

CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMISSION

455 MARKET STREET, SUITE 228 SAN
FRANCISCO, CA 94105-2219 VOICE
(415) 904-5200
FAX (415) 904-5400
TDD (415) 597-5885
WWW.COASTAL.CA.GOV

**W6d**

Date October 24, 2025

To: Commissioners and Alternates

From: Kate Hucklebridge, Executive Director
 Sarah Christie, Legislative Director
 Annie Kohut Frankel, Public Education Program Manager
 Eben Schwartz, Statewide Outreach Manager
 Vivian Matuk, Environmental Boating Program Manager
 Luna Taylor, Outreach and Communications Analyst
 Lauren Dung, Program Associate
 Jessica Lie, Grants and Education Programs Analyst

Re: 2025 Public Education Program Update

At the Coastal Commission meeting of November 5, 2025, the staff of the Public Education Program will update the Commission with a summary of program activities and accomplishments for the past year. The attached report provides written information on 2025 activities.

California Coastal Commission

Public Education Program

2025 Annual Report



Photo: Un Mar de Colores, Whale Tail Grant Recipient

California Coastal Commission

Public Education Program

2025 Annual Report

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Public Education Program 2025

Introduction

The California Coastal Commission's [Public Education Program](#) connects people with the California coast and ocean for their mutual well-being. An important focus is on engaging communities that face barriers to coastal access, resulting in expanding opportunities to enjoy, learn about, and care for our coast and ocean. This report describes our work in 2025.

Background

The [California Coastal Act](#) lays out the foundation for the Coastal Commission's Public Education Program. Coastal Act Section 30012 states that "an educated and informed citizenry is essential to the well-being of a participatory democracy and is necessary to protect California's finite natural resources, including the quality of its environment." The Coastal Act further states that "the Commission shall carry out a public education program that includes outreach efforts to schools, youth organizations, and the general public for the purpose of promoting understanding of, fostering a sense of individual responsibility for, and encouraging public initiatives and participation in programs for, the conservation and wise use of coastal and ocean resources."



Figure 1: "Serenity" by Grace Kim, Grade 11
2025 Coastal Art & Poetry Contest winner

The Commission's public education programs include impactful and fun outdoor experiences, stewardship activities, community field science, and artistic expression. The Coastal Commission supports other organizations engaged in this work by providing grant funding, resources for educators, and training. Partnerships are vital and many of the programs described in this report are collaborative efforts. Appendix I lists the Public Education Program's many partner organizations.

There are several funding sources for these programs. The [WHALE TAIL® License Plate](#) has supported core program activities and [WHALE TAIL® grants](#) since 1997. Since 2014, the [Protect Our Coast and Oceans](#) check-off box on the state tax return has also provided funds for WHALE TAIL® grants. In 2021, the state budget allocated additional funds for WHALE TAIL® grants, which are fully spent this year. Corporate contributions and individual donations support the [Coastal Cleanup Day](#) Program through our partner, the California State Parks Foundation.

2025 Highlights

- The 41st annual **California Coastal Cleanup Day** took place on Saturday, September 20. Coordinators around the state organized 775 cleanup sites, and for the first time in the event's history, cleanups took place in all 58 California counties. California led the world in cleanup activity in September.
- On September 30, the California Ocean Protection Council approved \$2 million in additional funding for the next round of **WHALE TAIL® Grants**, with approximately \$1 million set aside for tribally-led projects. Applications for these grants are due December 15, 2025 and will come before the Coastal Commission for funding recommendations in April, 2026.
- The 2024/25 competitive **WHALE TAIL® Grants** round had the most funding requests in the history of the program with 299 proposals submitted, 80 more than the previous year (which was also a record). 53 projects were selected for funding.
- **Boating Clean and Green**'s Dockwalker Program celebrated its 25th anniversary this year. The Dockwalker Program is the first of its kind in the nation and champions peer-to-peer education to inspire environmental stewardship in California. This program is implemented by the California Coastal Commission's Boating Clean and Green Program, California State Parks, and The Bay Foundation. Since 2000, over 1,400 Partner Dockwalkers (environmental educators) have shared clean boating practices with over 130,000 boaters across the state.
- **The Plastic Pollution Reduction Guidance**, a project in development for the past several years, has been finalized and will come to the Commission for approval at its November meeting. The guidance is designed to be used by Commission staff and local governments to reduce plastic pollution through Coastal Development Permits, Local Coastal Plans, and other planning documents.
- **WHALE TAIL® license plate** sales combined with renewal fees for existing plates provided approximately \$4 million for environmental programs in Fiscal Year 2024-25. Of this total, \$1 million was allocated to the Coastal Commission's California Beach and Coastal Enhancement Account, which funds the Commission's public education programs and WHALE TAIL® Grants, and \$3 million to the Environmental License Plate Fund.

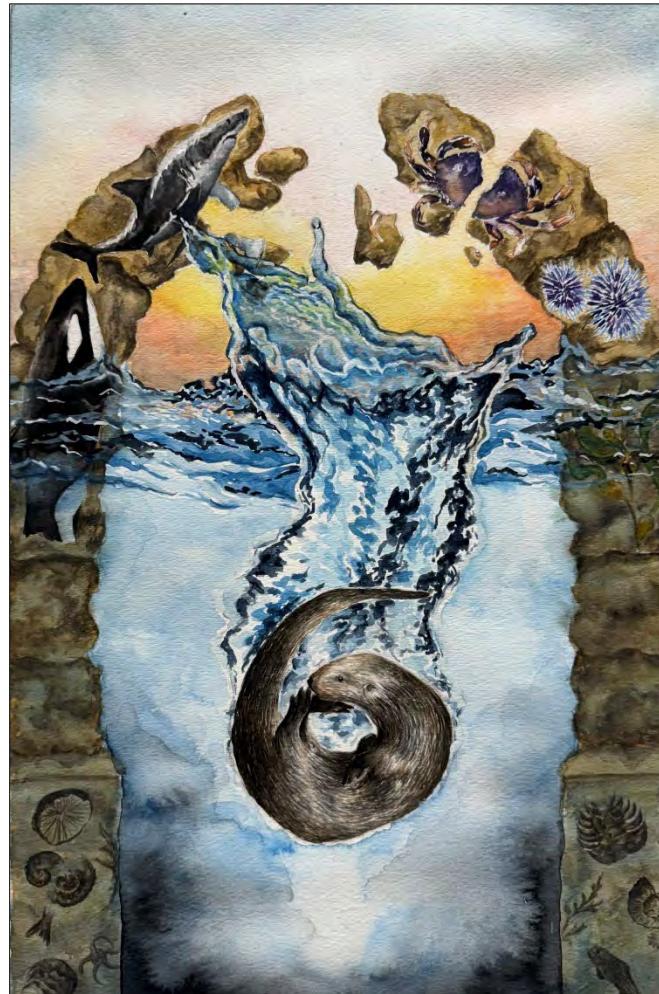


Figure 2: "Keystone: by Yun Xi Lucy Wang, Grade 8, 2025 Coastal Art & Poetry Contest winner

California Coastal Cleanup Day

On September 20th, 2025, tens of thousands of Californians turned out to over 775 cleanup sites throughout the state for the annual [California Coastal Cleanup Day](#). In a new twist on the cleanup this past year, organizers turned the event into the world's largest scavenger hunt. Dubbed the "Trashure Hunt," organizers placed special items of "trash" at cleanups sites across the state. The volunteers who found those items were able to redeem them for donated prizes such as hotel stays, inflatable kayaks, tickets to Giants and A's baseball games, and even an e-bike!



Figure 3: Volunteers with Save Our Shores in Santa Cruz working hard

The Cleanup continues to be California's most popular annual volunteer event. Reports from around the state are still filtering in, but as of this writing 37,722 volunteers took part in at least one cleanup during the month, helping to remove 344,653 pounds of trash and recycling from 1,369 miles of the state's shorelines. Over the 41-year history of the event, nearly 2 million people have participated, collecting more than 27 million pounds of debris from our shorelines.

Coastal Cleanup Day enjoyed strong volunteer turnout in both coastal counties and inland areas. Inland cleanups illustrate one of the event's most important messages—that we are all connected to the coast and ocean by our rivers, streams, and storm drains. Over one-quarter of the volunteers and more than one-third of the debris was from inland cleanups. On-the-water participation continues to grow among boating facilities and boating groups as well: 44 boating facilities and groups participated in the event with 2,011 volunteers collecting 14,340 pounds of trash and recyclables on land and from 107 kayaks, canoes, and dinghies.

In addition to cleaning up, volunteers tracked the trash they removed using either a paper data card or the Ocean Conservancy's [Clean Swell app](#), which allows the Commission to continue to encourage self-guided [neighborhood cleanups](#) throughout the month of September. Volunteers clean their streets,

local parks, creeks, and shorelines on their own, contributing to the statewide totals while also expanding the cleanup to areas and audiences that might otherwise not be able to participate. 489 California cleanups were reported on the Clean Swell app during the month of September. When combined with the 775 sites that took place on the actual day of the cleanup, California held far more cleanups than any other state or country recorded for the International Coastal Cleanup.

Data collected by volunteers is added to the 35-year record of cleanup data, which comprises one of the longest and most robust trash data sets in the world.



Figure 4: Volunteers relax after cleaning the river in Trinity County, marking the first time in the cleanup's history that all 58 counties have been represented

Data Tells a Story

Coastal Cleanup data collection helps advance our understanding of the challenge of marine debris and highlights single use items that are particular problems in the environment. The data also supports state and local policies to reduce and prevent plastic pollution.

Food wrappers and food and beverage containers continue to grow on the list of top ten items collected, reflecting the increase in takeout and delivery services in the state. Plastic grocery bags dropped back out of the top ten after increasing their rank with the COVID pandemic. This was thanks in part to new legislation (SB 1053, Blakespear) that closed the loophole in the state's plastic grocery bag ban that previously allowed the use of heavier-weight plastic bags. The top ten list represents common items that volunteers have picked up, demonstrating the items and products that are most abundant on beaches and shorelines. In 2025, the top ten items ranked as follows:

	Item	Percent
1	Cigarette butts	23.61%
2	Plastic/foam pieces	18.55%
3	Food wrappers (candy, chips, etc.)	7.37%
4	Other plastic waste	5.91%
5	Bottle caps (plastic)	3.92%
6	Other bags (plastic)	2.40%
7	Beverage bottles (plastic)	2.35%
8	Bottle caps (metal)	2.20%
9	Straws/stirrers (plastic)	1.93%
10	Beverage bottles (glass)	1.65%

Event Messages Reach Millions

In addition to catalyzing participation, the event raises awareness by reaching millions of Californians through extensive media coverage in newspapers, television, radio announcements, on social media, and other online sites. As part of these efforts, staff partnered with the CalTrans Stormwater Program to promote events around the state. The joint effort connected CalTrans' efforts to reduce stormwater trash with Coastal Cleanup Day's message of how watershed health impacts the coast and ocean.

