

CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMISSION

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November 26, 2025

TO: California Coastal Commissioners and Interested Public

FROM: Dr. Kate Huckelbridge, Executive Director
Shana Gray, Deputy Director, North Coast and Statewide Planning
Karen Vu, Climate Change Specialist

SUBJECT: Briefing and possible action on 2026-2030 California Coastal Commission Strategic Plan

SUMMARY OF STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff is recommending adoption of the 2026-2030 California Coastal Commission Strategic Plan. A draft of the 2026-2030 Strategic Plan was released on September 26, 2025, followed by a 45-day public review period and coordination with California Native American tribes. Sixteen public comment letters were received, with most comments falling into categories related to: 1) Recognition of California Native American tribes, 2) Water Quality and Marine Resources, 3) Preservation of Open Space, 4) Recognition of Local Priorities and Constraints, 5) Coastal Resilience, 6) Coastal Access and Visitor-Serving Uses, and 7) Simplifying, Expediting, and Streamlining Review Processes.

In response to the comments, staff made edits to clarify, correct, add context to, and emphasize certain portions of the document; however, the proposed final draft of the 2026-2030 Strategic Plan does not fundamentally alter the content or recommendations of the prior draft that was released in September 2025. Additional responses to common questions, concerns, or other recommendations are also provided in this staff report. This recommended final draft version of the 2026-2030 Strategic Plan is attached as [Exhibit 1](#).

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Exhibit 1: [Final Draft 2026-2030 California Coastal Commission Strategic Plan](#)

I. MOTION AND RESOLUTION

Motion:

I move that the Commission adopt the 2026-2030 California Coastal Commission Strategic Plan pursuant to the staff recommendation.

Staff recommendation of approval:

Staff recommends a **YES** vote. Passage of this motion will result in the Commission's adoption of the 2026-2030 California Coastal Commission Strategic Plan. The motion passes only by affirmative vote of a majority of the Commissioners present.

Resolution of approval:

The Commission hereby adopts the 2026-2030 California Coastal Commission Strategic Plan.

II. BACKGROUND

In November 2020, the Commission adopted a five-year Strategic Plan for 2021-2025 to maintain consistency with state agency requirements as well as a requirement from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration under the Commission's Coastal Zone Management Act Section 312 federal evaluation. As the current Strategic Plan planning horizon comes to a close, Commission staff is now seeking adoption of a new Strategic Plan that will guide the Commission's work and responsibilities over the next five years. Considerable staff time and effort went into developing the proposed Final Draft 2026-2030 Strategic Plan ([Exhibit 1](#)), including an internal survey 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. Commission staff received a number of comments through an online survey on the Commission's website and through a dedicated Strategic Plan email address. Commission staff also held public listening sessions with the general public, local governments, Spanish speaking communities, and tribal groups. In total, the Commission received 309 comments through the online survey, emails, and letters.

These comments ranged from project-specific feedback to broader recommendations on "high priority" topic areas on which to focus, such as maximizing public access, increasing affordable housing and lower-cost visitor serving uses, and improving multimodal/nonvehicular transportation routes. The public also raised concerns about short-term rentals, marine debris, and a loss of coastal resources due to development pressures. Local government letters focused on improving coordination opportunities,

concerns over funding for sea level rise adaptation strategies, and discussed facilitating housing. Other topics included recommendations to balance the needs of the public with private property rights and to reduce the regulatory burdens associated with permitting. The public comments were reviewed in tandem with staff input and factored into the development of the goals, objectives and actions provided in the September 2025 Draft Strategic Plan.

III. SUMMARY OF 2026-2030 STRATEGIC PLAN

The Final Draft Strategic Plan for 2026 – 2030 presented here centers on the Commission’s mission to protect and enhance the coast and focuses on laying out a roadmap for the Commission to achieve this mandate in light of current and future challenges. This updated plan provides a framework of 5 goals, 15 objectives, and 72 specific actions to guide the agency’s work over the next five years. Staff believe these goals, objectives, and actions will support effective implementation of the Coastal Act and achievement of the Commission’s mission and vision.

Goals 1 and 2 focus on objectives and actions to ensure coastal access for all and plan for resilient communities. Goal 3 prioritizes objectives and actions related to improving external engagement and communication. Goal 4 implements the requirements of the Coastal Act to protect coastal resources. Lastly, Goal 5 focuses on the agency itself by aiming to build and maintain a resilient organization.

