



Chapter 9

Next Steps

CURRENT AND FUTURE COASTAL COMMISSION EFFORTS:

The Commission has a [Strategic Plan](#) for 2013-2018 (2013a) that identifies many action items that the Commission or partner organizations plan to take to address the challenges of sea level rise and climate change. The first priority in the Strategic Plan is for the Commission to adopt Sea Level Rise Policy Guidance for use in Local Coastal Program (LCP) planning and project design (Action 3.1.1), and this Guidance reflects significant progress toward accomplishing this task. The objectives and action items from the Strategic Plan related to sea level rise and climate change are presented within the following pages.

The Commission is also involved in a number of other efforts that meet the climate change planning goals laid out in its Strategic Plan. These include efforts related to the Commission's normal operating business, such as ongoing coordination with local government partners and other agencies, as well as specially funded projects designed to meet specific needs. Several of these efforts that are currently underway or that staff identified as next steps during the completion of this Guidance document are listed below. The Commission anticipates that these items will be completed over the next two to five years, in coordination with other relevant partners and research institutions, as staff capacity and funding allows.

1. **Continue an active program of public outreach on sea level rise.** The Commission will strive to provide public information about sea level rise issues through public workshops, the Commission's website, meetings, outreach, and our public education program. The Commission will work to enhance efforts to coordinate with low-income and underserved populations and communities.
2. **Develop methods for quantifying impacts to coastal resources from shoreline armoring projects.** The Coastal Commission staff has initiated a Project of Special Merit (funded by NOAA) to build upon the Commission's existing efforts to mitigate for the adverse impacts of shoreline development projects to public access and recreation by working with beach ecologists and a valuation economist to develop a method to quantify impacts to biological resources and beach ecology. The final product is anticipated to be a set of guidelines to use in assessing the impacts of proposed shoreline armoring projects and a method(s) for calculating the full value of recreational and ecological loss resulting from installation of shoreline armoring projects (where they may be approved as consistent with the Coastal Act).
3. **Adopt policy guidance and model ordinance language for resilient shoreline residential development in hazardous areas affected by sea level rise.** Under another NOAA-funded Project of Special Merit, the Coastal Commission will conduct a statewide survey to characterize physical shoreline conditions for residential areas along the coast. Informed by this assessment, staff will identify and analyze policy and legal issues for development and redevelopment in hazardous areas, factoring in sea level rise projections that will change shoreline conditions over time. Working collaboratively with local governments, staff will use the policy and legal analysis to develop policy guidance and model ordinance language. The project will build upon this Guidance and is consistent with the Coastal Commission's Strategic Plan goals.

4. **Enhance coordination and planning efforts related to developing adaptation strategies for critical infrastructure.** Addressing sea level rise impacts to critical infrastructure is particularly complex and will require greater amounts of planning time, stakeholder input, and funding. The Commission will support planning efforts in a number of ways including, for example:
 - a. Providing guidance or participating in working groups that examine managed retreat of critical infrastructure, including when to consider managed retreat rather than continue with repairs and maintenance in light of sea level rise.
 - b. Coordinating closely with Caltrans to address transportation issues. Planning efforts may include integrating LCP planning and regional transportation planning processes; coordinating and supporting phased approaches for realignment projects; and identifying priorities for adaption response.
 - c. Coordinating with port and harbor authorities and other relevant stakeholders to address vulnerabilities specific to ports, harbors, fisheries, and navigation, and to develop and enhance adaptation strategies that are particularly applicable for coastal-dependent infrastructure and other port needs.
 - d. Coordinating with the State and Regional Water Quality Control Boards to consider vulnerability issues related to water supply and wastewater capacity infrastructure in California.
5. **Consider producing additional guidance documents, including:**
 - a. Broader climate change guidance addressing other climate change impacts to the coastal zone.
 - b. One-page fact sheets on some adaptation measures such as green infrastructure and conservation easements.
 - c. Guidance on the use of ‘living shorelines’, dune management, beach nourishment, and so on for California, including an assessment of areas or coastal situations where these strategies could be effective, what they need to succeed, monitoring requirements, and maintenance.
 - d. Guidance for how to address impacts to critical infrastructure, assets and resources that cross jurisdictional boundaries, and ports, harbors and other coastal-dependent resources.
6. **Implement the Coastal Commission’s responsibilities under other state efforts and legislation.**
 - a. Governor Brown’s April 2015 [Executive Order B-30-15](#) states that state agencies shall take climate change into account in their planning and investment decisions, and employ full life-cycle cost accounting to evaluate and compare infrastructure investments and alternatives. The order requires agencies to ensure that priority is given to actions that build climate preparedness and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, provide flexible and adaptive approaches, protect the state's most vulnerable