The Coastal Commission also continued its tradition of producing unique event posters, postcards, and t-shirts. San Francisco-based ad agency Barrett Hofherr provided pro bono support to develop the Trashure Hunt concept with playful graphics contributed by design studio Muti, encouraging volunteers to turn the event into an elaborate game. The event materials proved extremely popular among the cleanup organizers and the public and were widely shared across social media platforms.



Figure 5: English version of event poster

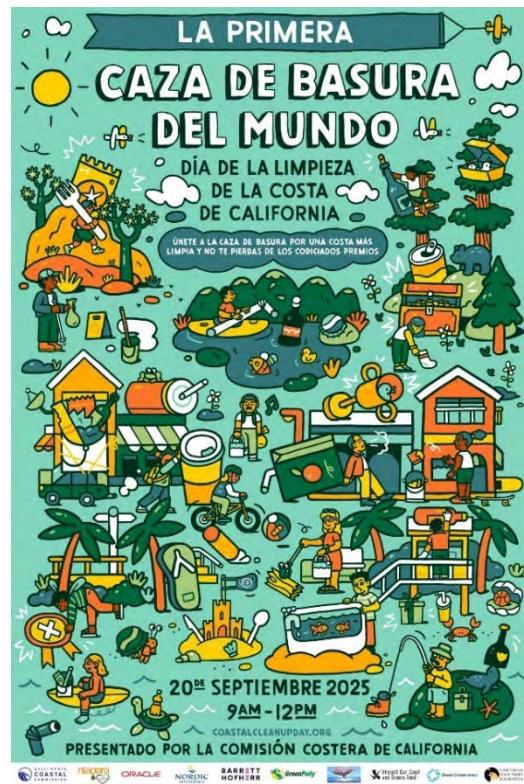


Figure 6: Spanish version of event poster

Corporate Partners in CCD

The Coastal Cleanup Day Program continued to enjoy support from corporate sponsors, which help fund the event and enhance outreach efforts. A new partner in 2025 was Presenting Sponsor Niagara Cares, which provided critical financial support and volunteer teams at multiple sites across the state. The Cleanup also received financial support from Oracle, returning partner Nordic Naturals, and the WHALE TAIL® License Plate. The Cleanup received in-kind support from the California State Parks Foundation, Ocean Conservancy, Rubio's, GreenPolly (which donated 120,000 trash bags made with 94% post-consumer recycled plastic), and Barrett Hofherr.



Figure 7: Volunteers cheer at an Orange County Coastkeeper-led cleanup site

Volunteers Reflect on Their Experience

With assistance from local coordinators, the Commission conducts an annual survey of Coastal Cleanup participants to gain insight into their experience. The survey is also a way for volunteers to provide feedback and suggestions. Survey-takers are entered into a drawing for a Coastal Cleanup Day prize package.

The vast majority of respondents attended an organized event and chose their cleanup location to improve their neighborhood or community. Over 20% of respondents participated in more than one cleanup during the month of September. Another takeaway is that the event is inspiring—91.8% of respondents said that participating in the cleanup makes them want to do more to protect the environment, including actions like continuing to pick up trash, recycling more, and using fewer single-use plastic items.

80% of respondents are return volunteers who participated in past Coastal Cleanup Days, some as many as 10 times or more. The survey asks how the Cleanup has influenced them over time. Many said that they had become more conscientious consumers and had switched to reusable products, threw away less food, pick up trash when out walking, and are spreading the word.

Volunteers also wrote about how much they enjoyed participating and that it felt good to participate in such a communal event. One person wrote “Thank you for organizing this; it felt good to be out there doing something tangible and positive.” Another remarked, “thank you for allowing people of all ages to participate year after year in this event!” One volunteer summed it up as follows: “It was great! My favorite day of the year!!”

Adopt-A-Beach®

Over the past 40 years, thousands of California schools, civic groups, businesses, scout troops, families and friends have adopted beaches throughout California. The Adopt-A-Beach® Program offers groups an easy way to care for the coast by pledging to clean their beach three times over the course of one year. School groups can fulfill the obligation with one cleanup. In 2025, many Adopt-A-Beach® Program sites held regular “drop-in” group events as well as providing for individualized participation and self-guided cleanup options. Reports are still being gathered at this time, but as of this writing at least 30,000 volunteers participated at over 2,200 cleanups during the year.

All 15 coastal counties, plus Alameda and Contra Costa, traditionally participate in the program, although local leadership of the program does change on occasion and Commission staff is currently working to fill in gaps that are missing representation along the coastline. The Commission coordinates with Beach Managers from partner organizations who run the program locally. Beach Managers give participants cleanup supplies and educational materials, provide instruction, arrange for trash pickup, and sometimes offer supplemental educational programs and public recognition. The Commission provides Beach Managers with promotional materials and cleanup supplies to enable their work with local adopting groups.



Figure 8: An Adopt-A-Beach group organized by I Love A Clean San Diego poses next to their adoption sign

Kids Ocean Day

For more than 25 years, youth from throughout California have taken part in Kids Ocean Day, which includes in-school presentations about our connection to the ocean and how we can protect it, a fun field trip to the coast, a beach cleanup, and joining together to form aerial art creations to send a message to the world.

The program is led by Friends of the Dunes in Humboldt County, the Marine Science Institute in San Francisco, the Malibu Foundation for Environmental Education in Los Angeles, Orange County Coastkeeper, I Love A Clean San Diego, and Community Action Partnership of Kern, with aerial art

direction by Spectral Q, and statewide coordination and funding from the California Coastal Commission and the WHALE TAIL® Grants Program. This year 3,964 students took part in a school assembly or classroom presentation, and most of those students gathered on beaches up and down the state to celebrate Kids Ocean Day. The notable exception was students served by the Malibu Foundation, which canceled the beach field trip due to the ongoing concerns about damage from the Palisades fire.



Figure 9: Humboldt aerial art led by Friends of the Dunes

The aerial art formations this year were on the theme of “Restore,” to convey the message that we all need to work to ensure that our coast and our environment is healthy and vibrant. The message was illustrated in different ways in each location and together sent a powerful message to the world about taking care of our planet. All the children’s aerial art images can be viewed at oceanday.net.



Figure 10: Students in San Diego excited to start their field trip to the beach

Protect Our Coast and Oceans Fund Tax Check Off

California taxpayers can support coastal education, access, and stewardship by checking a box and donating to the [Protect Our Coast and Oceans Fund](#) in the voluntary contributions section of the state tax return. Donations to the fund support grants to local programs through the WHALE TAIL® Grants Program. Between January and September 2025, contributions to the Protect Our Coast and Oceans Fund totaled \$203,987 from 15,224 individuals. With Los Angeles County's 2024 tax deadline postponed until October 15, 2025, these totals are expected to grow before the year is over. Since its inception, California taxpayers have contributed over \$3.5 million to the Protect Our Coast and Oceans tax check off.



Figure 11: Grant recipient BORP Adaptive Sports & Recreation prepares to launch on a kayaking expedition

This year's marketing campaign for the tax check-off included social media advertising and webpage display ads. In addition, numerous partner organizations helped to spread the word to their constituencies to extend the campaign's reach.

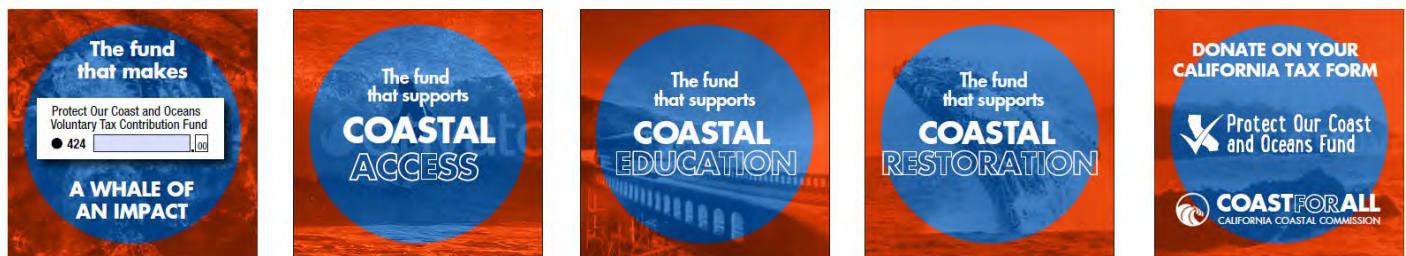


Figure 12: Panels from one of the ad campaign's social media reels

WHALE TAIL® License Plate

For Fiscal year 2024-25, California drivers purchased 3,868 WHALE TAIL® License Plates, which combined with renewal fees from 47,575 existing plates resulted in \$4 million in revenue for environmental programs. Of this amount, \$1 million went to the California Beach and Coastal Enhancement Account (CBCEA), and \$3 million went to the Environmental License Plate Fund (ELPF).

Each year, the legislature appropriates funds from the CBCEA to the Coastal Commission to carry out Coastal Cleanup Day, Adopt-A-Beach®, the WHALE TAIL® Grants Program, and other coastal and marine education programs. The ELPF funds a variety of state environmental programs. Since its 1997 launch and through September 2025, 280,912 California drivers have purchased the WHALE TAIL® License Plate, and sales and renewal fees have contributed over \$133 million to environmental programs (\$37 million to the CBCEA and \$96 million to the ELPF).



Figure 13: The California WHALE TAIL® License Plate

Over the 28 years of its history, the WHALE TAIL® Plate has consistently ranked among the top-selling specialty license plates, generating substantial revenue for Coastal Commission education programs and WHALE TAIL® grants. Annual sales have declined in recent years, reducing the overall funds available for grants and other educational efforts. This decline is likely due to a combination of factors including reduced marketing opportunities due to the DMV's transition to digital vehicle registration renewals, increased competition from the black and yellow Legacy Plate, which directs 100% of its funds to the ELPF, and the general economy. The one-time General Fund allocation for WHALE TAIL® grants in 2021 provided significant but temporary relief for this funding challenge, as will the Ocean Protection Council funding approved this fall (see below).

The image displays four panels from a banner advertisement for the WHALE TAIL® license plate. The top panel features the text "GET THE PLATE THAT MAKES A WHALE OF AN IMPACT" next to a small image of the license plate. Below this are three horizontal panels, each with a title and a corresponding photograph: "COASTAL CLEANUPS" (showing people cleaning up a beach), "COASTAL RESTORATION" (showing two sea lions), and "SWIM LESSONS" (showing a child swimming). At the bottom left is the logo for "COAST FOR ALL CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMISSION", and at the bottom right is a red button labeled "ORDER NOW".

