



Staff Recommendation

September 14, 2021

**Consideration of Authorization to Disburse Funds for
Marine Protected Area (MPA) Signage**

Sandra Fogg, California Sea Grant Fellow

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$500,000 to the California Marine Sanctuary Foundation, in collaboration with the MPA Collaborative Network, for a Marine Protected Area (MPA) Signage Project to further increase awareness and stewardship of California's MPA Network.

LOCATION: Statewide

STRATEGIC PLAN OBJECTIVE(S): Goal 3: Enhance Coastal and Marine Biodiversity;
Objective 3.1: Protect and Restore Coastal and Marine Ecosystems

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 the adopted State Water Resource Control Board's Water Quality Control Policy on the Use of Coastal and Estuarine Waters for Power Plant Cooling;
- 3) The proposed authorization is not subject to review under the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA") pursuant to 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15378(b)(4)."

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 \$500,000 to the California Marine Sanctuary Foundation to install educational and regulatory MPA signs statewide to increase awareness and stewardship of California's statewide MPA Network.

This authorization is subject to the condition that prior to disbursement of funds, the California Marine Sanctuary Foundation listed above 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:

Staff recommends the Ocean Protection Council approve the disbursement of up to \$500,000 to fund the California Marine Sanctuary Foundation (CMSF), in collaboration with the MPA Collaborative Network, for a MPA Signage Project that will further increase MPA awareness, stewardship, and regulatory compliance to protect coastal and marine ecosystems in California. The project will include: identification of additional signage needs across the state; assessment of existing sign content to evaluate effectiveness; development of a public-facing, interactive map of sign locations statewide; engagement with stakeholders to develop locally-relevant content; and the creation and installation of up between 75-100 new signs.

California’s globally significant network of MPAs was created to protect marine life and habitats and may serve an important role in building ecosystem resilience in the face of climate change. Evaluation of MPAs worldwide have identified that increased public awareness through signage and other outreach efforts can improve compliance with MPA regulations, helping ensure that MPAs can provide their intended ecological benefits. To date, the State has made significant investments in MPA signage, resulting in the creation and installation of over 400 educational and regulatory signs since the completion of the MPA Network in 2012.

Additional MPA signage has been identified as a critical need by the [MPA Statewide Leadership Team](#) (Leadership Team)¹, as well as by members of the state’s 14 county-based [MPA Collaboratives](#)². This project, which was developed through close collaboration between CMSF and the MPA Collaborative Network, in partnership with OPC and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), would expand existing statewide signage, building on previous investments to further improve public understanding and awareness of MPAs. Years of effective partnership between OPC, CDFW, CMSF and the MPA Collaborative Network on MPA compliance, stewardship, and signage efforts stage this project for success.

¹ <https://www.opc.ca.gov/programs-summary/marine-protected-areas/partnerships/>

² <https://www.mpacollaborative.org/>

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Background

To ensure the durability and long-term success of California's MPA Network, the state has established an MPA Management Program that includes four focal areas: *Outreach and Education, Policy and Permitting, Enforcement and Compliance, and Research and Monitoring*. The MPA Management Program leverages resources and advances collaborative action across these four focal areas to advance the goals of the Marine Life Protection Act.

Public compliance with rules and regulations is necessary for MPAs to meet their ecological goals. Educational and regulatory signage can contribute to improved compliance by building public awareness and understanding of MPAs. For the past decade, CMSF has led MPA signage efforts through combined funding from OPC and Resources Legacy Fund (RLF). In partnership with CDFW, the California Department of Parks and Recreation, Tribal members, the MPA Collaborative Network, and other collaborators, CMSF has successfully created and installed over 400 educational and regulatory signs across the state.

Despite these significant efforts, additional signage to increase statewide compliance of MPA regulations is still necessary. This need was recently identified by the MPA Statewide Leadership Team, an advisory body to the Secretary for Natural Resources made up of representatives from state and federal agencies, California Native American Tribes, and non-governmental partners that are actively engaged in the MPA Management Program. In its 2021-2025 Work Plan³, the Leadership Team committed to working with local communities to evaluate and improve MPA signage. The Leadership Team identified the MPA Collaborative Network as the lead organization to assess statewide MPA signage efforts by completing an inventory of existing signs and creating a mechanism for the public and partners to request maintenance of existing signs or identify needs for new signs.

The MPA Collaborative Network also identified additional signage as a local priority across the state. Through a series of [Compliance Forums](#)⁴ funded by OPC and RLF, members of the 14 county-based MPA Collaboratives (including non-profits, local government and Tribal members, enforcement officials, anglers, and non-consumptive ocean recreationists) identified the top four compliance concerns as: poaching in MPAs; trash and pollution; wildlife disturbance; and harmful tide pooling. The number one solution identified to address these compliance concerns was signage⁵.

