



## Chapter 9. Additional Coastal Commission Efforts to Address Sea Level Rise

Since the original development of this policy guidance in draft form in 2013 and its adoption by the Commission in 2015, the Coastal Commission has made significant progress on its work on sea level rise and climate change. Among its many accomplishments over the past ten years were the adoption of [Critical Infrastructure At Risk: Sea Level Rise Planning Guidance for California’s Coastal Zone](#) (2021) and the [Public Trust Guiding Principles and Action Plan](#) (2023), along with extensive interagency work and distribution of grant funding to local governments to support sea level rise adaptation planning. Despite this significant progress, more work is needed.

The Coastal Commission’s [Strategic Plan](#) for 2021-2025 (CCC 2021) identifies many action items that the Commission or partner organizations plan to take to address the challenges of sea level rise and climate change. 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 (see Box below). Coastal Commission staff also participated in the development of the [State Agency Sea Level Rise Action Plan for California](#) (2022), which contains nearly 80 trackable actions and serves as a five-year roadmap designed to help formalize and accelerate coordinated state agency efforts to prepare for the impacts of sea level rise.

These next steps, some of which are already underway, 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. Continue work on advancing environmental justice in sea level rise adaptation planning and LCPs.** Following adoption of this updated guidance, Coastal Commission staff will roll out a series of webinars for local governments and interested stakeholders that aim to further educate and instruct planners on how to integrate environmental justice and equity principles into sea level rise adaptation planning. Commission staff also plan to continue developing and formalizing a team of environmental justice and sea level rise subject matter experts who can be tapped to inform and guide development of future guidance materials.
- 3. Develop guidance on nature-based shoreline adaptation measures to address sea level rise.** Coastal Commission staff are developing interpretive policy guidance that will help planners prioritize permitting and analysis of nature-based adaptation strategies such as shoreline restoration and living shorelines projects.

4. **Continue work to carry out the California Coastal Act and Public Trust Doctrine in an era of climate change and sea level rise.** In 2023, the Coastal Commission adopted the [Public Trust Guiding Principles and Action Plan](#) which describes how the public trust doctrine relates to the Coastal Commission’s and local governments’ work on sea level rise planning under the Coastal Act, presents a series of principles that guide the Commission’s and local governments’ work on this subject, and sets forth next steps and research priorities for the Commission. Coastal Commission staff will continue carrying out these next steps as resources and staff capacity allow.
5. **Develop guidance on maximizing public access and recreational resources, including the California Coastal Trail, in light of sea level rise.** Building on a statewide analysis of the vulnerability of the California Coastal Trail to sea level rise, Coastal Commission staff will develop policy guidance, new information, and a framework for maintaining public access in the future, with an additional focus on addressing the disproportionate impact of public access losses to socially vulnerable or environmental justice communities and promoting the removal of barriers to access.
6. **Explore the concept of neighborhood-scale adaptation.** Explore technical methods to analyze how natural backshore characteristics can help reveal which adaptation approaches are possible and most resource protective in both the short and long term. This information could elucidate which stretches of shorelines have characteristics conducive to inland migration of habitats such as beaches, which do not, and which could if certain adaptation measures are implemented. This information could help define areas, or “neighborhoods,” potentially suitable for a cohesive adaptation approach.
7. **Continue robust interagency coordination on sea level rise.** Coastal Commission staff will continue working with its various partners at the federal, state, regional, Tribal, and local levels to address sea level rise. Specifically:
  - Continue coordination with the Local Government Working Group (LGWG). The LGWG (made up of local government representatives from the California Association of Counties and the League of California Cities, two Coastal Commissioners, and CCC staff) was formed in 2019 to advance coordination in support of LCP updates, particularly to address sea level rise. The group has co-developed a number of deliverables including a [Joint Statement on Adaptation Planning](#) and a [framework](#) for phased approaches to LCP updates, and remains actively committed to developing materials and recommendations to support SLR and LCP planning. Key ongoing work includes supporting phased LCP updates, proactive adaptation planning at neighborhood or other subarea levels, and regional coordination.
  - Continue participation in the State SLR Collaborative, convened by the Ocean Protection Council, and carry out the [Principles for Aligned State Action on Sea Level Rise](#) (2021) and the [State Agency Sea Level Rise Action Plan for California](#) (2022).