Figure 14: Panels from a Whale Tail Plate banner ad

The 2025 WHALE TAIL® marketing campaign was a compliment to the tax check-off campaign, emphasizing the shared purpose of the two efforts. It focused on the positive outcomes funded by purchases of the license plate, inviting the public to support projects to increase access to, clean up, and restore our coast. In addition to traditional marketing, an important tool for public awareness is seeing the license plate on vehicles. We greatly appreciate all those who have supported this cause by purchasing a WHALE TAIL® Plate and encourage everyone to participate. WHALE TAIL® Plates can be purchased at ecoplates.com.

WHALE TAIL® Grants

In the 27 years since it began in 1998, the WHALE TAIL® Grants Program has awarded \$25.5 million to 1,074 different projects. The FY 2024/25 competitive WHALE TAIL® Grants cycle was one of the largest in the program's history, thanks to a one-time 2021 General Fund budget allocation. Over 14,000 direct participants are anticipated between the 53 programs funded in this cycle.

An annual report of the 2024/2025 grants cycle is attached as Appendix II. The report describes ongoing and evolving efforts made throughout the entire grant cycle to increase accessibility in the outreach, scoring, selection, and management of the WHALE TAIL® grant program. The report includes an analysis of the 2024/2025 grant recipients, as well as data collected from the 2023/2024 grant recipients after one year of their grant experience.

This year's 53 projects are engaging communities in 28 counties, plus one statewide project and one northern California region project. As a small grants program, we work to be accessible and welcoming to a wide range of entities. This year's grantees are made up of 1 university, 2 government entities, 6

schools or school districts, and 44 non-profits. Of the 44 non-profit grantees, half of them have annual budgets of under \$1,000,000. Twenty-eight grantees are first-time WHALE TAIL® grant recipients.



Figure 16: A youth participant with City of Redding's "From Land to Sea" summer camp learns about the northern coast of California.



Figure 15: Community members enjoy a whale watching trip with Latino Outdoors

Applications for the FY 2025/2026 competitive grants are open and will be due December 15, 2025. This upcoming grant cycle will be the first to be funded through a partnership with the Ocean Protection Council. Approximately half of the \$2,000,000 in grant funds will be dedicated through a tribal set-aside for projects led by, in partnership with, and/or directly serving California Native American tribes and tribal communities. The Commission will vote on the staff recommendations in April 2026.

Boating Clean and Green

The Boating Clean and Green Program is a partnership with California State Parks that educates boaters about clean and safe boating practices and provides training and technical assistance to increase environmental services for boaters. The program meets boaters where they are—at launch ramps, boat docks, boating events, and online. The program serves between 8,000 and 10,000 boaters and water enthusiasts annually.

Hybrid Trainings and Other Educational Offerings

Staff prepared a new cohort of Dockwalker volunteers to educate boaters at marinas, launch ramps, and events. Staff conducted 14 Dockwalker trainings and refresher classes, training 219 partner Dockwalkers. Dockwalkers and staff distributed 6,500 California Boater Kits, which provide boaters with know-how and tools to reduce their environmental impact, including information on clean boating practices, an oil absorbent pillow, an oil absorbent sheet, and a fuel bib.



Figure 17: The California Boater Kit

Staff also reached boaters by sharing clean and safe boating information at two boat shows and conducted three clean boating seminars and presentations reaching over 300 boaters. In addition, staff conducted three hybrid boating facilities spill-response communication workshops for boating facility managers with 138 participants, and two aquatic invasive species prevention workshops with 103 participants.



Figure 18: Partner Dockwalkers conducting face-to-face education and distributing the California Boater Kit

The Program has been implementing a year-round virtual educational and outreach strategy with videos, educational posts in Facebook and Instagram. In 2025 this strategy generated over 10.6 million impressions.

Dockside Podcast

The Program also continued to collaborate with the California State Parks Boating Safety Unit on seven new episodes of the [Dockside podcast](#). Some of the topics this year included a bilingual episode about nature and access for all, California boating incidents, the largest dam removal in history, and Cyril Derreumaux, a kayaker, extreme athlete, three times world record holder and the first person to complete solo kayak crossings of both the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. To date, 34 episodes have been published with over 6,300 combined downloads.

Marine Flare Collection Events

In November 2025, staff will partner with the California Product Stewardship Council, Ports of San Diego and Los Angeles, City of Oceanside, Alameda, Marin, Del Norte, West Contra Costa, Santa Barbara and Santa Cruz counties in offering nine expired marine flare collection events for the public, preceded by an event held with the County of Orange in August 2025. In 2024 events, 528 participants properly disposed of 8,596 expired marine flares.

California Fishing Line Recycling Program

Fishing line recycling stations are located throughout the state on docks and piers, boat launch ramps, and other locations where fishing takes place. The stations are managed by facility operators, parks managers, and other officials. The stations help prevent fishing line from being left in the environment where it can harm wildlife and create a hazard for boats. In 2025, the program grew from 518 stations to 530. Through this recycling program, 3,958 pounds of fishing line have been collected and properly recycled. Stretched out, this line would stretch from San Francisco to Punta Arenas, Chile!



Figure 19: A fishing line recycling station

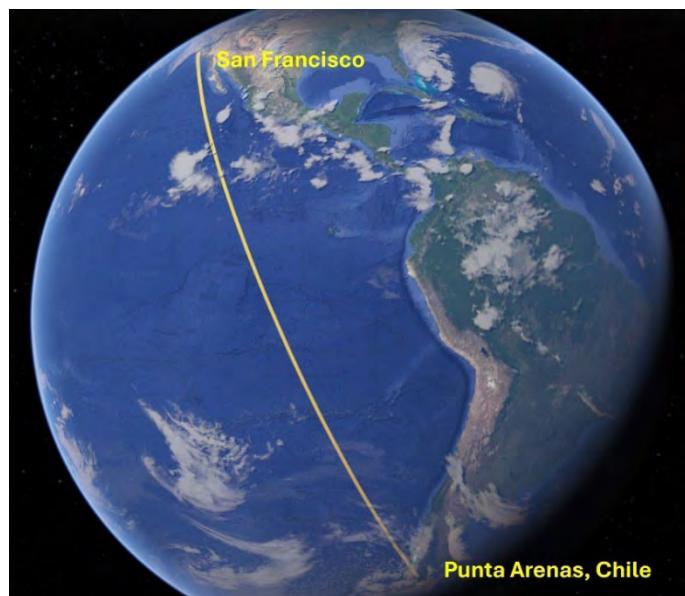


Figure 20: The distance from San Francisco to Punta Arenas

Resources for Educators and Students

The Commission held the sixth annual [Climate Storytelling Contest](#) (previously known as the Climate Video Challenge), which asked middle and high school students to create a podcast, photo essay, or narrative essay in response to the prompt, "What are your feelings towards climate change? How could those feelings turn into action?" First, second, and third place prize winners for each of the three categories were selected in July 2025 and can be viewed on the [contest webpage](#). The webpage also invites participation in the next contest, including entry details, brainstorming ideas, storytelling tips, and extensive climate change resources. The next deadline for entries is May 28, 2026.

The 24th year of the Coastal Commission's [Coastal Art & Poetry Contest](#) received 2,204 entries from K-12 students throughout the state. The [ten winning entries and 40 honorable mentions](#) are displayed on the Commission's website, were featured across social media, and exhibited at Channel Islands National Park Visitor Center in Ventura, Ford House Museum in Mendocino, Peter and Mary Muth Interpretive Center in Newport Beach, and Bear Valley Visitor Center at Point Reyes National Seashore. The poetry was published in the June 2025 issue of Chapman University's [TAB—The Journal of Poetry and Poetics](#). The next contest entry deadline is January 29, 2026.

In 2025, the Public Education Program continued to promote and share its collection of curricular resources, which can be found on the Commission's Educator Resources webpage. Subject matter includes climate change, plastic pollution, coastal policy, and more.

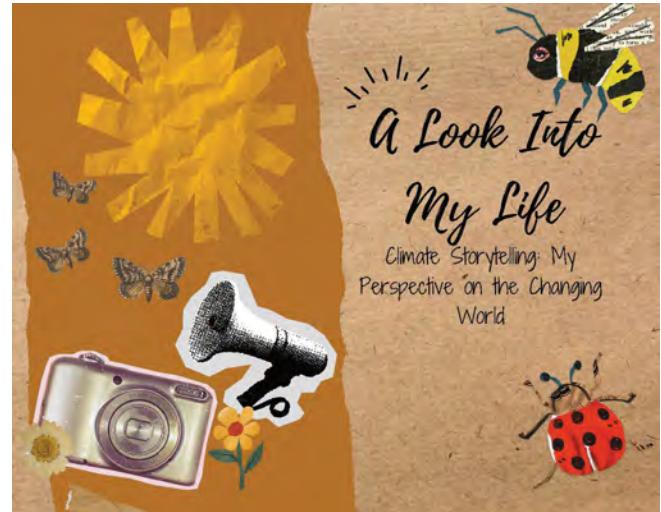


Figure 21: Cover image from "A Look Into My Life," photo essay by Jimena Castaneda



Figure 22: Calm Coast Cycling by Flora Davis, Grade 4, El Segundo

California King Tides Project

The California King Tides Project is part of an international effort to help visualize sea level rise by photographing the highest high tides of today. The Coastal Commission engages partner organizations and members of the public in this community science project, which is building a vast photo archive used to visualize the impacts of future sea level rise, document current flood risks, ground-truth and validate climate change models, and serve as a living record of change for future generations.

During the most recent King Tides season in November and December 2025, members of the public uploaded [1,144 photos](#) which were mapped by Public Education and Mapping Unit staff for ease of viewing by planners, scientists, journalists, students, and other members of the public. Media outlets covered the California King Tides Project in at least 53 articles and segments. Local organizations (such as the Exploratorium, San Diego Coastkeeper, Stewards of the Coast and Redwoods, City of Ventura, City of San Rafael, Climate Action Santa Monica, Northcoast Environmental Center, San Diego Bird Alliance, Elkhorn Slough Reserve, East Bay Regional Park District, California State Parks, among others) organized 32 events around the King Tides during this season. The project website includes resources for educators to incorporate King Tides and sea level rise into their lessons, a gallery of selected recent photos organized by county, and instructions on how to take and upload photos to the project. See all the project photos from 2018 to 2025 [here](#). The next King Tides are December 4-5, 2025 and January 2-3, 2026, plus November 6 and December 6 in southern California and some northern California locations. Find local dates and times and learn how to participate at www.coastal.ca.gov/kingtides.

