

CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMISSION

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TO: California Coastal Commissioners and Interested Public

FROM: John Ainsworth, Executive Director
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Michelle Jespersen, Federal Programs Manager
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SUBJECT: **California Coastal Commission Proposed Final Five-Year Strategic Plan for 2021 - 2025. Discussion and potential adoption.**

I. RECOMMENDATION

Commission staff recommends that the California Coastal Commission review and approve the proposed Final Coastal Commission Five-Year Strategic Plan for 2021 – 2025. Commission staff provided an opportunity for Commission review and public input on the Public Review Draft Five-Year Strategic Plan from December 6, 2019 to February 14, 2020, with an additional opportunity for comment at the March 11, 2020 public hearing.

Since the March hearing, Commission staff revised the draft plan based on public comments, Commission input, and recent actions by the Governor in terms of policy priorities and executive orders. In addition, the document now includes evaluation criteria for each goal and acknowledges the changed circumstances and constraints resulting from the COVID-19 global pandemic. Commission staff believe this proposed final plan provides a solid framework of goals, objectives and actions to guide the agency going forward and that it will support achievement of the Commission's vision and mission over the next five years.

Motion:

"I move that the Commission adopt the California Coastal Commission Proposed Final Five-Year Strategic Plan for the years 2021 - 2025."

Staff recommends a **YES** vote.

II. PROPOSED FINAL STRATEGIC PLAN

The Proposed Final Strategic Plan for 2021 – 2025 (Final Plan) presented here builds on the Commission’s previous 2013 – 2018 Strategic Plan. This proposed Final Plan provides a framework of 9 goals, 50 objectives and 199 specific actions to guide the agency’s performance over the next five years. Staff believes these goals, objectives, and actions will support effective implementation of the Coastal Act and achievement of the Commission’s vision and mission.

Goal 1 starts off the plan with objectives and actions to continue to build the agency’s organizational capacity for the future. Goals 2 and 3 focus attention on objectives and actions related to maximizing public access for all (Goal 2) and protecting and enhancing coastal resources (Goal 3). The Final Plan accounts for the dynamic imperatives of climate change and sea level rise, which are already adversely affecting marine and terrestrial ecosystems and threatening the safety and economic health of our coastal communities, the State of California, the nation, and the world (Goal 4).

The Final Plan also adds focus on emerging issues to address historic social inequities through implementation of environmental justice and equity principles and tribal consultation (Goal 5). The plan includes objectives and actions focused on the core work of the Commission’s regulatory and LCP planning programs (Goal 6) and for enforcement (Goal 7). Finally, the Final Plan emphasizes the need to collaborate and coordinate closely with federal, state and local agency partners (Goal 8) and includes a suite of objectives and actions to continue to modernize the agency’s operations and to improve e-government and information management (Goal 9).

Appendix A is a companion to the goals, objectives, and actions in the body of the document and provides an abbreviated list of the objectives and actions. In addition, each goal has several “Evaluation Criteria” that can be used to measure and report on progress in achieving the goals and objectives. Progress on actions will also be tracked and reported to the Commission and the public on an annual basis for the five-year timeframe. Finally, many of the actions proposed in the plan involve enhancing coordination or collaboration with various governmental and non-governmental resource management partners and serving on working groups and task forces. This work is discussed in Goal 8 and further highlighted in Appendix B.

Commission staff recognizes that the proposed Final Plan is ambitious, especially in light of the COVID-19 global pandemic and the impacts of the March 2020 outbreak on the state’s economy, budget, workforce and how the agency carries out its work. Despite the current circumstances and added constraints, Commission staff have largely kept the initial proposed actions in place with a few new actions from the previous Public Review Draft version (as described further below). Commission staff are committed to making progress on these proposed actions and objectives within the next five years as best as possible, and as resources, changing circumstances, and opportunities allow.

A. Cost Estimates for Plan Implementation

Commission staff recognizes that full completion of the plan will require significant increases in its budget and staffing levels. At the March 2020 Commission hearing, Commission staff presented preliminary cost estimates for the additional resources needed to fully implement the proposed Strategic Plan. At the time, several Commissioners requested more details on the costs and resources needed for full implementation of the Strategic Plan.

