



Staff Recommendation
Consent Item
June 14, 2022

**Consideration of Authorization to Disburse Funds for a Budget Augmentation for
MPA Monitoring Data Synthesis and Analysis**

Lindsay Bonito, MPA Program Manager

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$89,632 to the National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis (NCEAS), based at UC Santa Barbara, to conduct analysis and synthesis of MPA monitoring data.

LOCATION: Statewide

STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS AND OBJECTIVES: Goal 3: Enhance Coastal and Marine Biodiversity; Objective 3.1: Protect and Restore Coastal and Marine Ecosystems

EXHIBITS:

None

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 California Ocean Protection Act;
- 2) The proposed projects are consistent with the adopted State Water Resources Control Board's Water Quality Control Policy on the Use of Coastal and Estuarine Waters for Power Plant Cooling; 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 \$89,632 to the National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis (NCEAS), based at UC Santa Barbara, to conduct analysis and synthesis of MPA monitoring data.

This authorization is subject to the condition that prior to disbursement of funds, the National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis (NCEAS), 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 that the Council approve the disbursement of an additional \$89,632 to analyze and synthesize MPA monitoring data, led by the National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis (NCEAS), augmenting the budget of a project that was previously approved by the Council. To prepare for its first-ever decadal management review of the MPA Network, the State has invested significantly into both baseline and long-term monitoring of the MPA Network. The MPA monitoring program is a large component of the State’s efforts to evaluate progress towards meeting the goals of the Marine Life Protection Act¹. The long-term monitoring project teams have published their findings to date in a series of publicly available technical reports² which address MPA performance evaluation questions outlined in California’s MPA Monitoring Action Plan³, and refined by the Decadal Evaluation Working Group⁴. Each technical report is specific to the individual habitats that were monitored; this project is working to integrate individual monitoring datasets and conduct analyses to address broader-scale MPA performance evaluation questions. In February 2021, the OPC approved \$500,000 to NCEAS to synthesize and analyze MPA monitoring data⁵, however, additional funding is needed for further analytical support for the NCEAS working group and for DataOne, a data repository service that houses OPC’s MPA monitoring data and provides public access to datasets through a data portal⁶.

¹ www.wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Marine/MPAs/MLPA

² www.caseagrant.ucsd.edu/news/california-marine-protected-area-long-term-monitoring-program-final-reports-2019-2021

³ www.wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Marine/MPAs/Management/monitoring/action-plan

⁴ www.opc.ca.gov/webmaster/_media_library/2022/01/Evaluating-Californias-Marine-Protected-Area-Network-2021_ADA_OST_revised12.2022.pdf

⁵

www.opc.ca.gov/webmaster/ftp/pdf/agenda_items/20210216/Item_6_MPA_Monitoring_and_Data_Analysis_StaffRec_FINA_L.pdf

⁶ <https://search.dataone.org/portals/CaliforniaMPA>

This project will provide the State with critical information on MPA performance that will inform adaptive management of California's MPAs into the future, helping to ensure a successful management review of the MPA network in 2022 and contributing to broader state priorities such as sustainable fisheries and climate resilience.

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Background:

In preparation for the first decadal management review of the MPA Network, significant investment has been made on behalf of the state to implement and support both baseline and long-term monitoring efforts statewide. To best assist the Fish and Game Commission, California Department of Fish and Wildlife and OPC for the upcoming 2022 review, analyses are needed to integrate baseline and long-term datasets, explicitly incorporate influencing factors (e.g. climate change) into MPA performance evaluation, and address network evaluation questions not currently being addressed by monitoring groups or the state.

Project Summary:

The originally approved project is currently integrating existing analyses and performing new analyses as needed to provide answers to MPA performance evaluation questions outlined in Appendix B of the Action Plan and refined by the Decadal Evaluation Working Group (DEWG), a working group of the OPC Science Advisory Team. In support of adaptive management, the project is evaluating and providing updated recommendations to the MPA design criteria established during the creation of the MPA network. This project is also coordinating with state MPA program staff and an MPA communications contractor to help develop products for the 2022 MPA management review. The additional funding will provide support for a part-time graduate student researcher to lead analyses to ensure analytical products are available for inclusion in the decadal management review.

Specific research objectives include:

- Identify patterns and trends emerging from existing data streams and analytical products, including baseline and long-term MPA monitoring projects.
 - Integrate across habitats
 - Integrate across the statewide network
 - Integrate across social-ecological systems
- Incorporate influencing factors (e.g. climate change, environmental conditions, historical fishing pressure) into analyses related to MPA performance evaluation.

- Explore MPA performance evaluation questions that are not currently being addressed, but for which sufficient data exist to conduct analyses.
- Evaluate MPA design criteria using best available science and cutting-edge analytical approaches.

About the Grantee

The National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis (NCEAS) is an independent research affiliate of the University of California Santa Barbara. NCEAS applies a solutions-oriented approach through synthesizing existing data sources, facilitating scientific collaborations among researchers with diverse expertise, and advancing transparent science that is accessible to both the scientific community and the greater public.

Project Timeline

February 2021 - March 2023

PROJECT FINANCING:

Staff recommends that the Ocean Protection Council (OPC) authorize encumbrance of up to \$89,632 to the National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis (NCEAS), based at UC Santa Barbara, to conduct analysis and synthesis of MPA monitoring data. Council approval for this minor budget augmentation is necessary as the amount exceeds the Executive Director's delegated authority to approve budget amendments of 15% of the original project budget.

Once-Through Cooling FY 20/21	\$89,632
TOTAL	\$89,632

The anticipated source of funds will come from the Once-Through Cooling Interim Mitigation Program 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 research priorities to ensure effective management of the MPA Network by analyzing monitoring data that will significantly contribute to the upcoming decadal MPA management review.

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(b)(2) as projects which:

- Eliminate or reduce threats to coastal and ocean ecosystems, habitats, and species.
- Improve the management of fisheries and/or foster sustainable fisheries.
- Allow for increased public access to, and enjoyment of, ocean and coastal resources, consistent with sustainable, long-term protection and conservation of those resources.
- Improve management, conservation, and protection of coastal waters and ocean ecosystems.
- Provide monitoring and scientific data to improve state efforts to protect and conserve ocean resources.
- Protect, conserve, and restore coastal waters and ocean ecosystems.
- Provide funding for adaptive management, planning coordination, monitoring, research, and other necessary activities to minimize the adverse impacts of climate change on California's ocean ecosystem.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT (CEQA):

The proposed project is not a 'legal project' that triggers the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Public Resources Code section 21068 and Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations, section 15378. If it was determined to be a 'legal project' under CEQA, the proposed project is categorically exempt from review under CEQA pursuant to 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15306 because the projects involve information collection, consisting of data collection, research, and resource evaluation activities that will not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource. Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon approval by OPC.