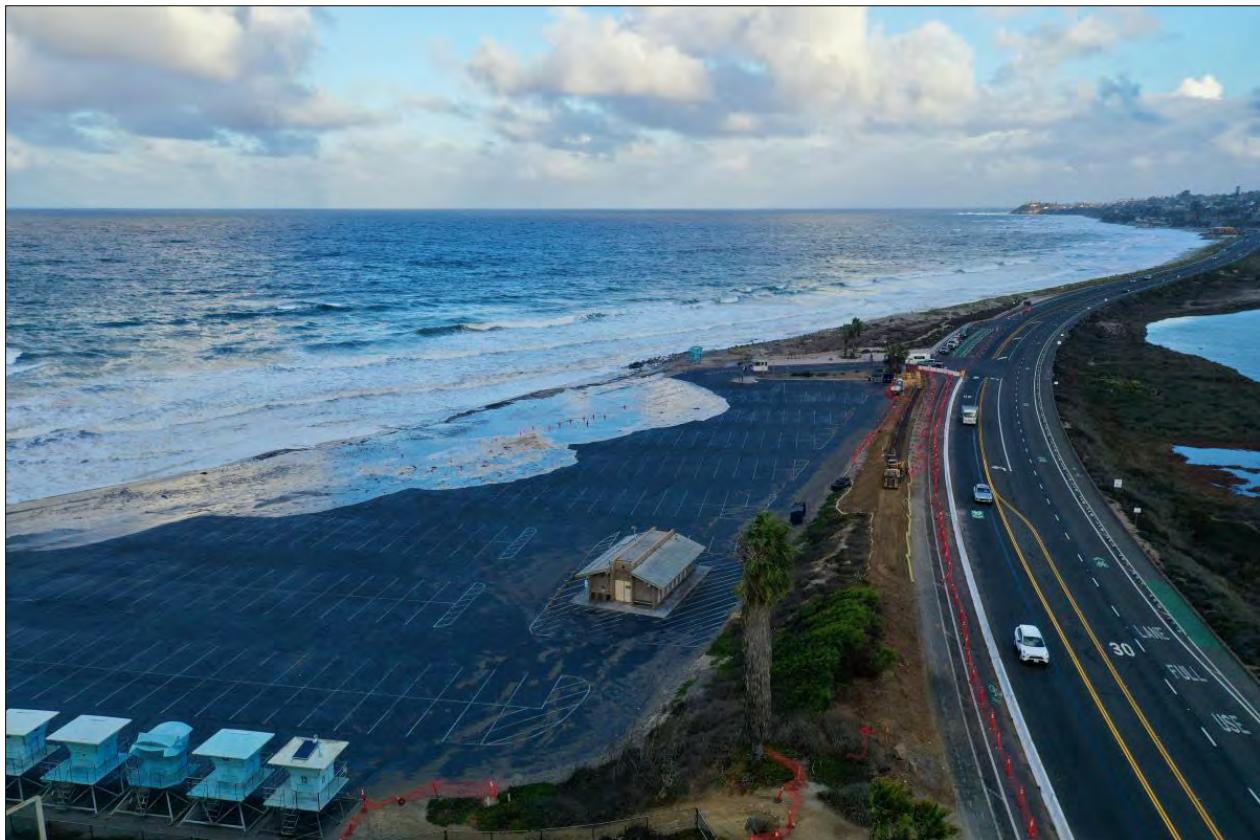


Figure 23: Cardiff State Beach during November's King Tides

Ocean & Coastal Photography Contest

The 26th annual Ocean and Coastal Amateur Photography Contest was held from mid-July through September. Amateur photographers throughout California submitted 997 photos of the California Coast, California ocean and coastal wildlife, and people enjoying our coast. A panel of professional photographers and naturalist judges are in the process of choosing four prize winners and a selection of honorable mentions. The winning photos will be available to view [on the website](#) in November.

Winning photographs from the contest are available as a traveling exhibit. The photos were displayed at the Point Arena Lighthouse in Mendocino from December 14, 2024 to February 3, 2025, and at Sol Treasures in King City from the beginning of November 2025 to the end of January 2026. Interested venues can contact coast4u@coastal.ca.gov to inquire about hosting the exhibit.



Figure 24: "Island Affection," Santa Cruz Island, by Leslie Curchack

Plastic Pollution Policy & Coordination

Public Education staff completed work on a project to support the incorporation of plastic pollution reduction measures into the Commission's ongoing permit, planning, and enforcement work. Funded by a NOAA grant through Section 309 of the Coastal Zone Management Act, this project provides guidance and training for staff and will include public outreach about the Commission's efforts. The draft of the guidance has gone through both internal and public review and goes before the Commission for approval at its November meeting. An additional two years of implementation and training is anticipated.

Advancing marine debris policy and coordination in conjunction with other agencies and stakeholder groups at the state and regional level is an ongoing priority. Staff remains involved in the implementation of the California Ocean Litter Prevention Strategy, coordinated by the California Ocean Protection Council, though the original 6-year term has expired. With an uncertain future ahead, Coastal Commission staff are engaging in efforts with the Ocean Protection Council and regional NOAA staff to plan a potential path forward for continued work on this project. Policy accomplishments that have emerged from the Strategy include state and U.S. laws banning plastic microbeads in personal care products.

Public Education staff continues to represent the Coastal Commission on the Ocean Protection Council's Plastic Pollution Steering Committee, a collection of state agencies working collaboratively to address plastic pollution across multiple jurisdictions and authorities.

Coastal Wonders

The lighthouse stands large and tall
watching over waves big and small

The mighty Pacific sings all through the day
through the voices of seagulls and seals at play

The tidepools hold a lot of surprises
fishes, crabs, and octopi in disguises

With trash and plastic on the shore
the fishes and sea life deserve much more

When nature thrives
life on Earth revives

By Ashwath Narayananaganesh, Grade 3
2025 Coastal Art & Poetry Contest

Beach Wheelchairs

The Coastal Commission is committed to helping all visitors to the coast experience the beach firsthand. The Commission's beach wheelchair program aims to ensure that these chairs, which have wide, balloon tires that can move across soft sand, are widely available. To this end, WHALE TAIL® grants have funded the purchase of 64 beach wheelchairs to date.

The Commission maintains a [beach wheelchair webpage](#) that includes a map showing the location of beaches with wheelchairs and information on how the public can borrow them. The map currently lists 118 locations with chairs available for free public use. The public can assist us in keeping this map up-to-date by emailing additions or corrections to coast4u@coastal.ca.gov.



Figure 25: A WHALE TAIL® grant to Heal the Bay increased the accessibility of their beach cleanups



Figure 26: A WHALE TAIL® grant for a beach wheelchair helps youth at Catalina Island Marine Institute get into the water



Figure 27: Coastal Commission booth at San Diego County Fair

Other Forms of Public Outreach

The Public Education Program attended several fairs and events this year. We returned to the Monterey Whale Fest in April, where staff engaged locals and visitors in coastal stewardship topics. At the Los Angeles Sanitation District's Earth Day festival in Whittier, staff hosted a table with information about watershed cleanups, environmental justice, coastal access, and Coastal Commission meeting participation. This Earth Day, staff visited with the Oceanside community and City of Oceanside staff at Alamosa Park. Public Education also staffed a marine debris activity table for an Earth Day Fair at Sunset Elementary School in San Francisco. In June and July, Public Education staff teamed up with staff from the Coastal Commission's San Diego office to host a table at the San Diego County Fair's EcoHut to promote Coastal Access and "Coast For All" themes.



Figure 28: Coastal Commission booth at Whalefest in Monterey

Coast4u.org. The Commission's Public Education web pages provide detailed information on all the programs, contests, and resources offered to the public. They include Coastal Cleanup Day and Adopt-A-Beach® information, downloadable curricular materials, WHALE TAIL® Grant guidelines and application, how to purchase a WHALE TAIL® License Plate or donate to the Protect Our Coast and Ocean Fund, interactive maps on topics such as king tides and beach wheelchair availability, and more.

Social Media. Commission social media platforms provide the public with a way to keep apprised of opportunities and events and to interact on topics of mutual interest. Staff uses social media to raise awareness, share content, invite participation, communicate about programs, and help build a constituency centered on coastal stewardship and joy in our coast. Through social media, staff builds and strengthens connections with like-minded organizations and keeps our supporters engaged. Staff shares partners' posts, provides key information, and thanks sponsors and supporters. The Coastal Commission is currently active on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [Bluesky](#).

Email News Blasts. Staff maintains a mailing list of subscribers who have signed up at events, Coastal Cleanup Day, and [on our website](#) to keep in touch. Our targeted messages include grant opportunities, cleanup events, contest announcements and awards, as well as new program initiatives and education materials. More than 60,000 people are subscribed to Public Education Program email lists.

we're eight again

we're eight again. eight,
with sweat stains soaking through
our cotton tie-dye shirts. hand in hand,
we kick our shoes off, free
our toes and race down wet sand that grips
to us politely. pull together a pile of shells, wish
on a pebble, and throw it into the water.

we tell our mothers that we don't need
the sunscreen: we're happy being tan. our mothers
scold us as we meekly listen. Patting
down sides of our sand castle, we
shriek as the water inches nearer. We
snack on melting ice cream cones, crunch
on potato chips, let the crumbs run

down onto our swimsuits, and then let
the water pull us in. pretend that
we're dolphins and mermaids and all, last
one to the shore is a rotten egg. we sip
on smoothies and lemonade, pretend that
we're forty with an office job and once the sun
sets, we're eight again.

By Brianna Su, Grade 8
2025 Coastal Art & Poetry Contest

Appendix I: Partner Organizations

(If you are aware of an omission or correction, please let us know.)

