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November 2, 2026

TO: California Coastal Commission and Interested Parties

FROM: Dr. Kate Huckelbridge, Executive Director

SUBJECT: Executive Director's Report

El Nino

On October 27th, Governor Newsom issued two Executive Orders related to preparing for and mitigating impacts from the 2026-27 El Nino.

Executive Order N-13-26 specifically addresses El Nino-related threats to California's iconic Highway 1. The Order directs the California State Transportation Agency and the California Natural Resources Agency to convene a Highway 1 Task Force including representatives from Caltrans, State Parks, several Governor Offices, and the Coastal Commission. The Task Force shall work to identify threats to Highway 1, including both immediate threats from Highway 1 from this El Niño and the larger threats from climate change and sea level rise. Along with an assessment of the threats, the task force is also tasked with delivering a plan to address the threats by December 15, 2026. Commission staff are already engaging with Caltrans, State Parks and other agencies to activate this task force and leverage existing resources and studies to complete the tasks to the extent feasible.

Executive Order N-14-26 directs state agencies to expedite preparations for anticipated El Niño impacts by suspending selected statutes, regulations, and permitting requirements that could delay flood, erosion, and infrastructure protection projects. The order authorizes streamlined approval of activities such as levee repairs, sediment and debris management, flood-control projects, and protection of public infrastructure, while retaining environmental safeguards and oversight by the California Natural Resources Agency. For coastal areas, the order specifically suspends portions of the California Coastal Act to allow the rapid placement of sand berms and sandbags to reduce flooding and erosion, and it prioritizes actions to protect coastal infrastructure from El Niño-related storm impacts.

I also note that this order follows a previous Governor's State of Emergency Declaration on September 21, 2026 related to preparing for and responding to this winter's El Niño. That order requires the Commission to expedite emergency work requests. To help prepare and inform coastal communities of our process to address emergency needs, we created a specific page on our website related to this winter's El Niño with information on the event, how to prepare for it, and how to quickly seek approval for emergency work under the Coastal Act. We also set up a direct email contact at EmergencyRequests@Coastal.Ca.Gov, to help ensure easy contact information, and have been staffing on weekends to ensure a quick contact is ready if needed.

Public Education Program – El Nino-Related

California King Tides Project

The California King Tides Project invites the public to safely photograph the highest predicted astronomical tides of the year. The Project asks the question, what will our coast look like when the king tides of today become our everyday high tides? This year, that question is particularly poignant as we experience a historically strong El Niño, with record-breaking ocean levels likely to continue through the fall and winter, exacerbating landslides, flooding, and unsafe ocean waters. With these conditions in mind, it is more important than ever for Project participants to follow local and statewide safety guidelines during and after storm and high surf events and heed any emergency closures and warnings. Please do not seek king tide photos in your area unless you can do so safely. Get tips for safely viewing and photographing King Tides.

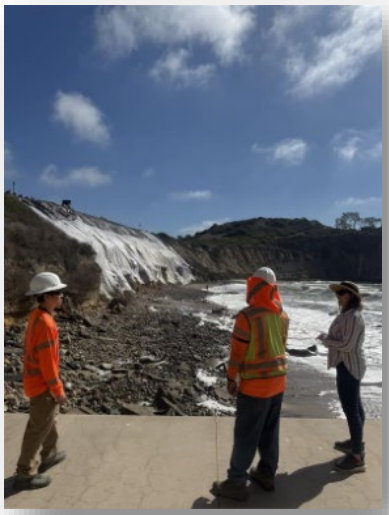
California King Tides Project dates are selected based on NOAA's tide predictions for the highest tides of the winter season, which are determined by the relative position of the Earth, moon, and sun, and do not include any storm surge or El Niño impacts. This season's project dates are November 24-26, December 23-25, and January 21-22. Some northern California locations may also include December 22, January 20, and/or January 23. Learn more at coastal.ca.gov/kingtides.

New Dockside Podcast Episode: Super El Niño: What Californians Need to Know.

The California Boating Clean and Green Program released a new Dockside podcast episode, sitting down with experts from Scripps Institution of Oceanography, the California Coastal Commission (Coastal Engineer Jeremy Smith), and California State Parks to unpack:

- What El Niño actually is
- Why this year's conditions are so unusual
- How inland and coastal communities may be affected
- What king tides mean for flooding and erosion
- Which areas are most vulnerable
- How to prepare and stay safe this winter

Site Tours/Visits



On October 19th, staff from the commission transportation unit attended a site visit with Caltrans engineering staff to review the ongoing emergency at Crystal Cove State Park, where a landslide combined with erosion from the large El Niño-fueled tides are threatening Pacific Coast Highway. Commission staff continues to be actively coordinating with Caltrans and State Parks on how to ensure the safety and continued operation of Highway 1 here, while minimizing impacts to the beach and the important coastal public access it provides.

California Ocean Observing Systems Summit

Jacki Phelps, District Supervisor in the South Central Coast office, was invited to participate in a panel at the California Ocean Observing Systems Summit on October 12th in Santa Barbara. Specifically, Jacki participated in the Maritime, Commerce, and Marine Applications panel, which was intended to provide insight into regional and statewide coastal data and information needs. Jacki shared how sea level rise adaptation planning is currently informed by ocean observing data, including how data supports coastal monitoring and sea level adaptation planning pathways.

Environmental Science Associates Northern California Permitting Symposium

Luke Henningsen from the North Central Coast District office was invited to speak at the Environmental Science Associates (ESA) annual Northern California Permitting Symposium on October 16th in Berkeley. He joined a panel with representatives from the San Francisco Bay Conservation & Development Commission (BCDC), CA Department of Fish & Wildlife (CDFW), CA Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB), and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) focused on permitting guidance and updates. Luke provided a general overview of the Commission's history, coastal permitting and streamlining efforts, how the Local Coastal Plan (LCP) process works in partnership with local governments, recent policy updates related to SB 272 for sea level rise planning and El Niño preparedness and offered general guidance for early coordination with Commission staff.

Public Education Program

<u>California Fishing Line Recycling Program</u>

The Boating Clean and Green Program will be working with Point Blue and the Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary in the implementation of a National Marine Sanctuary Foundation and NOAA Marine Debris Program grant. Through this grant, Program staff will

install up to 40 new fishing line stations and will revive the CA Stow It, Don't Throw It program (creating and distributing up to 1,500 portable fishing line recycling kits to anglers).

Climate Storytelling Contest

The Climate Storytelling Contest for the current school year is now open for middle and high school students to create a photo essay, a podcast, or a narrative essay on the prompt, "What are your feelings about climate change and how could those feelings lead to action?" Entries may be submitted from now until May 27, 2027.

Whale Tail Grants

Staff hosted a grantee networking event on October 22, giving organizations a space to learn from and connect with one another. Grant recipients from 2023 through the present were invited, and 35 individuals participated. Grantees were able to connect by geographic location and discussion topics of interest, with many expressing enthusiasm for continued relationship-building. This was the third year in a row for this event.

CASE Annual Conference

The Public Education Program will staff a booth at the California Association of Science Educators conference in Sacramento on November 6 and 7. This annual event gathers over 1,500 educators, curriculum leaders, and district decision makers from across the state.

2025 Year in Review

I'm pleased to share that the California Coastal Commission has published its 2025 Year in Review, highlighting the agency's accomplishments across all core program areas. The report reflects our ongoing commitment to protecting California's coast while advancing responsible development, equity, and climate resilience.

Key highlights from 2025 include:

- Local governments approved 1,290 Coastal Development Permits — representing nearly 90% of all CDPs statewide.
- The Commission approved 160 CDPs, 250 project waivers, 43 emergency permits, and 71 LCP amendments.
- Only one project was denied this year, involving a proposal to reconfigure small-vessel public boat moorings in Newport Beach Harbor.
- Coastal Development Permits processed by the Commission averaged just 47 days, underscoring the agency's dedication to efficient and effective permit review.
- The full report is now available on the Year in Review Hub on our website, and we encourage Commissioners to review and share it.

Staff Acknowledgments (promotions/retirement)

Retirement of Dan Carl

Dan Carl will be retiring from the Commission this month after an incredible 33 years of service to our agency. Dan started his environmental advocacy quite early, becoming actively involved with Save our Shores when still a middle schooler, and helping to campaign against oil drilling in the Monterey Bay area, including writing a few of his signature fiery letters to federal government agencies and politicians. That early passion – borne of growing up in Santa Cruz with its serious environmental ethos – ultimately led Dan starting his work at the Commission in 1993, when he was a hired as an intern to work on LCP reviews in the Monterey Bay area. He very shortly thereafter transitioned to coastal planner work in the Central Coast District office. During that time he led Commission efforts on a variety of issues large and small, and spanning the central coast geography, including creating the 7,000 acre Cotoni-Coast Dairies National Monument, protecting wetlands and agricultural land in south Santa Cruz County, denying a proposal by the Pebble Beach Company to build a new golf course and several hundred luxury homes within nearly a thousand acres of sensitive Monterey pine forest, and then serving as lead negotiator on a revised project that protected such habitat, moved Highway 1 inland, removed several miles of armoring at Piedras Blancas and provided for new coastal trail and State Park land in its place.

Dan was promoted to Central Coast District Manager in 2007 and then CEA/District Director for both Central and North Central Coast Districts in 2011. In that time, Dan has been instrumental in pushing for coastal resource protection and good public interest outcomes over a vast coastal region extending from Sonoma County to the north through San Luis Obispo County in the south and including 22 different local government jurisdictions. He has been instrumental in establishing a new focus on local government coordination, particularly on LCP planning. Dan also led several complex and often controversial planning efforts including the City of San Francisco's Ocean Beach Master Plan, providing an adaptation blueprint for the City's shoreline to protect critical infrastructure while restoring dunes and providing public access, and the Oceano Dunes Management Plan, working to provide for recreation and natural resource conservation at this vast dune and beach park.

All in all, Dan has provided over 33 years of service on behalf of the California coast and its resources. Dan is never shy from doing what's right for the public and the public's resources, and is a steadfast believer in good government and good public policy. But perhaps Dan's most notable achievement in his 33 years is instilling these same principles and beliefs into his staff. There is no replacing Dan, but everyone who supports robust coastal resource protection can be comfortable knowing that he taught a cohort of people to think like him, to question like him, to push the envelope like him, and to uphold the Coastal Act and honor the Coastal Commission like he has for so long. His teaching and mentorship and example is embodied in his staff, and we will take that torch moving forward. So thank you Dan, and happy retirement.

Promotion of Kevin Kahn

Kevin Kahn has been promoted to serve as the District Director for the North Central and Central Coast Districts. Kevin has been with the Commission for over 14 years, climbing up

the career ladder first as a Coastal Planner in both the Central and North Central Coast districts, then as the Central Coast District Supervisor, and for the past 5 years as the Central Coast District Manager. In these roles, he's navigated essentially every aspect of the Commission's planning and permitting program, and tackled some of the agencies' most controversial, complex, and consequential coastal resource management issues, from planning to appeals to permits. Kevin has built critical relationships with local government representatives, NGOs, elected officials, environmental justice advocates, tribal representatives, and diverse community and served as the Central Coast representative on the team developing the Commission's Environmental Justice Policy in 2019. Congratulations Kevin!



From Act to Action: The First 50 Years of Coastal Protection

As part of our many initiatives to celebrate the Coastal Act's 50th Anniversary, Commission staff will be spotlighting key program achievements and a public access success at each monthly hearing. The goal is to educate the public, honor the Act's legacy, and highlight the Commission's ongoing work to protect California's coast. We will continue to show our Coastal Access Spotlight series to the Commission for the rest of this year, as well as post the videos on Instagram and YouTube via the Commission's website: https://www.coastal.ca.gov/access/highlights.html

Swim California – Completed!

Ultra marathon swimmer Catherine Breed completed her 900-mile long swim along the California coast on October 21. She is the first person to ever attempt such a feat. Along the way, Catherine partnered with local organizations to hold 10 community events to highlight coastal access and marine conservation success stories across the State.
Catie Barr, Sea Grant Fellow working in our Statewide Planning Unit, was fortunate enough to be a part of the support team for Catherine during her swim past the San Francisco Bay Area as well as for the last week of the four-month long journey.
As Catherine neared her finish at the border, she drew attention to the Tijuana River pollution crisis, which has resulted in near-continuous beach closures in the region over the last five years. Catherine noted that people often assumed her greatest concern would be encountering sharks, when in reality the health and safety risks posed by the pollution crisis were a bigger challenge for her team to manage. As she put it, "We're more fearful about animals that live in the ocean and have little interest in humans than we are about the damage and destruction we are causing to our own home."



Catherine Breed and Catie Barr

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Program Spotlight

This month, the Statewide Planning Unit will be highlighting the Commission's work related to coastal resilience.

Public Access Spotlight:

This month we will feature a beautiful sandy cove, just north of the town of Gualala in Mendocino County. Bonham Trail leads to Cooks Beach and is operated by the Redwood Coast Land Conservancy. There is also a viewpoint just steps from the road shoulder, offering expansive views of the coast and perhaps migrating grey whales.

BEACH CELEBRATION: THANK YOU!

On October 10, we celebrated the 50th Anniversary of the Coastal Act at Junipero Beach in Long Beach. The day featured phenomenal speakers, live music and dancing, sand castle building contest, sno-cones and lots of time celebrating and reminiscing with partners, colleagues and friends. The day turned out to be memorable in ways none of us anticipated. With El Nino and the kelvin wave damaging nearby homes, a flooded parking lot and emergency sand berms being built nearby, the realities of coastal hazards were impossible to ignore. In an unexpected way, these circumstances underscored the importance of the Coastal Commission's work more than ever and the urgent challenges California faces as sea levels rise and storms intensify.

Against that backdrop, celebrating 50 years of the Coastal Act felt especially meaningful. It was a reminder of how much we have accomplished together and how much work lies ahead to prepare for a changing coast. We are grateful for the support of so many individuals and organizations that support the mission of the Coastal Act and this agency. We felt the love on October 10. We would especially like to thank the organizations and individuals who contributed funding, planning support and people power to make the beach party a reality. Huge thanks to our co-hosts Azul, Surfrider and the California Protection Network, to the City of Long Beach for hosting the celebration, Partners of Parks for being our fiscal sponsor and providing crucial planning help and to all the staff that helped with planning and execution. A special shoutout to Noaki Schwartz and especially to Eben Schwartz who made it all happen.