- populations, and promote natural infrastructure solutions. The Coastal Commission will continue to integrate these principles into its planning and regulatory work.
- b. [AB2516](#), authored by Assemblymember Gordon and approved in September 2014, established a *Planning for Sea Level Rise Database* that is anticipated to be available online in early 2016. The database will provide the public with an educational tool from which to learn about the actions taken by cities, counties, regions, and various public and private entities to address sea level rise. The Coastal Commission will contribute data to this effort, including information about grant-funded LCP updates.
 - c. The Coastal Commission will also participate in the implementation of the 2014 [Safeguarding California](#) plan, along with the Ocean Protection Council's 2014 [Resolution on the Implementation of the Safeguarding California Plan](#). Key principles are and will continue to be incorporated into Coastal Commission work, including protection of California's most vulnerable populations the integration of risk reduction with emissions reductions, and the development of metrics and indicators of progress on efforts to reduce climate risk.

Coastal Commission Strategic Plan 2013-2018 Excerpts Actions Related to Sea Level Rise and Climate Change

GOAL 1: Maximize Public Access and Recreation

Objective 1.1 – Enhance Public Access through Updated Beach Access Assessment and Constraints Analysis

Actions:

- 1.1.5 Identify locations where access may be limited or eliminated in the future due to sea level rise and increased storm events and begin planning for other options such as new vertical accessways to maintain maximum beach access (see also Action 3.2.1).

Objective 1.4 – Expand the California Coastal Trail System through Enhanced Planning and Implementation

Actions:

- 1.4.4 Identify locations of the CCT that might be at risk from rising sea level and increased storm events and begin planning for trail relocations or other alternatives to insure continued functionality of the CCT (see also Action 3.2.1).

GOAL 3: Address Climate Change through LCP Planning, Coastal Permitting, Inter-Agency Collaboration, and Public Education

Objective 3.1 – Develop Planning and Permitting Policy Guidance for Addressing the Effects of Climate Change on Coastal Resources

Actions:

- 3.1.1 Adopt general sea level rise (SLR) policy guidance for use in coastal permitting and LCP planning, and amendments based on best available science, including the final report

from the National Research Council of the National Academy of Science entitled *Sea-Level Rise for the Coasts of California, Oregon, and Washington* (June 2012).

- 3.1.2 Based on the general SLR policy guidance, identify and develop specific regulatory guidance for addressing coastal hazards, including recommendations for analytic methods for accounting for SLR and increased storm events in project analysis, standards for redevelopment and development in hazard zones (*e.g.*, bluff top and flood zones), buffers for coastal wetlands, and policies for shoreline structure design and impact mitigation.
- 3.1.3 Develop a work program to produce policy guidance for coastal permitting and LCPs, to account for other climate change related impacts and adaptation planning including wetland, marine and terrestrial habitat protection, habitat migration, risk of wildfires, water supply and groundwater protection.
- 3.1.4 Provide public information and guidance through workshops, presentations to local government, *etc.* Assist local governments with interpretation of scientific or other technical information related to climate change and sea level rise that could be of use in adaptation planning.
- 3.1.5 Contribute to relevant state-wide efforts on climate change and adaptation as a member of the State's Climate Action Team – Coast and Ocean Working Group.
- 3.1.6 Coordinate with Natural Resources Agency, Office of Planning and Research, California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) and others to provide consistent guidance on climate change in updating general plans, hazard mitigation plans and other planning documents used by local governments.
- 3.1.7 Coordinate with the State Lands Commission to address sea level rise and shoreline change and implications for the management of public trust resources.