Coastal Cleanup Day

Current Local Coordinators:

Accelerated Achievement Academy (San Benito)	City of San Leandro
Adopt-A-Highway	COASTWALK (Sonoma County)
CALTRANS Maintenance Program	County of Orange/OC Parks Volunteer Services
CALTRANS Stormwater Program	Delta Conservancy
Aeolian Yacht Club	East Bay Regional Park District
Alameda County Resource Conservation Dept.	ECOSLO
Alameda Marinas	Environmental Health Institute
Alameda County Clean Water Program	Explore Ecology
Alpine Watershed Group	Grand Marina
American River Parkway Foundation (Sacramento)	Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy
Ballena Bay Yacht Club	Golden Gate National Recreation Area
Ballena Isla Marina	Heal the Bay (Los Angeles County)
Big Bear Marina (San Bernardino)	I Love A Clean San Diego
Butte Environmental Council	Lake County Department of Water Resources
Cache Creek Conservancy	League to Save Lake Tahoe
Calaveras Big Trees State Park	Literacy for Environmental Justice (San Francisco)
California State Parks	Mendocino Land Trust
City of Berkeley Shorebird Park Nature Center	Mount Shasta Trails Association
City of Fremont	Napa Resource Conservation District
City of Livermore Water Resources Division	Northcoast Environmental Center (Humboldt)
City of Long Beach	Oakland Marinas
El Dorado Nature Center (Long Beach)	Oakland Yacht Club
City of Milpitas	Orange County Coastkeeper
City of Oakland Watershed Improvement Program	Port of Oakland
City of Pleasanton	Creek Connection Action Group (Santa Clara Co.)
City of Redding Community Creek Cleanup	Premier Mushrooms (Colusa County)

Putah Creek Council	The EcoMedia Compass (Imperial County)
Salmon River Restoration Council	The Watershed Project (Contra Costa County)
San Francisco Department of Recreation and Parks	Tolowa Dee-ni' Nation
San Joaquin County Public Works	Trinity County Resource Conservation District
San Joaquin River Parkway & Conservation Trust	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers - Bay Model Visitor Center (Marin County)
San Mateo County Environmental Health	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers – Black Butte Lake (Glenn County)
Santa Clara Valley Water District	US Forest Service Orleans Ranger Station (Siskiyou)
Save Our Shores (Santa Cruz & Monterey Counties)	Ventura County Coalition for Coastal & Inland Waterways
Sierra Nevada Alliance	Yuba County Dept. of Environmental Health
Silverwood Lake SRA	
Smith River Alliance Solano County RCD	
Sonoma Ecology Center	
Sutter County RCD	

Other Coastal Cleanup Day Partners:

CSU East Bay: Pioneers for Change	Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary
CSU Channel Islands: Center for Community Engagement	Marine Mammal Center
California Department of Public Health, Tobacco Control Program	Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary
California State Parks Foundation	Niagara Cares
CalTrans	Nordic Naturals
Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary	Ocean Conservancy
Cordell Banks National Marine Sanctuary	Oracle
	WHALE TAIL® License Plate

Adopt-A-Beach®

Año Nuevo State Reserve California State Parks	City of Long Beach El Dorado Nature Center
Center for Natural Lands Management	City of Newport Beach
Channel Islands Beach Community Service District	City of San Leandro
City of Berkeley Shorebird Park Nature Center	City of San Mateo
City of Huntington Beach	City of Santa Barbara, Creeks Division

City of Ventura, Partners in Progress for a Beautiful Ventura	National Parks Service
COASTWALK	Pacific Beach Coalition
Doheny State Beach Foundation	Point Reyes National Seashore
East Bay Regional Park District	Santa Barbara County Parks Department
Eco Warrior Foundation	Santa Cruz County Parks
Golden Gate National Recreation Area	Save Our Beach
Heal the Bay	Save Our Shores
I Love a Clean San Diego	Sonoma County Regional Parks
La Conchita Community Organization	Surfrider Foundation
Marin County Parks and Open Space	The Watershed Project
Northcoast Environmental Center	Vandenberg Air Force Base
	Ventura County Parks

Boating Clean & Green Program

CA State Parks Division of Boating and Waterways	The Boat US Foundation
CalRecycle	SF Estuary Project
Contra Costa County Public Works	The US Coast Guard Marine Safety Offices
The Bay Foundation	Recreational Boaters of California
SF Bay Conservation and Development Commission	CA Port Captains and Harbormasters Association
Pacific States Oil Spill Prevention Education Team	CA Department of Fish and Wildlife - OSPR
Marine Recreation Association	Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary
Pacific Inter Yacht Club Association	Lake Berryessa Partnership
San Joaquin County Department of Public Works	Morro Bay National Marine Sanctuary
Save Our Shores	San Francisco Dept. of the Environment
Southern CA Yachting Association	Seabird Colony Protection Program (National Marine Sanctuaries - Gulf of the Farallones)
The US Coast Guard Auxiliary	US Fish and Wildlife Service
The US Power Squadrons	
The State Water Resources Control Board	

California King Tides Project

California State Parks	Port of San Francisco
San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission	Navarro-by-the-Sea Center
The Exploratorium	MendoParks
San Diego Bird Alliance	Humboldt Waterkeeper
Friends of Five Creeks	Grassroots Ecology
City of San Rafael	Climate Action Santa Monica
Environmental Volunteers	Northcoast Environmental Center
Elkhorn Slough Reserve	Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition
UC San Diego Natural Reserve System	San Diego Coastkeeper
East Bay Regional Park District	American Canyon Community & Parks Foundation
Surfrider San Diego County	Stewards of the Coast and Redwoods
Friends of Rose Creek	City of Ventura
Tijuana River National Estuarine Research Reserve	Napa Valley Paddle
Cal Poly SLO College of Civil & Environmental Engineering & School of Marine Sciences	Sustainable Solano
Friends of Arcata Marsh	Greenbelt Alliance
Preserve Calavera	Central Coast Aquarium
Friends of China Camp	Batiquitos Lagoon Foundation
	Town of Corte Madera

Education Collaboration

California Environmental Education Interagency Network
Community Resources for Science
Climate Literacy Collaborative

Adopt-A-Beach® School Program and Kids' Oceans Day

Malibu Foundation for Environmental Education

I Love A Clean San Diego

Marine Science Institute

Orange County Coastkeeper

Community Action Partnership of Kern

Friends of the Dunes

Spectral Q

Marine Debris Policy and Statewide Coordination

California Ocean Protection Council

CalRecycle

Department of Toxic Substances Control

California State Parks

California Department of Public Health Tobacco Control Program

State Water Resources Control Board State Coastal Conservancy

CalEPA

California Department of Fish and Wildlife

California Fish and Game Commission

California Office of Environmental Health and Hazards Assessment

Caltrans

NOAA Marine Debris Program

Appendix II:
WHALE TAIL® Grants Program Annual Report
for Fiscal Year 2024-2025

WHALE TAIL® GRANTS PROGRAM

ANNUAL REPORT Fiscal Year 2024-2025



Figure 1: Enjoying the Klamath River with *Healing Waters Wilderness Adventures*

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Figure 2: Coastal Watershed Council's River Stewards program participants smile after caring for the Santa Cruz Riverwalk.

Photos in this report highlight FY 2024/25 WHALE TAIL® Grant projects.

BACKGROUND

The WHALE TAIL® Grants Program started in 1998, after the new WHALE TAIL® License Plate established a funding source for education and stewardship. For the last 27 years, the Coastal Commission's WHALE TAIL® Grants have supported experiential education and stewardship of the California coast and its watersheds, with an emphasis on engaging communities that have less access to such opportunities due to systemic and geographic barriers.

This report presents an overview of recent efforts to advance accessibility and inclusivity for the WHALE TAIL® Grants Program, with a focus on the Fiscal Year 2024/25 grants round, with additional analysis of the Fiscal Year 2023/24 grant cohort's experience after one year of grant management.

This report is an appendix to the Public Education Program's annual report for 2025.



Figure 3: *Oakland International High School* students bike along the coast.

The 2024/25 WHALE TAIL® Grants round was one of the largest in the program's history in terms of funding available and grants awarded. The Fiscal Year (FY) 2021/22 California State budget allocated \$10 million of General Fund local assistance to the Commission for WHALE TAIL® Grants, which must be encumbered by the end of FY 2025. This General Fund allocation has greatly expanded the reach of the grant program. Long-term funding for WHALE TAIL® Grants comes from

WHALE TAIL® Grants Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2024/2025

WHALE TAIL® License Plate sales and renewal fees, and the Protect Our Coast and Oceans “check box” on the California State tax form, which allows tax filers to contribute directly to support WHALE TAIL® Grants. In total from 1998 to 2025, the WHALE TAIL® program has distributed \$25.5 million to 1,074 grants.

WHALE TAIL® Grants must relate to the coast and ocean and fall into one or more of the following categories:

- Youth education programs
- Programs for educating the general public or adults
- Climate change education and stewardship
- Shoreline cleanup and enhancement programs with community involvement

Entities eligible to receive WHALE TAIL® Grants are non-profit 501(c)(3) organizations, projects of a non-profit fiscal sponsor, schools or districts, Federally Recognized Tribes and other California Native American Tribes as defined by Governor's Executive Order B-10-11, and other government entities. Grant projects must engage audiences in California and can take place anywhere in California.



Figure 4: Participants catch a wave on a Soul Surfer program with *Salted Roots*. Photo credit: Arielle Robles

FISCAL YEAR 2024/25 GRANT APPLICATION PROCESS

Commission staff conducted an extensive review of the entire WHALE TAIL® cycle in 2021, including the application and guidelines, how outreach is conducted, the experience for grant applicants in terms of getting needed information and providing feedback, and the internal process for selecting proposals. Staff continued these efforts into FY 2024/25. The ongoing goal is to find new ways to increase accessibility and inclusivity, address unnecessary burdens on applicants, and better align with program goals overall.

Staff sent an anonymous survey to FY 2023/24 grant round applicants for feedback on the application materials and submission process. Of the 219 applicants, 79 completed the survey. These respondents' suggestions, as well as staff experiences and ongoing grantee feedback, provided the basis for revisions to the FY 2024-25 [application](#) and [guidelines](#). Revisions included breaking the scoring criteria into finer point groupings, providing more examples of previously funded projects in the guidelines document, rearranging some of the questions for a more logical order, breaking down multi-part questions into bullet points, creating a simplified document for applicants to type in their responses to the application questions, and emphasizing that applicants can submit the required information in their own formatting and need not use the provided forms if they have any trouble with them.



Figure 5: Grant Union High School students meet a banana slug on a trip with *Sacramento Inspiring Connections Outdoors*

Outreach

Outreach for the FY 2024/25 competitive grants' deadline of November 4, 2024 began in late summer. Much of the promotion was via email, with outreach to hundreds of organizations throughout the state, including the following:

- California Native American Tribes as identified by the Native American Heritage Commission
- American Indian Education Centers
- California schools, from pre-k through adult as identified by California Department of Education
- California public libraries

- Community centers
- After-school/outside-of-school programs
- Service clubs for adults and youth
- Local governments and park districts
- Community colleges in urban and rural regions
- Hundreds of other organizations that work on issues of environmental justice, conservation, outdoor access, and education, collected through staff programs and research, as well as listservs relating to those topics.

The grant announcement was sent to 51,600 subscribers on the Coastal Commission's email lists and to approximately 1,300 people who subscribed to receive updates specifically about the WHALE TAIL® Grants. Coastal Commission social media accounts were used to promote the grant opportunity and share grant-funded programming successes of current grant-recipients. The WHALE TAIL® Grant is kept updated on the California State Library's [California Grants Portal](#), a comprehensive online database of California government grant opportunities, reaching those seeking funding who might not otherwise be aware of the California Coastal Commission.



Figure 6: An intern with the *Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy* shares their project at a farmer's market.

On September 12, 2024, staff led a webinar for prospective grant applicants to walk through the application process. This pre-application webinar has been a practice since 2017. The presentation assumed no prior knowledge and included substantial time for participants to ask questions. The video, presentation slides, and presenter script were posted on the WHALE TAIL® Grants webpage. 131 people attended the webinar and the presentation video was viewed 225 times.