- Continue 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 adaptation response.
- Continue coordinating with State Lands Commission on aligning responses to sea level rise impacts in Coastal Commission permits and State Lands leases. Coordinate on the public trust implications of adaptation strategies reflected in Local Coastal Programs.
- 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.
- Coordinating with the State and Regional Water Quality Control Boards to consider vulnerability issues related to water supply, water quality, and wastewater capacity infrastructure in California.

**8. Produce additional guidance documents, including:**

- Broader climate change guidance addressing other climate change impacts to the coastal zone and land use planning strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the coastal zone.
- Additional guidance on how to analyze the impacts of sea level rise upon groundwater, the associated hazards, and potential adaptation strategies.

**9. Continue implementation of the LCP Local Assistance Grant Program.** The Coastal Commission remains committed to supporting LCP updates through its [LCP Grant Program](#). Since 2013, the grant program has awarded approximately \$20 million to local governments to support sea level rise and LCP planning efforts and currently has approximately \$10 million remaining from a 2021 appropriation for the grant program. Funding has supported a variety of vulnerability assessments, technical studies, adaptation plans, public outreach, policy development, and LCP adoption and certification processes. These types of planning efforts are now required by SB 272, and the Commission will continue to support this work through provision of LCP grant program funds and coordination with other funding agencies such as OPC and the Coastal Conservancy.

**10. Implement the Coastal Commission’s responsibilities under other state efforts and legislation.**

- 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.
- [AB 2516](#), authored by Assemblymember Gordon and approved in September 2014, established a Planning for Sea Level Rise Database, and [SB 246](#), authored by Senator Gordon and approved in 2015, established the [Adaptation Clearinghouse](#), the latter of which hosts the information collected through both bills. The database describes the actions taken by cities, counties, regions, and various public and private entities to address sea level rise. The Coastal Commission will continue contributing data to this effort, including information about grant-funded LCP updates.
  - The Coastal Commission will also participate in the implementation of the [California Climate Adaptation Strategy](#). 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 2021-2025 Excerpts Actions Related to Sea Level Rise and Climate Change**

### **Goal 4: Support Resilient Coastal Communities in the Face of Climate Change and SLR**

**Objective 4.1** Address Risks Posed by Climate Change and Sea Level Rise in Local Coastal Programs (LCPs) and Coastal Development Permits (CDPs).

**Objective 4.2** Support Development and Implementation of Local Sea Level Rise Adaptation Projects.

**Objective 4.3** Build the Capacity of Commission and Local Government Staff to Better Address Climate Change and Sea Level Rise Vulnerabilities Through Technical Assistance, Guidance and Training.

**Objective 4.4** Protect Beaches, Wetlands and Other Coastal Resources, Including Public Access as Seas Rise. (See also Public Access Objective 2.6, Ensure Continued Public Access in Light of Changing Shoreline Conditions and Sea Level Rise)

**Objective 4.5** Facilitate Reduction of Greenhouse Gas (GHGs) in LCPs, CDPs and Other Efforts.

**Objective 4.6** Increase Public Awareness and Participation in Planning to Address Climate Change in Coastal Communities and Statewide.

### **Goal 5: Advance Diversity, Equity, Environmental Justice, and Tribal Relations**

**Objective 5.1** Strengthen Coastal Protection through Consideration of Environmental Justice in Permit Decisions and Planning Documents.

Please consult the [2021-2025 Coastal Commission Strategic Plan](#) to read the actions associated with each objective listed above.