Objective 3.2 – Assess Coastal Resource Vulnerabilities to Guide Development of Priority Coastal Adaptation Planning Strategies

Actions:

- 3.2.1 Conduct a broad vulnerability assessment of urban and rural areas to identify priority areas for adaptation planning, such as community development, public infrastructure, public accessways, open space or public beaches at risk from sea level rise. Identify and participate in on-going vulnerability assessments and adaptation planning efforts as feasible.
- 3.2.2 Work with CalTrans and other public agency partners to assess and address roadway, rail, and other transportation infrastructure vulnerabilities, particularly along Highway One and other coastal roads and highways.
- 3.2.3 Work with the Department of Water Resources, State Water Resources Control Board, and local agencies to assess and address water and wastewater treatment plant vulnerabilities along the coast.
- 3.2.4 Work with the Conservancy, California Department of Fish and Game [*sic*], US Fish and Wildlife, and other partners to assess the vulnerability of wetlands and other sensitive habitat areas. Identify habitats that are particularly vulnerable climate change and/or

habitats that may be important for future habitat migration (*e.g.*, wetland transitional areas).

3.2.5 Work with the Coastal Observing Systems, researchers, and others to identify and develop baseline monitoring elements to better understand and monitor changes in coastal conditions related to sea level rise and other climate change impacts.

3.2.6 With the Conservancy and OPC, develop and implement a competitive grant program to provide funding to selected local governments to conduct vulnerability assessments and/or technical studies that can be used to assess a community's risks from climate change and inform updates to LCPs.

ADDITIONAL RESEARCH NEEDS

Additional research is needed to more fully understand and prepare for sea level rise. The research needs are directed toward research institutions at academic, state, federal, and local levels. The Commission will strive to collaborate with and support research related to sea level rise science and adaptation, including with the efforts and ongoing work of the [California Climate Change Research Plan](#).

1. **Modeling.** Sea level rise science is an evolving field, and new science is expected to change and refine our understanding of the dynamics of sea level rise and its associated impacts to both natural and built environments. As such, there is a continual need for models to be developed, updated, and refined to ensure that we continue to have the best understanding of sea level rise-related impacts as possible. In some cases, the modelling capabilities already exist, but there is a need for such modelling to be applied to local areas to understand specific localized impacts. Several topics in particular that are in need of better or more refined modeling include:
 - a. Fluvial dynamics as they relate to and interact with rising sea levels
 - b. Habitat evolution models (*e.g.*, SLAMM) that project future locations of wetlands and other coastal habitats
 - c. The interaction of other climate change-related impacts with the impacts of sea level rise (*e.g.*, changing precipitation patterns, increased frequency and/or intensity of storms)
2. **Improved estimates of local vertical land motion.** Several independent processes – glacial isostatic rebound, groundwater withdrawals, plate movements and seismic activity – influence vertical land motion. Current guidance on sea level projections adjusts for large-scale vertical land motion north and south of Cape Mendocino. These adjustments do not properly address locations that are moving differently from the region, such as Humboldt Bay. A peer-reviewed methodology is needed to determine:
 - a. Instances when it will be important to modify the regional sea level rise projections for local vertical land motion
 - b. Types of existing information on land motion (*e.g.*, tide gauge records, satellite data, land-based GPS stations) that provide the best estimates of local land trends

- c. A procedure for adjusting state or regional sea level rise projections for sub-regional or local conditions
 - d. Additional data that are needed to implement this procedure
3. **Baseline data and monitoring systems.** Baseline monitoring data are needed for coastal and nearshore waters, beaches, bluffs, dune systems, nearshore reefs, tide pools, wetlands, and other habitat areas to better understand these systems, monitor trends, and detect significant deviations from historic conditions that may be related to sea level rise and other aspects of climate change. Better storm event monitoring data are also needed to support refinements and calibration of models used to project and analyze impacts.

A system for monitoring and tracking the cumulative impacts of projects in the coastal zone, including both new development and any adaptation strategies, is needed to better understand the impacts of development in the face of sea level rise and the efficacy of various adaptation methods. Monitoring systems may be needed at a variety of scales, including at the local, regional, and state level.