The WHALE TAIL® Grants [webpage](#) includes a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section with responses to common questions about the grant program and application process, and prospective applicants are encouraged via the webpage and other grant outreach to contact staff directly to ask questions. Throughout September, October, and up until the deadline on November 4, 2024, Public Education staff were available for and engaged in frequent conversations with prospective grant applicants, explaining the grant priorities, clarifying application questions, and guiding them through the process. During this time, staff conducted 85 consultations with 80 different organizations, by phone, email, and video conference. Of these 80 organizations, 50 followed through to submit a grant proposal, 14 of which were funded. This is a funding rate of 28% compared to an 18% rate of funding in the total pool of applicants.

Staff received 299 grant proposals for the FY 2024/25 WHALE TAIL® Grants cycle, the highest number of proposals ever received. As in the previous year, applicants were invited to complete an anonymous survey on their application experience. **Out of 100 responses, 97% agreed or strongly agreed that the application questions were clear and easy to understand, and 98% agreed or strongly agreed that the submission process was clear and easy to do.** Many respondents praised the application process and the support provided to applicants.

Suggestions for improvement were incorporated into the FY 2025/26 cycle, such as:

- changing and reorganizing layouts for readability
- adding more detailed language for clarity
- rearranging application questions to better reflect the flow of the scoring criteria

“The...guidelines were very clear as well as the form and budget calculator. The Whale [Tail] Team felt approachable and the whole thing was as enjoyable as writing a grant can be. Or more so!”

“Overall, I find the Whale Tail application process to be one of the most flexible and clearly delineated grant programs to which our organization applies.”



Figure 7: Save California Salmon with Orleans Elementary during a trip to Wedding Rock.

Were the APPLICATION QUESTIONS clear and easy to understand?

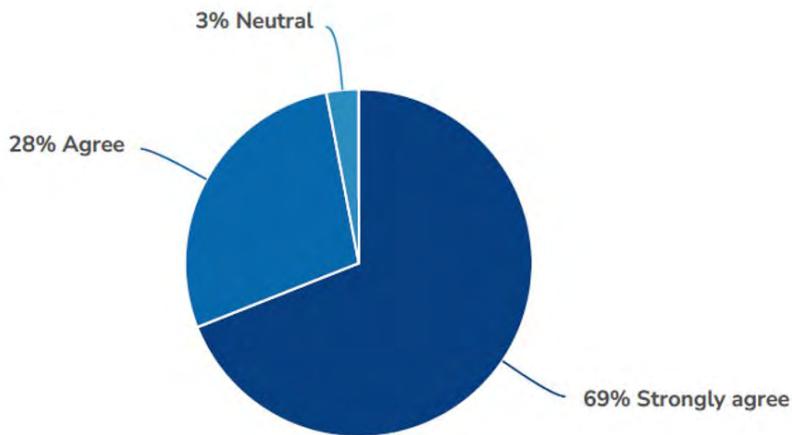


Figure 8: 69% strongly agree application questions were clear and easy to understand, 28% agree, 3% are neutral.

Was the process for SUBMITTING your proposal clear and easy to do?

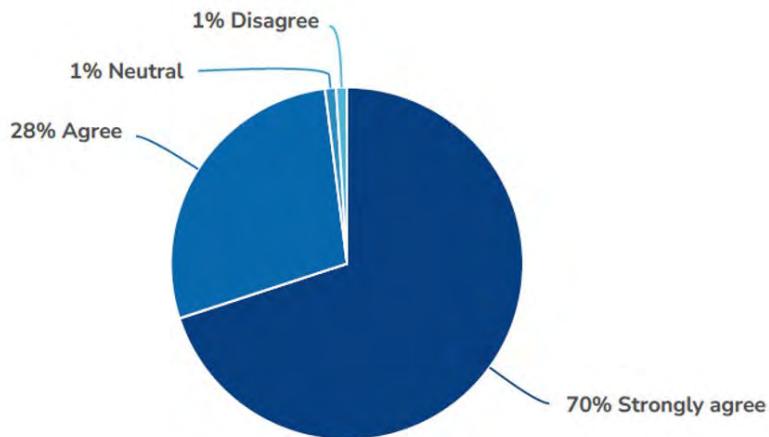


Figure 9: 70% strongly agree the submission process was clear and easy, 28% agree, 1% neutral, and 1% disagree.

Selection Criteria and Accepted Proposals

Out of the 299 proposals requesting a total of \$11.4 million, there were 53 proposals approved for funding, totaling \$1,749,305. Selection criteria included educational and environmental impact, engagement of communities that have historically received fewer marine education and stewardship opportunities, and value of the project to the community being engaged. The scoring criteria is included in [Appendix A](#). Organizations were notified in February 2025 and all grant agreements were signed by June 15, 2025. With a maximum grant of \$50,000 and a small grants category of \$25,000 or less, 43.4% of recommended grants were small grants. Approximately 14,486 direct participants are anticipated in the implementation of the 53 projects. Brief descriptions of the 53 grant projects are in [Appendix B](#).

FY 2024/2025 GRANTEES AT A GLANCE

Total number of grants: 53

Participants directly engaged (anticipated): 14,486

Projects by County

Some grant projects engage communities in one county, some in more than one county. Below lists the number of projects engaging communities in each county (or region, when there is dispersed outreach for a project).

- Statewide - 1
- Northern California - 1
- Alameda County – 7
- Contra Costa County - 5
- Del Norte County – 1
- Glenn County - 1
- Humboldt County – 3
- Kern County – 1
- Los Angeles County – 10
- Madera County – 2
- Marin County – 1
- Mendocino County - 2
- Monterey County – 3
- Napa County – 1
- Riverside County - 1
- Sacramento County – 2
- San Benito County – 1
- San Diego County – 7
- San Francisco County - 4
- San Luis Obispo County - 3
- San Mateo County - 3
- Santa Barbara County - 1
- Santa Cruz County – 1
- Shasta County – 1
- Siskiyou County – 2
- Solano County – 1
- Sonoma County – 3
- Trinity County – 1
- Tulare County – 2
- Ventura County - 2



Figure 10: Projects will engage communities in counties shaded in blue. 1 statewide project and 1 Northern California region project are not included in this map.

Projects engaging Inland Communities: 15

Projects engaging a Designated Rural Region: 13

Types of Grantee Organizations

- Local Education Agency (school, district, county office of education) - 6
- College/University - 1
- Government entity - 2
- Nonprofit 501(c)(3) – 44
 - Project of a nonprofit fiscal sponsor - 7

Size of nonprofits funded, based on annual organizational budget:

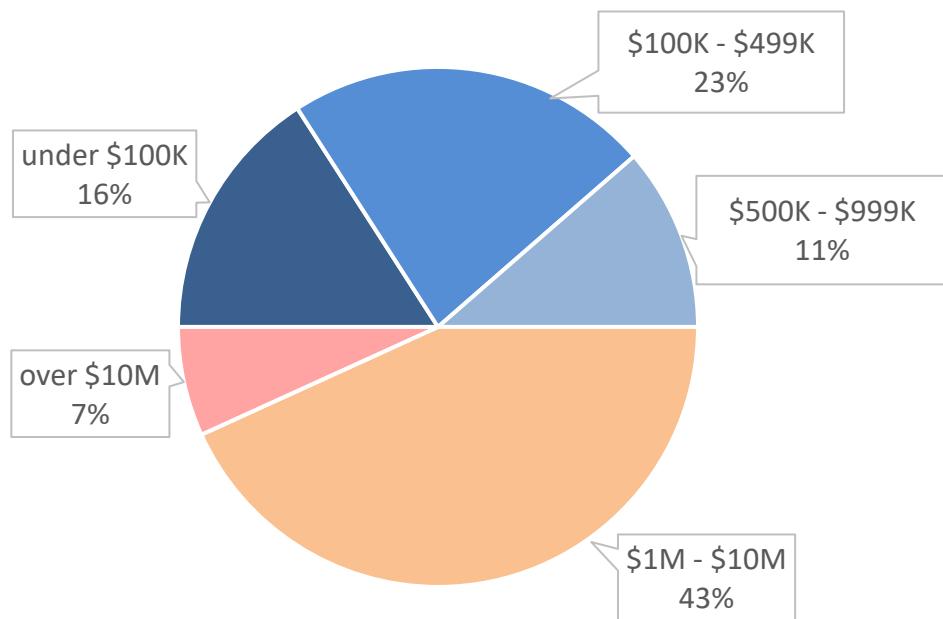


Figure 11: 16% under \$100K, 23% \$100K-\$499K, 11% \$500K-\$999K, 43% \$1M-\$10M, 7% over \$10M

GRANT MANAGEMENT SUPPORT

Advancing accessibility and supporting grantees is a priority in the ongoing administration of the approved WHALE TAIL® Grants. The following section discusses efforts made by staff during the grant cycle to support grantees, from providing many opportunities to ask questions, to reducing reporting burdens and offering capacity building trainings.

New Grantee Orientation Meetings

Two introductory online meetings were held in April 2024 for new grant recipients to go over the contracting process, invoicing procedures, and reporting, as well as to reinforce a relationship that welcomes questions and fosters ongoing communication in both directions.

Progress Reporting

Staff offers grantees the option to submit progress reports as a conversation rather than as a written document. In addition to a check-in on compliance with grant scope and timeline, these conversations are an opportunity to work through any challenges, share successes, and ask for assistance if needed. The Grant Manager files their notes from the conversation. A written submission is required for final grant reports.

“Providing an opportunity to submit mid-year reports virtually/verbally...made it way more meaningful for us to be able to talk about what we have been up to regarding the grant.”

Capacity Building Trainings and Coaching

Through a targeted grant to [Justice Outside](#), the Coastal Commission funded capacity building trainings for the FY 2024/25 WHALE TAIL® Grant recipients. Trainings have been available to each cohort of grant recipients since FY 2017/18. Justice Outside conducted a brief survey of the grantees' interests and needs and offered three, 3-hour online workshops (Foundational Courses) and two, 90-minute online group discussions (Learning Labs) based on the responses. The following training topics were offered:

- Equity centered curriculum and program development (Foundational Course & Learning Lab)
- Program evaluation and impact assessment (Foundational Course)
- Justice Centered Marketing & Communications (Foundational Course)
- Ethical and Human Centered Storytelling (Learning Lab)

Stipends were distributed to the grantees that participated in these optional trainings. Twenty-five grantee organizations participated in at least one of the training sessions.

“I felt the community in the session was very inclusive and supportive. The information was new to me and kept me engaged, giving me a lot to bring back to my organization.”

Grantee Networking Event

A pilot grantee networking event was organized on October 9, 2024, to provide a space for organizations to learn from and connect with each other. Grant recipients from FY 2021-22, 2022-23, and 2023-24 were invited, with 55 individuals participating. Because of the positive feedback from the pilot event, another networking event is planned for November 13, 2025. As of October 8, 2025, 34 people have registered for the event, which will have breakout sessions based on participant interest.



Figure 12: Participants gather for fun, community, and connection at *Black Surfers Collective's* Pan-African Beach Day.

SURVEY OF GRANT MANAGEMENT EXPERIENCE – FY 2023/2024

One year after their grants were issued, FY 2023/24 grantees were surveyed for feedback and suggestions for improvement. There were 44 respondents total. Of the 34 who were involved in the contract preparation and signing process, 94% said that support they received during contract initiation was clear. 86% said that support they received for invoicing and reporting was clear; and 98% said that over the course of their grant their Grant Manager was very available to them. In response to invoicing and reporting feedback, staff created additional resources, including Excel versions of the invoice template, a template for documenting participant stipends, and a list of progress report questions. Staff will continue to refine and improve the resources available for grantees based on ongoing feedback.

“[Staff were] extremely helpful and responsive. Applying for government grants can be intimidating for small grassroots organizations, and you all have made the whole process very easy for us to apply and invoice without it affecting our operations...You all have perfected the process to include every organization both big and small.”

“The clear communication and quick responses have been extremely helpful... I also appreciate that our grant managers are able to answer questions regarding our specific grant quickly and with an understanding of our specific grant’s purpose and goals.”

CONCLUSION

A key element of the WHALE TAIL® Grants program is a focus on reaching communities that face barriers accessing marine education and stewardship opportunities. Each year, staff systematically review grant processes and implement improvements to further this goal. Recent changes include modifications to the application materials and selection criteria, increased outreach, and development of more resources and methods of support for grant recipients. These changes, and the generous General Fund allocation in FY 2021, have supported implementation of more accessible coastal and marine education programs and increased the grant program's reach and impact throughout California.

Looking forward to the FY 2025/26 grant cycle, an overarching goal remains to remove barriers and create a program that is accessible and welcoming to a wide range of entities, including those without deep organizational resources or prior experience with government grants. The [California Ocean Protection Council](#) has generously approved \$2 million in funding for the FY 2025/26 grant cycle. This includes approximately \$1,000,000 for a dedicated Tribal Set-Aside and approximately \$1,000,000 for general pool grants to support projects that expand coastal access, education, cultural practices, stewardship, and resilience. The WHALE TAIL® Grants program will also offer an advance payment option to non-profit and tribal grantees for the first time, which has been long requested from grantees. Coastal Commission staff are committed to continually improving the program and are honored to manage the WHALE TAIL® Grants Program for the people of California.



Figure 13: Oceanside middle school students head to the waves with *Un Mar de Colores*

Appendix A: FY 2024/2025 Whale Tail® Grant Scoring Criteria

CRITERIA FOR SELECTING GRANT RECIPIENTS

Scoring Criteria	Points
Educational Impact and/or Environmental Improvement	25
Audience	15
Project Concept <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purpose (10 points) • Relevant and Creative (10 points) • Continuing, Building Capacity, or Creating Tools for Others (5 points) • Reasonable Cost (5 points) 	30
Proposal Content and Project Implementation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organization and Staffing (10 points) • Project Clarity, Feasibility, and Completeness (15 points) • Tracking and Assessment (5 points) 	30
Total Points Possible	100

Appendix B: Whale Tail® Grant Awards for FY 2024/2025

1. American Canyon Community & Parks Foundation, \$49,917

Project Title: Stream to Sea: Napa Watershed Education Initiative

Engaging Communities in: American Canyon, Napa County

Napa Valley Unified School District elementary students will engage in a watershed education program with in-class learning and field trips to the local wetlands for nature study and ecological restoration. An EV shuttle will be purchased to enhance trail access for disabled students.

2. Audubon California, \$48,286

Project Title: Coastal Leadership Program

Engaging Communities in: Los Angeles County

A cohort of students and early professionals will engage in a 6-month education and leadership program including field trips to coastal sites, guest speakers in coastal and marine careers, and a capstone project.

3. Barbareño Band of Chumash Indians / Committees for Land, Air, Water and Species, \$32,480

Project Title: Ikmen – Waves of Connection: Deepening our Relationship with Ocean, Community and Homeland

Engaging Communities in: Santa Barbara and Goleta

Coastal place-based, culturally responsive programming for Barbareño Chumash community members will include Chumash storytelling, traditional food practices, cultural history sharing, sacred site visits, and tule boat making and racing.

4. BIPOC Support Foundation, \$48,940

Project Title: From Your Neighborhood to the Coast: "Voices of Change"

Engaging Communities in: Escondido and San Marcos

An 8-week summer program will engage middle and high school students in hands-on environmental education, coastal field trips, and media production as they collaborate with professional mentors and local artists to create environmental art installations and a documentary about local environmental issues.

5. Black Surfers Collective, \$34,900

Project Title: Surf to Stewardship: Connecting Communities with the Coast

Engaging Communities in: Los Angeles

Youth will enjoy free surf lessons incorporating environmental education, Pan African Beach Days will take place twice monthly during summer and early fall, and Nick Gabaldón Day in Santa Monica will honor one of California's first known Black surfers.

6. BORP Adaptive Sports & Recreation, \$19,800

Project Title: Adaptive Kayaking Environmental Day Trips

Engaging Communities in: Alameda and Contra Costa Counties

Six kayak day trips, including on-the-water environmental education about natural and cultural history, will engage people with disabilities.

7. California Indian Museum and Cultural Center, \$50,000

Project Title: Tribal Youth Ambassadors: Being with Bears on the Coast
Engaging Communities in: Sonoma County

Tribal Culture Bearers and a wildlife ecologist will educate Native American youth about black bears in coastal and riparian zones, and the intersection of first foods and bear foods, through hands-on ecological stewardship and cultural arts activities, field trips, and a camping trip.

8. Center for ArtEsteem, \$50,000

Project Title: Waterways Exploration from the Mountains to the Coast
Engaging Communities in: East and West Oakland

A six-month program will engage 7th-12th grade youth in experiential education about protecting California's waterways and coastal and ocean ecosystems through classroom lessons and a week-long trip from the foothills to the Pacific Ocean, while connecting with Indigenous land stewards and water protectors.

9. Central Coast Aquarium, \$6,049

Project Title: Sea2School
Engaging Communities in: Nipomo

A new program will provide 6th grade students with four in-class lessons on ocean literacy and environmental stewardship and a field trip to Hazard Canyon Reef in Monaña de Oro State Park for exploration and biodiversity data collection.

10. City of Redding, \$50,000

Project Title: From Land to Sea: The Pathways of our Water
Engaging Communities in: Redding

The City's Martin Luther King Jr. Center will host a six-week summer camp to engage elementary-age youth in the interconnectedness of the Sacramento River and the Pacific Ocean through an art curriculum and weekly field trips.

11. Coastal Watershed Council, \$50,000

Project Title: River Stewards Program
Engaging Communities in: Santa Cruz

People experiencing homelessness will be offered weekly environmental education, stewardship opportunities, and services via a partnership with Downtown Streets Team. Training will emphasize plant and wildlife identification, stewardship principles related to habitat, and plant care as team members remove debris and invasive species, plant new native species, weed, water, and engage in other activities along the San Lorenzo River.

12. Crossing the Channel for Cause, \$20,000

Project Title: Santa Paula to the Sea
Engaging Communities in: Santa Paula

Middle grade classes will learn about the biodiversity and stewardship of the Santa Barbara Channel through a trip to Santa Cruz Island, a harbor cleanup, monitoring of sandy beach habitats, on-campus

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weather and trash surveys, a student bike repair program, and community outreach campaigns during a year-long program.

13. Earth Team, \$49,742

Project Title: Blue Ocean Internship 2025: Balancing Health & Wealth of the Ocean
Engaging Communities in: San Pablo, Richmond, Oakland

High school students will take part in a year-long ocean health project, including plastic pollution data collection, multiple field trips, campus awareness campaigns, and learning about the Coastal Act and how to participate in Coastal Commission hearings via public comment.

14. Eel River Watershed Improvement Group, \$7,789

Project Title: Creek Days Environmental Education Fair
Engaging Communities in: Humboldt County

A multiday environmental education fair will host over 300 students with redwood tours, educational booths on coastal watersheds and redwood forest habitats, and an ecological restoration project.

15. EGE Foundation, \$16,300

Project Title: EGE Out! Natural Resource Education Program
Engaging Communities in: Oak Park and Del Paso Heights in Sacramento County

A weekly afterschool program will engage students over three months as they explore STEAM careers, coastal and marine habitats, nonpoint source pollution, and coastal stewardship, including field trips to the beach, the Delta, and a local sustainable farm.

16. Elkhorn Slough Foundation, \$46,313

Project Title: Water Stories: Building Connections with Elkhorn Slough through Natural Dyes and Intergenerational Interviews

Engaging Communities in: Las Lomas, Seaside, and Arvin

Fourth and fifth graders from Las Lomas, undergraduate environmental science students from CSU Monterey Bay, and elder members of an Arvin art collective will contribute to this project to collect and communicate intergenerational “water stories” through interviews, art exhibits, and natural textile dyes, and an investigation of the response of natural dye colors to local water pollutants.

17. EmpowHer Institute, \$46,308

Project Title: Social Justice STEAM Camp
Engaging Communities in: Los Angeles County

A five-week, two-session summer program for girls of color will include coding projects focused on climate justice, community resilience, and environmental stewardship, a week on Catalina Island, and opportunities to gain PADI Scuba diving and ASA 101 Keelboat Sailing certifications.

18. Five Keys Schools and Programs, \$39,695

Project Title: Five Keys' Coastal Connections
Engaging Communities in: San Francisco Bay Area and Los Angeles County

Transition-aged and adult high school students will learn about marine science in a new curriculum unit, and participate in six interpretive and stewardship events such as beach exploration, aquarium visits, and naturalist-led walks.

19. Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy, \$49,765

Project Title: Linking Individuals to Their Natural Communities
Engaging Communities in: San Francisco Bay Area

High school students will take part in a six-week leadership, service learning, and career development program about habitat restoration, environmental justice, and coastal exploration including kayaking and camping trips.

20. Groundwork San Diego-Chollas Creek, \$49,379

Project Title: Southeastern San Diego Coastal Explorers Camp
Engaging Communities in: Southeast San Diego

A coastal exploration day camp for elementary age youth will include field trips to an aquarium, estuaries, bays, and the coast to learn about oceanography, biodiversity, climate, and stewardship, while also taking part in fishing, kayaking, swimming, and boogie boarding.

21. Healing Waters Wilderness Adventures, \$12,441

Project Title: Immigrant Youth Wilderness Leadership Development & Empowerment
Engaging Communities in: San Bruno

High school English language learners will participate in a week-long watershed science and leadership development camp as they raft the Klamath River, leading to opportunities to train as river guides for future camps.