All objectives and actions in the Plan are essential and they are not listed in order of priority. Importantly, equity and resilience are woven throughout the updated plan in an effort to ensure that the Commission’s actions focus on addressing impacts to communities that face barriers to accessing and enjoying the coast. The Commission plans to implement these actions in the next five years, provided that adequate staffing capacity and funding are available or acquired. Many of these actions can be undertaken simultaneously during the five-year timeframe, as the tasks will be carried out by the relevant staff in the Commission’s program departments and district offices.

IV. RESPONSE TO COMMENTS

A draft of the 2026-2030 Strategic Plan was released for a 45-day public review on September 26, 2025. Staff received 12 public comment letters during this period. Commission staff also coordinated with California Native American Tribes and received one written comment letter and one attendee at a listening session held on October 22, 2025.

The comment letters are included as [Correspondence](#) for this item. Several comments were provided that described how various agencies, local governments, and organizations are carrying out efforts and practices that support the goals, objectives, and actions of the Commission’s Strategic Plan. Other comments generally fell into the categories summarized below. Changes to the draft Strategic Plan related to these topics are discussed in the relevant sections, along with broader responses to the questions, concerns, or other recommendations raised in the comment letters. Although

various edits were made to clarify, correct, add context, and emphasize certain portions of the document, the proposed final draft of the 2026-2030 Strategic Plan (November 2025) does not fundamentally alter the content or recommendations of the prior draft that was released in September 2025.

Recognition of California Native American Tribes

Commission staff received a number of comments requesting that the Plan include stronger language recognizing the importance of California Native American tribes as sovereign entities. These comments requested that the Plan highlight the need for ongoing and early coordination and communication with indigenous communities, incorporate stronger language that affirms the sovereign-to-sovereign relationship between tribes and the State, and that tribes should be included as partners in coastal resiliency planning efforts. The Plan was revised to incorporate these suggestions including revising Goal 3, Objective 3 to identify the coast as a living cultural landscape for tribes and encouraging local governments to partner with tribes to improve coastal resiliency planning (including as required by Senate Bill 272). Additional language was also added throughout the Plan that uplifts acknowledgement of California Native American tribes as a key partner in the Commission's work and mandate to protect the coast. Modifications were also made to recognize that traditional ecological knowledge includes tribal cultural and ecological resources. In addition, Action 3.3.5 was specifically added to encourage improved engagement with tribes on LCP updates and climate resiliency planning efforts.

Water Quality and Marine Resources

Several comments requested that the Plan more explicitly address the importance of protecting water quality and reducing coastal pollution. The comments emphasized including language that promotes healthy coastal waters and watersheds to protect public health and aquatic habitats. In turn, this would support the public access, coastal resource protection, and resilient communities goals of the Strategic Plan. Action 4.2.2 was revised to broaden the language to address all types of pollution hazards, not just plastic pollution, that could affect the marine environment and coastal watersheds. And Action 4.3.5 was added to support agricultural practices and other efforts that protect water quality and aquatic habitats. Lastly, Action 4.2.5 addresses comments related to aquaculture and the protection of the marine environment by encouraging sustainable and resilient fisheries, aquaculture and supporting infrastructure and uses as infill development in California's working waterfronts.

Preservation of Open Space

Various comments noted that the Strategic Plan lacked objectives and actions related to the protection and preservation of open space. These comments suggested that implementation of affordable housing and other development should focus on infill development opportunities to preserve open spaces and that the Plan should highlight the climate vulnerability of open space as well as its critical role in providing coastal access and supporting coastal economies. The Plan's Goal 4, Objective 3 explicitly calls

for the prioritization of coastal agriculture and open space. Under this objective, staff modified Action 4.3.2 to state that vulnerability evaluations also apply to open space areas, to assess vulnerability to sea level rise as well as other climate change impacts to develop appropriate adaptation strategies and preserve these areas.