³ The MPA Statewide Leadership Team's 2021-2025 Work Plan is undergoing its final approval process and will be posted on the Leadership Team's webpage in the Fall of 2021: <https://www.opc.ca.gov/programs-summary/marine-protected-areas/partnerships/>

⁴ https://opc.ca.gov/webmaster/ftp/pdf/agenda_items/20190523/Item3c_MPAOutreach_Enforcement_FINAL_v1.pdf

⁵ <https://www.mpacollaborative.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/California-Statewide-Compliance-Forum-Report-Final-Reduced-1.pdf>

By combining their capacity and expertise, CMSF and the MPA Collaborative Network will continue the momentum achieved from previous efforts to increase awareness and compliance of MPA regulations. This project will not only expand the reach and quantity of MPA interpretative signage, but will also evaluate messaging and imagery to determine effectiveness and resonance with the public. CMSF offers detailed project and program management, expertise in evaluation of educational materials, and a long history of managing statewide signage initiatives. The MPA Collaborative Network brings the local perspective and knowledge of its extensive network of 1200+ members, who are working in partnership with state and building essential social infrastructure for long-term MPA stewardship. This project represents a unique opportunity to leverage the strengths of these two MPA partners to improve and expand MPA signage across the state.

Project Summary

This project would directly address these needs through the following proposed tasks:

1. Conduct a signage needs assessment to identify additional gaps in signage statewide;
2. Evaluate signage messaging and effectiveness;
3. Develop and publicly release a user-friendly mobile application to create a map inventory of MPA signs statewide and allow local stakeholders to input information on sign condition and additional needs;
4. Engage stakeholders in the project to contribute locally relevant content and coordinate efforts across the state; and
5. Create and install between 75-100 new signs in priority locations identified from the needs assessment.

CMSF and the MPA Collaborative Network will work collaboratively with CDFW and OPC to ensure MPA messaging is locally relevant, in alignment with the State's MPA communication strategy, and is inclusive and culturally sensitive. Through separate funding, the MPA Collaborative Network will lead a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) series over the next year to conduct a language assessment of MPA messaging, in partnership with the non-profit Just Communities. The outcomes will be incorporated into this signage effort and will help inform broader MPA messaging for the state.

Project Timeline

Fall 2021 – Summer 2024

About the Grantee

The California Marine Sanctuary Foundation is a non-profit organization that was established in 1995 to support the Monterey Bay and Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuaries and California's statewide network of MPAs. CMSF works to advance the understanding and protection of coastal and ocean resources through community outreach and education on a statewide scale. OPC has partnered with CMSF on numerous

MPA-related projects over the past several years including a complex effort to install over 400 interpretive signs for public use along the entire coast of California.

The MPA Collaborative Network will be an integral partner and subgrantee on this project. The MPA Collaborative Network, which began in 2012, is an organization that supports and facilitates communication and resource sharing between the MPA Collaboratives, a consortium of 14 county-based community groups working to advance MPA management and local stewardship. OPC regularly partners with the MPA Collaborative Network to complete MPA-related projects, including this year's completion of 15 statewide MPA Community Compliance forums that identified a ubiquitous need for improved and updated MPA signage throughout the state.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Staff recommends that the Ocean Protection Council authorizes encumbrance of up to \$500,000 to the California Marine Sanctuary Foundation to complete the project summarized above.

Ocean Protection Council	\$500,000
Silicon Valley Community Foundation	\$5,000
Seafia	\$5,000
PROJECT TOTAL COST	\$510,000

Funding Source

The anticipated source of funds will be from the Ocean Protection Council's Once-Through Cooling Interim Mitigation Fund Fiscal Year 20/21. OPC's Once-Through Cooling Interim Mitigation Program prioritizes mitigation payment investment through four categories to ensure effective management of the MPA network: 1) enforcement, 2) outreach and education, 3) research and monitoring, and 4) restoration. The recommended project addresses critical outreach and education priorities to ensure effective management of the MPA network by establishing and maintaining compliance with MPA regulations. Improved public awareness of MPA regulations can serve as once-through cooling impact mitigation because it increases protection of marine life within MPAs, which in turn maximizes the expected ecological benefits from these areas^{6,7}.

CMSF is also working with RLF to secure up to \$100,000 in matching funds to provide fiscal support for this statewide signage effort.

⁶ <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1657v5d.27>

⁷ https://opc.ca.gov/webmaster/_media_library/2018/10/OTCAwardGuidelines_OceanProtectionCouncil_FINAL.pdf

CONSISTENCY WITH CALIFORNIA OCEAN PROTECTION ACT:

The proposed project is consistent with the California Ocean Protection Act, Division 26.5 of the Public Resources Code as it will improve management and stewardship, as well as conservation, maintenance and protection of coastal waters and ocean ecosystems.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT (CEQA):

The proposed authorization is not subject to review under the California Environmental Quality Act (“CEQA”) pursuant to 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15378(b)(4).