The COVID-19 global pandemic has completely disrupted the state budget with massive overall budget cuts, staff pay and time reductions, and redirection of staff for contact tracing in the current fiscal year (2020-21). Additional reductions are planned for FY 2021-22. With these statewide budget reductions, it is not possible now to consider significant budget enhancements to implement the Strategic Plan. However, we will continue to work closely with the California Natural Resources Agency and the Department of Finance to maintain budget resources and seek any opportunities for added resources when possible. As a part of our regular updates to the Commission on the implementation of the new Strategic Plan, we will include information on available staff resources and staff's efforts to seek all opportunities to further enhance resources.

III. BACKGROUND

A. 2013 Strategic Plan

In April 2013, the Commission adopted a five-year Strategic Plan to meet a requirement from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration under the Commission's 2008 Coastal Zone Management Act Section 312 federal evaluation. Prior to that point, the Commission's last Strategic Plan was approved in 1997. The 2013 – 2018 Strategic Plan provided a strong framework for strategic action across seven goals and associated objectives. Status reports on the Commission's progress under the 2013 – 2018 were reported annually to the Commission and can be reviewed on the Commission's [Strategic Plan](#) webpage under "Implementation Updates."

B. Development of the 2021–2025 Strategic Plan

Commission staff developed this proposed final strategic plan to guide the agency's work for the next five years. Considerable staff time and effort went into developing the proposed plan (Exhibit 1), including review of the status of 2013 – 2018 actions, new proposed actions and objectives provided by all programs and units within the Commission, an internal web portal to allow for individual staff input, and many meetings and deliberations by the Commission's Executive Management Team. In addition, the Commission solicited early input from the public for consideration in the development of the strategic plan. During that early input solicitation, the Commission received 148 comments through the public portal, emails, and letters, including five letters from local governments. This input was considered and included in the Public Review Draft Five Year Strategic Plan released in December 2019.

The Public Review Draft Strategic Plan was available for public review and comment from December 6, 2019 through February 14, 2020. The Commission held two public hearings to provide additional opportunity for additional public comment. The Commission received 68 comment letters or emails and eight members of the public provided oral comments on the Public Review Draft Strategic Plan at the February 12, 2020 and March 11, 2020 public hearings. The COVID-19 crisis slowed progress for finalizing the plan.

C. Summary of Public Comments

Commission staff received 68 written comment letters or emails on the Public Review Draft Strategic Plan during the public comment period. The comment letters/emails came from state and federal agencies (4), local governments and or elected officials (15), non-governmental organizations (9) and other stakeholder groups, such as community and neighborhood groups, property owners, and members of the public (40).

The comments ranged from broad recommendations to specific input on objectives, actions or to propose new actions be considered. A summary of comments by goal is provided below.

Goal 1, on agency capacity, comments were generally in support of funding for additional staff and staff trainings as well as resources and technology to support internal efficiencies.

Goal 2 on public access, comments included the need to better address coastal access for overburdened and historically disadvantaged communities and to assess the disproportionate burden on disadvantaged communities with regard to public access. There were also comments expressing concern over the impacts of high visitation and impacts to “special communities,” community character and coastal resources, expressed primarily from coastal communities, elected officials and service providers in Marin County.

For Goal 3 on protecting coastal resources, comments supported efforts to address plastic pollution and marine debris; similar to above, comments expressed concern over damage to coastal resources with high visitation in unique coastal communities.

For Goal 4, on resilient coastal communities, commenters expressed support for and some requested the plan emphasize the urgency of addressing sea level rise and other climate impacts. Commenters also wanted additional detail on guidance efforts in terms of level of specificity and recognition of flexibility needed to address local circumstances/constraints.

For Goal 5, on environmental justice, diversity and tribal relations, comments requested additional specificity around how environmental justice issues would be considered in regulatory review and requested additional actions to improve opportunities for community engagement. Affordable housing concerns were brought up here and also in Goal 6.