Recognition of Local Priorities and Constraints

Commission staff received comments requesting that the Plan recognize that when engaging with local governments, consideration should be given to community-specific interests, resources, and conflicts. The comments also indicated that local governments may experience conflicts in prioritizing the goals and objectives of the Strategic Plan. For example, there might be instances in which it may be difficult for local jurisdictions with limited resources and staff to harmonize the need to implement sea level rise adaptation strategies with the need to increase lower-cost visitor serving accommodations along the coast. As noted by commenters, these issues are not one-size-fits-all and therefore cannot reasonably be addressed through guidance or memos; it requires direct coordination. The Plan already contains robust language stating the Commission's commitment to partnering closely with local governments, including through the Local Government Working Group, to support them in balancing competing priorities. To further strengthen this intent, staff updated Action 1.3.4 to specifically call out that LCP and CDP guidance developed by the Commission to help local governments will aim to recognize specific community needs, interests, and constraints. Action 2.1.5 pertaining to the development of a Nature-Based Adaptation Strategies Guidance was also revised to state that the Commission will coordinate with local jurisdictions and other partners to identify feasible pathways to encourage such strategies. Action 2.2.3. also emphasizes coordination with local governments, Ports, universities, and others to find ways to integrate environmental justice into LCPs and other planning documents. Further, language was added to Goal 4 to call out the need to harmonize various local planning documents such as Port Master Plans and Long Range Development Plans with LCPs to reflect resilient solutions that protect coastal resources.

Coastal Resilience

Several comments touched on the topic of coastal adaptation strategies, including managed retreat as a core sea level rise adaptation strategy. Some of the comments recommended that managed retreat should be defined and incorporated into the Strategic Plan as well as specific actions relating to the protection of housing, coastal resources, and shoreline armoring. Other comments requested that the Plan state that managed retreat should be considered as a last resort option for sea level rise adaptation. Commission staff made changes to the Strategic Plan that align with other Commission planning documents, including the [Sea Level Rise Policy Guidance](#), which describes retreat as a key strategy that should be considered and implemented along with other adaptation options as part of a phased approach. Staff updated Action 2.3.4 to call out specific sea level rise adaptation strategies including nature-based adaptation, voluntary property buyout programs, and managed retreat opportunities.

Coastal Access and Visitor-Serving Uses

Many of the comments received support the action items proposed in the Draft Strategic Plan relating to the elimination of barriers, access for all, and multi-modal access to the coast. Some of the comments suggested supplementing the actions related to coastal access and visitor-serving use issues, including developing guidance to help local governments identify and eliminate barriers to access, exploring ways to increase the supply of lower-cost accommodations and recreation, and ensuring equitable coastal access and inclusivity for additional community groups. Another comment supported the concept of developing flexible approaches to lower-cost overnight accommodation mitigation such as creating accessible spaces. Action 1.3.6 was added to support coastal access and recreation opportunities that are inclusive and foster a welcoming beach environment for all people. Actions 1.2.2 and 1.2.4 were modified to encourage the increase in supply of lower-cost overnight accommodations as well as affordable housing for the coastal workforce, and to pilot new approaches to provide lower cost and affordable access.

Simplify, Expedite, and Streamline Review Processes

Commission staff received comments requesting the Strategic Plan include actions that call for simplifying and streamlining certain CDP and LCP review processes. Specifically, these comments recommended that the Commission should facilitate streamlined approval of nature-based adaptation projects and LCP updates including minor LCP updates to help local jurisdictions prioritize policies and projects that advance coastal resiliency. The Strategic Plan supports the efforts to fast-track review of CDPs and LCPs, including in Action 2.1.1 that calls for prioritizing and expediting LCPs that plan for sea level rise in alignment with SB 272 and in Action 4.1.2 that calls for expediting review of wildfire resilience and vegetation treatment projects. Further Goal 3, Objective 2 states that the Commission will work to improve its engagement processes including developing a more streamlined and user-friendly system for the public to access records, understand procedures, and participate in decision-making. Staff agrees that transparent and efficient review of CDPs and LCPs is a key priority for the next five years and believe that the actions and objectives included in the Strategic Plan appropriately commits the Commission to working with local jurisdictions and project applicants to improve and facilitate the review of CDPs and LCPs.

V. NEXT STEPS

Staff is recommending **adoption** of the proposed 2026-2030 California Coastal Commission Strategic Plan. The Final Draft Strategic Plan (November 2025) is available for review as [Exhibit 1](#). Following the December hearing, if the Final Draft is adopted, Commission staff will release a final adopted draft of the Strategic Plan. This version will reflect that it is the final adopted version and will be formatted to improve readability and presentation.