

**Draft for public comment**

**Ocean Protection Council**  
**Proposed Program Priorities**  
**Fiscal Years 2008 to 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 fiscal years 2008 to 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 and application instructions can be found at the OPC website.

## **Governance**

### **Enforcement**

Coordination: The OPC staff has been working to improve coordination among agency enforcement programs. The OPC has facilitated a pilot project between enforcement professionals at the State Water Board and the Department of Fish and Game (DFG). Staff will continue to develop this pilot and, if successful, will export coordination approaches to other agencies.

Endangered Species Acts: The OPC staff 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. As was contemplated by these acts more than three decades ago, protecting critical habitat will not only protect the listed species, but the others that share that habitat as well.

### **Agency Coordinated Management and New Funding Options**

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 seeks to identify the gaps that exist in our protection efforts and ways in which funds may be generated to fill those gaps. A separate but related effort will look to develop a set of indicators that can provide both the public and policymakers with an indication of our collective success at protecting ocean and coastal resources.

### **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

## Draft for public comment

agreement, the governors identified seven issues of regional significance. Together, the three states are joining forces to help protect the health of ocean and coastal ecosystems along the entire West Coast and the economies that depend on them. 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, on topics including climate change, water quality, ocean energy, research, and sediment management, are being assembled to work toward the specifics of implementing action. The OPC will play a leadership role, developing and supporting pilot projects related to these actions and serving on relevant subject area teams.

### **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. The OPC will: (1) continue to serve as a facilitator between the state agencies, federal agencies, and west coast states; (2) address future research needs and leverage research dollars; and (3) develop state policies.

## Research and Monitoring

### **Seafloor Mapping**

The OPC has made significant progress toward completing seafloor maps in California state waters – to date, the OPC has completed maps for approximately one third of state waters. A complete state seafloor map will provide foundational data to support numerous management decisions, most notably those involving the 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. OPC staff will also examine the cost and feasibility of completing maps for the nearshore area to a depth of 10 meters.

### **Marine Protected Area Baseline Characterization and Information Management**

California is well on its way to establishing a coastwide network of marine protected areas. The OPC has contributed nearly \$4 million to support baseline characterization in the central coast and may fund a final, third-year in this region. The MPA Monitoring Enterprise is currently drafting a plan for baseline characterization in the north central coast that will eventually become a statewide plan for long-term monitoring in all MPA regions. The OPC will work to find support dollars to conduct monitoring in those regions according to that plan and to create an information management system to synthesize MPA information 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.

## Draft for public comment

### 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 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. Staff will develop ideas and possible funding recommendations to capture unique opportunities that come from this workshop. In addition, 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 that directed staff to focus on providing solutions to the marine debris problem in California. In July 2008, the OPC and the marine debris coordinating committee released the draft Ocean Litter Implementation Strategy. Once the plan is final, the OPC will continue work with state agencies and other parties to implement the actions called for in the strategy.

### Low Impact Development

In 2008, the OPC adapted a resolution on low impact development (LID). Staff will continue to complete the actions called for in that resolution. In addition, staff will bring 2-3 projects to the OPC that will implement LID practices as part of the new development or redevelopment project. The request for project concepts will require that the projects have several additional components (development of best management practices, an LID manual, general plan revisions, etc.) that can be exported to other cities and counties to further promote LID statewide.

### 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). The number of HAB events is increasing worldwide. OPC staff will work with resource managers and researchers to develop a pilot HAB alert system that will provide 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 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.

## Physical Processes and Habitat Structure

### Climate Change 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. 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 strategies are adopted, the OPC will work to implement them and support research on data gaps. For example, coastal managers have already expressed a need for statewide LIDAR data (needed to produce high-resolution coastal inundation maps), better

## Draft for public comment

erosion models and predictions, and greater understanding of beach processes and sediment dynamics in light of changing sea levels.

### Ocean and Coastal Ecosystem

#### Fisheries Management

COPA directs the OPC to work to improve fisheries management 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.

Electronic Reporting Methods: OPC staff is also working with the DFG to identify electronic reporting methods that may be implemented in California and will secure the software and hardware needed to implement a new system statewide.

Community-based Management Reform: The OPC will continue to work with fishing communities and several non-governmental organizations to formulate cutting-edge approaches to existing management challenges. In addition, the OPC will continue work with DFG and the Fish and Game Commission (FGC), when appropriate, to support their efforts to prepare for these potential reforms.

Collaborative Fisheries Research Organization: The OPC will develop a collaborative fisheries research (CFR) organization. The CFR organization can develop, solicit, and fund projects that create equal partnerships among fishermen and academic scientists to address the fishery data needs of DFG, the FGC and the OPC. This CFR 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 pelagic species.

#### Salmon Statewide

Salmon populations have been severely impacted by human actions since the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Despite a century and a half of attention, salmon populations are declining, as evidenced by the coastwide salmon fishery closure this year. OPC staff will continue to work with experts to determine the most important causes of salmon decline and develop politically viable solutions to address these impacts.

#### Aquatic Invasive Species

California currently lacks an invasive species rapid response program and emergency fund, and management programs to adequately prevent the introduction of invasive species. The OPC, in partnership with the Ocean Science Trust, is funding teams of experts who will complete individual vector risk assessments by June 1, 2009 and a report synthesizing the results and developing recommendations for priority management actions by mid-August 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.

## Draft for public comment

### Education and Outreach

#### **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 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.

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