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For Goal 6, on planning and permitting, comments focused on additional improvements for timely and more efficient processing of LCPs and CDPs. Comments also requested actions be more explicit around Commission hearing process and making information gathering/analysis more transparent.

For Goal 7, on enforcement, comments expressed concern over the magnitude of violations and need to prioritize Coastal Act enforcement.

Under Goal 8, comments emphasized the need for better coordination across state agencies to avoid duplication, inconsistency and conflicting requirements on projects and in LCPs.

Under Goal 9, on information management and E-government, many comments expressed the need for Commission to provide better online information and move toward electronic acceptance and delivery of information. Some comments requested ability to participate in meetings through video conference or to play videotaped comments at hearings.

Finally, a few overarching comments that apply across all goals, include a request for additional detail or level of specificity on how actions will be carried out or achieved. In addition, some comments emphasized the need to provide clear, realistic metrics or outcomes to assess progress on plan implementation.

D. Revisions to the 2021 Strategic Plan

As summarized above, the proposed Final Plan includes a number of changes from the Public Review Draft Strategic Plan. Revisions to plan reflect input from the public comment (oral and written), Commissioner input, and to adjustments in response to recent events. Overall, the proposed Final Plan includes ten new actions and one new objective from the Public Review Draft. Major changes to the document include:

- Revisions to Section I include a discussion of the COVID-19 global pandemic and impacts on the Coastal Commission resources and workforce. Text was also added to emphasize the Commission's commitment to addressing equity and environmental justice in all of the agency's work.
- Addition of "Evaluation Criteria" to each goal to provide additional details around how progress will be measured and reported.
- Updates to actions related to conducting virtual hearings and telework to reflect progress made during COVID-19 global pandemic and new state requirements for a telework plan (Goals 1, 5, 6 and 9).
- In response to comments related to "special communities", in Goal 2, new language was added to Action 2.2.4 to specify that work with partner agencies will include addressing impacts of high visitation along roadways and in coastal communities.

- A new action and additional text were added in Goal 2 to prioritize increased access and barrier removal for overburdened and historically disadvantaged communities.
- Revisions in Goal 4 and in Goal 5 include a new action and language to work on addressing equity and environmental justice in sea level rise planning and also to consider disproportionate burdens of climate change on environmental justice communities.
- New actions were added in Goal 3 and Goal 4 to include work on state high-level priorities including the Governor’s recent Executive Order on climate action and protecting the state’s biodiversity and coastal waters and for the California Natural Resources Agency’s “Cutting Green Tape” Initiative.
- Revisions were also made in Goal 3 to better align the actions on aquaculture with Goal 3 objectives and Coastal Act policies.
- In Goal 6, new actions were added to assist with successful and timely processing of Local Coastal Program submittals with guidance, information and with training. A new objective was also added to Goal 6 related to improving the Commission meeting processes, maximizing public participation and transparency in decision-making.
- Revisions were made in Goal 9 to emphasize the agency’s commitment to providing information to the public through the Coastal Data Management System (CDMS) and through other e-gov information delivery improvements (i.e. improvements to the website).

Other minor changes include adding “regional transportation agencies” in relevant actions related to coordination, eliminating duplicative actions, improving cross-referencing of related objectives and actions, and for providing clarity and consistency throughout the document.

IV. POST-ADOPTION

After Commission adoption, Commission staff will finalize the document and work with a graphic designer to reformat and display the information in a user-friendly, visually appealing way. This may include printing of consolidated versions of the plan that can be shared for informational and educational purposes with the State Legislature, the Governor, other state and local agencies, and decisions makers. The Final Strategic Plan will be shared with our federal partners from NOAA’s Office for Coastal Management as a product of the Commission’s FY 2018 NOAA federal grant, and it will also be made available on the Commission’s website. As described in the plan, we will report annually on progress and keep the Commission informed on major accomplishments and any challenges with implementation throughout the five-year term.

V. EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: Proposed Final 2021 – 2025 Strategic Plan

Exhibit 2: Written Public Comments Received