impacts, and the solutions available to mitigate and adapt.

Increased, organized, and targeted statewide communication on SLR is critical to raise awareness and convey the urgency of SLR. This project will implement key messaging for targeted audience sectors: vulnerable residents and businesses, policymakers, and those that enjoy the coast. Communicating clearly and effectively about SLR is essential to reduce confusion on a complex topic and to generate support for proactive adaptation planning. Ultimately, increased awareness will catalyze action by decision makers, engage communities in adaptation planning, and result in a more resilient California.

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Californians’ safety, local and state economies, critical infrastructure, and natural resources face increasing threats from SLR. Every scientific assessment since California’s 2009 Climate Adaptation Strategy has revealed that coastal impacts from SLR will occur more quickly and be more severe than previously projected. In response to the significant threats posed by SLR, the State of California has adopted [Principles for Aligned State Action](#) to make the state’s coastline more resilient. These principles were convened by the State’s SLR Leadership Team, which is comprised of state agencies with coastal, bay, and shoreline climate resilience responsibilities, including coastal infrastructure and public safety. These principles act as a blueprint for aligned, proactive adaptation policies in the

coming decade. By acting decisively now to mitigate ongoing SLR impacts, we can protect and improve the state economy and preserve quality of life.

To secure significant funding and public support for resilience planning and implementation, awareness about SLR threats and adaptation strategies must be increased significantly. The State's SLR Leadership Team recognized the need to increase public awareness of SLR and address the lack of a consistent statewide communications strategy about SLR, its impacts, and the solutions available to mitigate and adapt. Communicating effectively about SLR is essential to increase awareness of SLR and to generate support for proactive adaptation planning.

With previous funding from OPC, the California Marine Sanctuary Foundation (CMSF) partnered with May77 Communications to develop a strategic statewide communications plan (Plan) on SLR that can be utilized by multiple state agencies. This pilot communications project created consistent and engaging SLR messaging for key audiences and included specific recommendations about how to best utilize a variety of internal and external communication channels to raise awareness and support of SLR adaptation policies statewide. This Plan was developed by May77 in partnership with CMSF through research, stakeholder discussions, and an online survey designed to measure the awareness, understanding and importance of projected threats from rising sea levels among California residents in the San Diego, Los Angeles and San Francisco Bay area.

Specific objectives for the Plan are to:

- Raise public awareness of the current and future threat that SLR poses to the environmental, economic, and recreational health of California.
- Create a greater sense of urgency amongst residents and policymakers to begin active resiliency planning at the local level.
- Increase trust in and visibility of California state agencies' SLR mitigation work amongst key lawmakers and stakeholders statewide.

The Plan serves as a detailed roadmap for engaging three key audience segments most likely to effect meaningful SLR change: vulnerable residents and businesses, policymakers, and those that enjoy the coast. The Plan provides relevant messaging that creates a much greater sense of urgency amongst these stakeholders. The focus of this first phase of what will be a multi-year engagement plan is to provide baseline education and reinforce the need for local communities to conduct vulnerability assessments and start active resilience planning with the support of California state agencies.

Project Tasks and Deliverables:

The overall objective of this project is to implement the Plan and increase awareness of SLR through effective statewide communication. The Plan is designed to communicate SLR to the three identified audience segments (vulnerable residents and businesses, policymakers, and those that enjoy the coast) through segment specific communications

strategies: traditional public relations, earned media, social media, campaign microsite, shareable video, paid advertising, state-controlled channels and face-to-face events. An overarching integrated creative strategy will inform outreach on all these platforms.

The Plan encompasses strategies for both free content marketing and creative advertisement campaigns. The components of this multi-year engagement plan are broken down into several specific tasks to accomplish the following deliverables: refinement of the creative campaign and communications strategy, implementation of earned media and social media strategies, development of a microsite where all SLR information will be housed, and also the creation of a digital toolkit that can be shared with partners so SLR messaging can be easily disseminated.

About the Grantee

The California Marine Sanctuaries Foundation (CMSF) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing the understanding and stewardship of ocean resources in California. Since its founding in 1995, CMSF has worked to connect science and management and enhance communication and coordination amongst stakeholders. With previous funding from OPC, CMSF has partnered with May77 Communications to develop a strategic statewide communications plan on sea-level rise. May77 is a private, full-service agency with decades of experience in developing environmental communications strategies.

Project Timeline

November 2020 – November 2021

PROJECT FINANCING:

Staff recommends that the Ocean Protection Council (OPC) authorize encumbrance of up to \$550,000 the California Marine Sanctuary to conduct implementation of strategic sea-level rise communications.

Ocean Protection Council	\$550,000
TOTAL	\$550,000

The anticipated source of funds will be from the Ocean Protection Council's Fiscal Year 2018/2019 appropriation of California Environmental License Plate Funds (ELPF). Using these funds to support this project is consistent with the California Ocean Protection Act, Section 35650(b), as well as OPC's Strategic Plan and Grant Program Funding Guidelines as discussed in more detail in the following section.

CONSISTENCY WITH CALIFORNIA OCEAN PROTECTION ACT:

The proposed project is consistent with the Ocean Protection Act, Division 26.5 of the Public Resources Code, because it is consistent with trust-fund allowable projects, defined in Public Resources Code Section 35650 as projects which:

(A) Eliminate or reduce threats to coastal and ocean ecosystems, habitats, and species; (D) Improve coastal water quality; (E) Allow for increased public access to, and enjoyment of, ocean and coastal resources, of those resources; (F) Improve management, conservation, and protection of coastal waters and ocean ecosystems; (H) Protect, conserve, and restore coastal waters and ocean

CONSISTENCY WITH THE OPC'S STRATEGIC PLAN:

This project implements Goal 1.1. Specifically, build resiliency to sea-level rise, coastal storms, erosion, and flooding.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT (CEQA):

The proposed project is categorically exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA") pursuant to 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15306 because the project involves only data collection, research and resource evaluation activities that will not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource.