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March 9, 2026

TO: California Coastal Commission and Interested Parties

FROM: Dr. Kate Huckelbridge, Executive Director

SUBJECT: Executive Director's Report

Final Strategic Plan

The 2026-2030 Strategic Plan that was adopted by the Commission in December 2025 has been finalized and is available to view on the Commission website at https://www.coastal.ca.gov/strategicplan/. The Strategic Plan lays out a roadmap for the Commission to achieve its mission of protecting and enhancing the coast in light of current and future challenges. It includes a framework of 5 goals, 15 objectives, and 72 specific actions that will guide the agency's work over the next five years.

Press & Media

The Coastal Commission just finished its Key Metrics Report for 2025, summarizing the agency's 2025 actions on permits, appeals and LCPs. It's a great snapshot of the Commission's workload, processing times, and year-over-year trends. As has been the case for several years, our South Coast office continues to process more than twice as many projects as the other district offices, primarily because of the number of uncertified jurisdictions within LA and Orange Counties. Cities that lack a certified LCP rely on the Coastal Commission to issue *all* of their coastal development permits--a dynamic that was never intended to still be in play 50 years after the passage of the Coastal Act. In keeping with progress made in past years, the Commission continues to act on CDPs well within Permit Streamlining Act deadlines. The average last year was just 47 days from completed application to final hearing. It's worth noting that the agency denied only one project last year, which involved a proposal to reconfigure public boat moorings for small vessels in Newport Beach Harbor. Of the 1,290 locally issued permits, about 3.5% were appealed to the Commission. Of those 44 appeals, 29 were dismissed for raising no substantial issue, and the remaining 15 were approved with conditions.

Events and Trainings

Annual Washington, D.C. Meetings of the Coastal States Organization and NOAA Program Managers

In early March, I traveled to Washington, D.C., with our Deputy Executive Director, Madeline Cavalieri, and our Legislative Program Manager, Sean Drake, for the annual meetings of the Coastal States Organization and NOAA Program Managers. Discussions during the meetings covered a range of issues, including NOAA's current policy priorities and budget outlook, supporting climate resilient communities and upcoming actions related to Outer Continental Shelf Resources (including Sediment, Critical Minerals and Energy). Staff from the Commission, the Coastal Conservancy, BCDC, and the San Francisco Bay, Elkhorn Slough, and Tijuana River National Estuarine Research Reserves also met with staff in California Congressional offices in support of FY25 and FY26 funding for California's Coastal Management Program. Staff emphasized the critical importance of federal funding for California's coastal planning, regulatory, enforcement, research, education, and public access programs, particularly in the face of increasing threats to federal funding and nationwide coastal management policies. Staff look forward to follow-up discussions and opportunities for continued support.

Outdoors for all Convening

On February 3, 2026, Commission staff attended the California Natural Resources Agency's Outdoors for All Convening in Sacramento. This statewide gathering included community-based organizations, tribal partners, advocates, practitioners, and state agency staff focused on shared learning and collaboration to expand equitable access to the outdoors. The discussions emphasized that California's coast belongs to everyone and explored persistent barriers to coastal access, including distance, cost, transportation, accessibility, cultural relevance, and safety, alongside strategies that center on belonging, community partnership, and stewardship. During the event, I delivered a Trailblazer Talk marking the Coastal Act's 50th anniversary, honoring its legacy of protecting the coast for all Californians, while underscoring the continued importance of public access, shared stewardship, and a sense of belonging in the outdoors for generations to come. A link to a recap of the convening can be found here: https://opc.ca.gov/2026/02/outdoors-for-all-connecting-californians-to-the-coast-and-ocean/

California Natural Resources Agency's Nature-Based Solutions Summit

On January 29, 2026, California Sea Grant Fellow Catie Barr attended California's first Nature-Based Solutions Summit hosted by the California Natural Resources Agency in Sacramento. The event brought together a diverse group of practitioners, agency staff, nonprofit representatives, and Tribal leaders to advance nature-based solutions across the state. Speakers highlighted the latest science, policy developments, and implementation efforts demonstrating how nature-based solutions can reduce greenhouse gas emissions and build climate resilience while supporting a range of additional benefits for communities. Discussions emphasized scaling cross-sector collaboration to help meet California's 2030 nature-based solutions targets. The summit marked the release of the 2025 Progress Report on the State's Nature-Based Solutions Climate Targets and launched a series of landscape-

specific convenings. A coastal-focused session will be hosted later this year in partnership with the State Coastal Conservancy.

Stanford University "Do Good Now" Career Fair

On March 4, 2026, Coastal Program Analyst Sydney Schmitter and NOAA Coastal Management Fellow Margaret Campbell partnered with staff from the Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC) to host a table at Stanford University's "Do Good Now" career fair. The event brought together mission-driven companies, nonprofits, local governments, and worker unions seeking talented young professionals dedicated to advancing the common good.

California Ocean Science Trust's SeaChange Scholars California Agencies Panel

On February Feb 5, 2026, California Ocean Science Trust's (OST) SeaChange Scholars "Navigating Your Future" webinar series featured a panel of California Coastal Commission staff who described the Commission's work and shared how their day-to-day roles connect coastal science with state policy. The webinar is part of OST's broader investments in career development opportunities and support for ocean and coastal science graduate students across California who are interested in careers at the science policy nexus. The conversation highlighted a range of career pathways across the agency's various units and concluded with a moderated discussion and audience question and answer focused on career journeys and working at the science policy interface. A recording of the webinar is available online: https://www.oceansciencetrust.org/in-practice/seachange-webinar.

National Geographic Slingshot Challenge

On February 2, 2026, Commission staff participated in local outreach connected to the National Geographic Society Slingshot Challenge, a youth program that invites students ages 13 to 18 to create one-minute videos proposing solutions to environmental issues. Commission participation supported student teams at the Los Angeles County High School for the Arts and helped elevate an ocean and coastal focus on issues like ocean acidification while encouraging students to frame their ideas as clear, compelling water stories. Staff also shared practical approaches for communicating complex Commission work clearly and accessibly to various audiences, including personal coastal stories and examples of the Commission's efforts to protect coastal resources. The session provided a model students could use in developing their videos and encouraged them to share their unique perspective in ways that motivate meaningful environmental action.

Banking and Compensatory Mitigation Training Course

From March 2nd-6th, Commission Ecologist Dr. Corey Clatterbuck participated in a Banking and Compensatory Mitigation Training Course provided by The Conservation Fund and California Department of Fish and Wildlife in Carlsbad, CA. The interagency training focused on California mitigation issues while covering key compensatory mitigation topics, including federal and state authorities, regulations, and policies regarding compensatory mitigation, the development of mitigation banking instruments, and the role of Interagency and Conservation Bank Review Teams. The training was presented by a suite of mitigation bank subject matter

experts and provided participants with expertise on effectively reviewing and overseeing mitigation banks in both their establishment and operation.

Public Education Programs

2026 Dockwalker Program Trainings (March-May 2026)

The Boating Clean and Green Program (a partnership between the Coastal Commission and California State Parks) will hold 13 Dockwalker trainings in 2026. Visit the Dockwalker web page to view the training schedule, locations, and to register. Dockwalkers inspire and educate California boaters to be safe and environmentally sound, distributing California boater kits while visiting marinas, boat launch ramps, boat shows, and boating events.

Sacramento Boat Show (March 5-8, 2026)

The Boating Clean and Green Program will be attending the Sacramento Boat Show on March 5-8. Staff will be sharing information with show participants about boating safety and clean boating practices, including how to properly dispose of oil absorbents and boat sewage, and environmental and safe boating laws.

New Podcast Episode

The Boating Clean and Green Program and California State Park's boating safety and education unit released a new Dockside podcast episode that goes behind the scenes with the experts from the California State Lands Commission to explore how they balance global trade with environmental protection, innovative ways they regulate ballast water and biofouling, and what you can do to help.

Staff Retirements

Dr. Jonna Engel

After over 20 years of dedicated service to the Coastal Commission and to the state of California, Dr. Jonna Engel is retiring from the Coastal Commission. In addition to working directly on some of the agency's most technically complex projects, Jonna has also led the Commission's team of ecology staff for the past decade. Jonna came to the Commission in 2006 after a productive academic career that included degrees in Physical Geography, Marine Science, and Ecology from UC Santa Barbara, the Moss Landing Marine Lab, and UC Santa Cruz as well as extensive research work along the California coast, particularly the Santa Barbara Channel and Channel Islands. She is the Commission's longest serving staff ecologist and has been instrumental in advancing and championing the agency's rigorous use of sound science and facilitating consistency in the application of scientific knowledge to policy and decisions. Over the past decade of her career, she's overseen the evolution of the Commission's Ecology Group from a staff of two to the current team of six that provides technical support for all of the Commission's districts and programs across the state. In addition to contributing her expertise to advance the efforts of countless working groups and advisory bodies over the years, Jonna's research and ecological analysis was critical to the

protection of the sensitive maritime chaparral habitats in Big Sur and the Santa Monica Mountains, and to conserving the Randall Preserve at Newport Banning Ranch, one of the last intact wetland-bluff ecosystems remaining along the coast of southern California. Never one to seek out the spotlight, some of her most meaningful contributions have been behind the scenes, however. Her humility, positive attitude, enthusiasm, boundless curiosity, and unfailing support for her staff helped countless interns and graduate students along their careers and has left us with an extremely capable core of passionate ecology staff ready to continue her work. Jonna will be dearly missed by her colleagues and her contributions to coastal protection leave us forever in her debt. We wish her a joyful retirement with many days exploring the coast she's worked so hard to protect, whether by surfboard or horseback!



Legislative Resolution

State Sen. Lohn Laird (D-Santa Cruz) and Assemblymember Gregg Hart (D-Santa Barbara) have authored joint resolutions commemorating the 50th anniversary of the passage of the Coastal Act and the Coastal Conservancy Act. More than 40 bipartisan co-authors have already signed on. See the press release here: https://sd17.senate.ca.gov/news/lawmakers-mark-50-years-california-coastal-act-vow-defend-and-expand-coastal-access

CNRA Speaker Series

On February 25, 2026, I had the privilege of participating in a dynamic panel discussion, hosted by Wade Crowfoot, California Secretary of Natural Resources, celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Coastal Act and reflecting on five decades of coastal stewardship. We explored the state of our coast, emerging challenges, and how we collectively shape coastal protection to meet California's needs in the coming decades. I was joined on the panel by several esteemed colleagues including Amy Hutzel, executive officer of the California State Coastal Conservancy, Susan Jordan, founder and executive director of the California Coastal Protection Network, Marce Gutiérrez-Graudiņš, founder of Azul and vice chair of the governing board of the California State Coastal Conservancy and Patrick Barnard, research director of the UCSC Center for Coastal Climate Resilience. A huge thank you to Secretary Crowfoot and my fellow panelists for joining me in this important conversation, and to the staff at CNRA, Coastal Commission and Coastal Conservancy who helped organize this event.

You can view the full panel discussion at: https://www.youtube.com/live/eYjby5OVccs



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 recently launched our Coastal Access Spotlight series on Instagram and YouTube.

Program Spotlight: Habitat Conservation
This month, Dr. Jonna Engel will highlight some key examples of the Commission's work protecting sensitive coastal habitats and share a bit about the role and evolution of our agency's Ecology Group.

Public Access Spotlight: Channel Islands Harbor, City of Oxnard
This month's feature focuses on the North Channel Islands area in the City of Oxnard. The Commission approved a 1000 parcel residential subdivision about 23 years ago in a newly dredged area of Channel Islands Harbor. Significant public access amenities required by the Commission include: an ADA Accessible 3 mile long pathway on the water side of the homes, several pocket parks and free public parking lots. The developer was required to build these facilities, and the City manages these public recreational areas. Check out the Highlights Section of our website for a map of the site.

Share your Coastal Memory

As one aspect of our celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Coastal Act, we are hoping that the public will share some of their personal experiences with the coast. We are collecting coastal memories to use on social media and our website to illustrate the connections we have to our coast. They can be brief or more involved, and pictures or even short videos will

help paint a more vivid picture. Memories can be submitted anonymously. Please visit this page to upload your story and help us understand how the Coastal Act has impacted you.

Coastal Act Achievements

The Coastal Commission and Coastal Conservancy recently put together this two-pager with some good facts on coastal protection achievements: https://documents.coastal.ca.gov/assets/press-releases/2026/feb/50-Years-of-Coastal-Protection-Fact-Sheet-2026.pdf

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Emergency Permits:

South Central Coast District

G-4-26-0004 Emergency permit issued to the University of California Santa Barbara (UCSB) for temporary placement and operation of five self-contained, solar powered, mobile security units equipped with security surveillance cameras and lighting to deter crime in remote areas of campus with limited or no lighting while the University develops a plan for a permanent security lighting system appropriate for sensitive habitat areas.

G-4-26-0006 Emergency permit issued to the University of California Santa Barbara (UCSB) for temporary placement of 700 sandbags for erosion protection along an area of approximately 70 feet on the seaward side of the southern extent of Lagoon Road berm at Campus Point Beach.

G-4-26-0002-W, Santa Barbara County Flood Control District Emergency Permit Waiver pursuant to Section 30611 of the Coastal Act to remove 14,585 cu. yds. of sediment from Carneros Creek and San Pedro Creek and debris basins and deposition of the material in the surf zone at Goleta Beach in order to prevent flooding of surrounding urban areas.

South Coast District

G-5-26-0004 – 30611 emergency permit issued to California State Parks to remove approximately 7,600 sq. ft. of asphalt from a parking lot that was damaged and undermined by erosion due to king tides combined with intense rainfall and stormwater runoff.

San Diego District

G-6-26-0003-W – Emergency permit waiver issued to the Port of San Diego and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service to contain and eradicate an invasive alga, Caulerpa prolifera, from the San Diego Bay National Wildlife Refuge by covering it with mesh, treating it with rock salt, and covering with tarp barriers and sandbags.

G-6-26-0005-W – Emergency permit waiver issued to the Port of San Diego to inspect and backfill a sinkhole along the Bayshore Bikeway in South San Diego Bay on February 13, 2026.