4. **Methods for estimating change in erosion rates and shoreline change due to future sea level rise.** There is a need for a peer-reviewed methodology for estimating change in erosion rates due to sea level rise for bluffs, beaches, and other shorelines exposed to erosion. An improved understanding of future erosion rates is necessary to better evaluate projects affected by such erosion, including in terms of calculating an appropriate setback distance.
5. **Analysis of sea level rise impacts to coastal access and recreation.** To improve public access planning efforts, more information is needed about how sea level rise could affect public access areas and recreation throughout the state, including changes to waves and surfing, and the potential economic costs of these impacts. Additional information about how these changes will affect lower-income populations and underserved communities is particularly important.

Many currently accessible beach areas have the potential to become inaccessible due to impacts from sea level rise. Shoreline armoring and emerging headlands could isolate connected beaches with sea level rise, which will block lateral access. Rising sea level will also tend to constrict beaches that are prevented from migrating landward by shoreline armoring and development. Some blufftop trails will become inaccessible as segments of trail are lost to erosion. In addition, changes in beach conditions and sediment dynamics due to sea level rise could affect waves and surfing, as can the rise itself by potentially ‘drowning out’ surf spots combined with the lack of space available for these spots to move (*e.g.*, where new ‘tripping’ elements can be encountered in the right depth of water to create surfable waves). Research on the specifics of these impacts will help the Commission and others understand the details of the potential impacts to coastal access and recreation.

6. **Methods to evaluate impacts to coastal resources from shoreline protection.** Research is needed to develop and improve methods to evaluate and mitigate for the adverse impacts to recreation, public access and beach ecology from shoreline armoring projects. This information will be used to determine a set of mitigation options that may be considered for use when evaluating individual permit applications to offset anticipated losses to beach

ecology and resources caused by shoreline armoring projects. The Coastal Commission staff is currently working on developing resource valuation guidelines as part of a Project of Special Merit (see Coastal Commission Effort #2).

7. **Analysis of sea level rise impacts to wetlands and strategies for preserving wetlands throughout the state.** Additional research is needed to assess the vulnerability of wetlands and other sensitive habitat areas to climate change, and to identify adjacent areas that may be important for future habitat migration (*e.g.*, wetland transitional areas). Further work is also needed to develop management strategies that are adaptable to local wetland conditions and sea level rise impacts, such as the following:
 - a. Methodologies for establishing natural resource area buffer widths in light of sea level rise
 - b. Approaches for identifying and protecting migration corridors
 - c. Guidance for increasing wetland sediment supply and retention
 - d. Techniques for developing an adaptive wetland restoration plan
 - e. Monitoring criteria
8. **Assessment of coastal habitat functions in light of sea level rise and other climate change impacts.** It is necessary to develop a better understanding of the value and benefits that intact natural habitats provide, especially as they relate to increasing coastal resiliency to sea level rise. In addition, further research is needed to identify the coastal habitats that are most likely to experience adverse impacts from sea level rise and extreme storms, and what the associated loss of ecosystem services will mean for coastal populations. Research is also needed to identify strategies to ameliorate the vulnerabilities.
9. **Potential effects of sea level rise on groundwater and coastal aquifers.** Additional research is needed to quantify the potential effect of sea level rise on freshwater aquifers located along the California coast, and the degree to which sea level rise could lead to new incidences of intrusion. Research should include: (a) an evaluation of the potential incidence and severity of saltwater intrusion at the scale of individual aquifers, under various sea level rise scenarios, (b) criteria to use when deciding if saltwater intrusion requires mitigation or response and (c) identification of strategies to address the impacts rising groundwater and saltwater intrusion have on agriculture.
10. **Analysis of non-environmental factors that influence sea level rise adaptation.** As suggested in a number of places throughout this Guidance, there are factors beyond just environmental concerns that will influence sea level rise planning. Such factors include environmental justice/social equity, economic, and legal considerations, among others. Understanding how these social concerns interact with environmental vulnerabilities will be important when assessing adaptation planning opportunities and challenges.