22. Latino Outdoors, \$8,800

Project Title: Connecting Latinos to Whales
Engaging Communities in: Wilmington, Los Angeles, San Diego
Community members will enjoy an English/Spanish whale watching boat tour experience.

23. Literacy for Environmental Justice, \$49,823

Project Title: Coast & Climate Eco-Adventures Program
Engaging Communities in: San Francisco

Youth will take part in outdoor field lessons on coastal ecology, coastal climate impacts, and climate adaptation strategies; will work to build climate-resilient Bayfront habitats at Candlestick Point State Recreation Area; and will connect with the marine environment through kayaking and fishing. Two shoreline cleanups will engage the local community.

24. Living Coast Discovery Center, \$20,000

Project Title: Coastal Climate Champions
Engaging Communities in: San Diego County

Middle school students will learn about climate science and stewardship with a focus on the San Diego region, will restore habitat at San Diego Bay National Wildlife Refuge, and communicate what they've learned to the rest of their school community.

25. Los Courage Camps, \$19,890

Project Title: Los Courage Summer Camps
Engaging Communities in: Los Angeles

Free summer surf camps will provide recreation, ocean education, and environmental stewardship for Los Angeles youth.

26. Monarch School Project, \$50,000

Project Title: Outdoor Equity Program for Unhoused Youth

Engaging Communities in: Barrio Logan in San Diego

Activities such as swim lessons, surfing, tidepooling, and fishing will be part of an environmental stewardship and ocean education curriculum engaging unhoused youth during a 12-month program.

27. Morro Coast Audubon Society, \$19,808

Project Title: Fostering Environmental Awareness Through High School Education and Research

Engaging Communities in: Nipomo and Paso Robles

High school students will experience at least 10 classroom sessions on coastal and marine ecosystems, go on at least 4 field trips to coastal sites, collect and sort debris from local beaches, and receive college application support.

28. Mujeres de la Tierra, \$20,000

Project Title: Vamos a la Playa

Engaging Communities in: Los Angeles

Families will receive education on water health and stewardship and enjoy a beach field trip.

29. North Fork Elementary School / Chawanakee Unified School District, \$17,900

Project Title: The Watershed Life Cycle

Engaging Communities in: North Fork and Bass Lake in Madera County

Seventh and eighth grade students will learn about watersheds, participate in a cleanup of Bass Lake, and attend a multi-night academic field trip to Catalina Island, followed by a student-led educational assembly for the rest of the school.

30. Oakland International High School / Oakland Public Education Fund, \$30,252

Project Title: Oakland Newcomer Immigrant Youth Coastal Exploration, Belonging, and Stewardship Program

Engaging Communities in: Oakland

High school students will take part in hands-on coastal ecology and fieldwork through coastal field trips, coastal camping trips, coastal cleanups, and community-wide outdoor education and community-building events, as well as through classwork that integrates language learning and ecology.

31. Pacific Islander Community Partnership – Bay Area, \$49,700

Project Title: Pacific Ocean Guardians Climate Justice Program

Engaging Communities in: San Francisco Bay Area

A six-month educational initiative for youth will focus on climate justice, sea-level rise, and ocean conservation, with hands-on workshops, coastal site visits, beach clean-ups, seafaring navigation and protection history of Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders, culminating in a youth-led Pacific Ocean Guardians Climate Justice Summit.

32. Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy, \$20,000

Project Title: Student Naturalist Program for LAUSD Schools
Engaging Communities in: Los Angeles County

Third graders will take part in an in-depth coastal conservation education program in the classroom, culminating in a field trip to White Point Nature Preserve and Cabrillo Beach.

33. Point Molate Alliance / Blue Frontier, \$48,145

Project Title: Richmond Youth Leadership Program
Engaging Communities in: Richmond

Youth will be empowered to take leadership roles in coastal public education and park planning about East Bay Regional Park District's newest park, Point Molate, through workshops on topics including Ohlone history, eelgrass ecology, sea level rise and nature-based solutions, community science projects, public speaking and media training, as part of a six-week summer program.

34. Project Avary, \$50,000

Project Title: Equity, Access & Empowerment for Children with Incarcerated Parents
Engaging Communities in: Northern California

Children of incarcerated parents will enjoy weeklong residential camp at Point Reyes, overnight coastal retreats, and day programs that include activities such as surfing, kayaking, fishing, and tidepooling, with two Family Unity Days and an annual Family Camp on the coast.

35. Queer Surf / Green Cities Fund, \$50,000

Project Title: Project Ocean Access
Engaging Communities in: Los Angeles County

Scholarships will increase accessibility for low-income adults to single-day and overnight surf lessons and beach programs designed for sustained ocean belonging and connection.

36. Reef Check Foundation, \$49,806

Project Title: Dive into Science for North Coast Tribes
Engaging Communities in: Mendocino and Sonoma Counties

Northcoast region tribal members, ages 16 and above, will receive Open Water, Advanced, and Rescue SCUBA training and become eligible to be Reef Check Citizen Scientist Divers as they explore Traditional Ecological Knowledge, ancestral ties to the ocean, and MPA monitoring and management.

37. River Jim Learning Solutions, \$19,204

Project Title: Mountains to the Sea
Engaging Communities in: Willows in Glenn County

Middle school students will explore rivers and reservoirs during canoe and camping trips as they learn about the Sacramento River watershed and their interconnectivity with the Pacific Ocean.

38. Sacramento - Inspiring Connections Outdoors / Sierra Club Foundation, \$20,000

Project Title: Three-Day Adventures at the Coast for Underserved Sacramento Youth
Engaging Communities in: Sacramento County

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Youth and young adults will enjoy three-day outings at a coastal hostel, with exploration of marine habitats, hikes in coastal forests, and coastal wildlife observation.

39. Sacred Places Institute for Indigenous Peoples / Social and Environmental Entrepreneurs Inc., \$49,444

Project Title: Indigenous Youth Environmental Justice Program

Engaging Communities in: Riverside and Los Angeles

Indigenous youth will take part in workshops on coastal emergency preparedness; visit Chumash, Tongva, and Acjachemen lands for traditional games, Indigenous stories about marine life, and coastal stewardship discussions; screen films that explore Indigenous perspectives on marine issues; host beach cleanups and an Earth Day celebration; tour local MPAs; and take part in a six-week environmental education camp as part of this year-round program.

40. Salinas Community Science Workshop / Community Initiatives, \$10,278

Project Title: Salinas Students as Teachers of Our Shores

Engaging Communities in: Salinas

Middle school youth will take part in an overnight camping trip to Sunset State Beach and learn together about the physics, biology, chemistry and geology of the shore. This leadership group will then serve as guides and teachers for a day trip to the beach for families and other youth.

41. Salmon River Restoration Council, \$49,969

Project Title: Headwaters to Ocean Program

Engaging Communities in: Somes Bar & Orleans

Mid-Klamath region youth will explore the connection between the Klamath River and the coast through in-class lessons and a three-day coastal camping trip where they will learn from Yurok Tribal members and Cal Poly Humboldt Marine Lab naturalists, and will then present their learning at a watershed education fair in their community.

42. Salted Roots / Social Good Fund, \$49,723

Project Title: Soul Surfer Community Surf and Environmental Stewardship Programs

Engaging Communities in: Alameda, Contra Costa, San Francisco, and San Mateo Counties

Youth and community members will develop ocean and surfing skills through a four-week summer camp and through community program days throughout the year. Other community events will focus on environmental stewardship with tidepooling, beach cleanups, and ecological restoration.

43. San Diego Children and Nature, \$37,018

Project Title: Promoting Coastal Health by Engaging Teachers in Watershed Exploration

Engaging Communities in: San Diego County

Over a period of nine months, a cohort of formal educators will visit and explore six local ecosystems, with a focus on ocean, climate, and watersheds, by directly engaging in science practices to increase environmental literacy and improve outdoor teaching techniques.

44. Save California Salmon, \$20,000

Project Title: North Coast Tribal Youth Environmental Education Program

Engaging Communities in: Del Norte, Humboldt, Mendocino, Siskiyou, and Trinity Counties

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Northcoast tribal community members will enjoy an Indigenous Science camp at Sue-Meg State Park, Yurok Tribal members will enjoy a traditional Canoe Camp, and Northcoast schools will take part in field trips focused on dam removal impacts, estuaries, and tidepools.

45. Sweetwater Spectrum, \$3,678

Project Title: Sweetwater Spectrum Ecology Club

Engaging Communities in: Sonoma

Residents of an independent living community for autistic adults will take part in a series of environmental learning workshops with watershed art projects and film screenings, organize beach and creek cleanups, and enjoy educational hikes, nature observation, and other outdoor recreation activities.

46. Telesis Academy of Science and Math, \$5,100

Project Title: Aqua Adventures

Engaging Communities in: West Covina

TK-8th grade students and their families will experience the ocean through a family engagement night featuring hands-on activities, interactive demonstrations, and experiments related to marine biology, water conservation, and human impact on the California coast.

47. Un Mar De Colores, \$45,748

Project Title: Oceanside Ocean Stewards After School Program

Engaging Communities in: Oceanside

An 18-week, three-days-a-week afterschool program for middle school students will provide ocean-based environmental education and surf therapy experiences along with an introduction to multiple environmental career pathways and academic tutoring.

48. University Corporation at Monterey Bay, \$20,000

Project Title: Immersive VR Dive Curriculum for At-Risk Youth: Investing in Future Ocean Stewards

Engaging Communities in: Monterey and San Benito Counties

An immersive virtual reality dive curriculum and community science program studying the local offshore environment will engage youth in juvenile detention centers and court schools.

49. Valley Children's Hospital of Valley Children's Healthcare, \$20,000

Project Title: Diving Into Discovery: Marine Education and Stewardship for Foster Youth

Engaging Communities in: Tulare County

Youth in the foster care system and their Court Appointed Special Advocates will learn about the ocean through marine-themed crafts, lessons, and a virtual reality dive followed by a visit to Monterey Bay Aquarium and Pacific Grove tidepools.

50. Ventura County Resource Conservation District, \$49,165

Project Title: Ag Family Summer Program

Engaging Communities in: Oxnard and El Rio

Youth and parents from fieldworker households will enjoy field trips to Santa Cruz Island, Ventura Harbor, local tide pools, and beaches, fostering coastal stewardship and knowledge of coastal career paths.

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51. Wild Wonder Foundation, \$14,750

Project Title: Watershed: Learning That Flows From Nature

Engaging Communities in: Plumas County

Sixth graders will take a four-day trip from the mountains to the Pacific, following the path of water through the watershed. A documentary film will document the trip and profile Plumas County Unified School District's exemplary environmental education program.

52. Woodlake Unified School District, \$33,000

Project Title: From the Central Valley to California's Shores: Woodlake Channel Islands Restoration and Education Project

Engaging Communities in: Woodlake in Tulare County

High school students will take a five-day trip to the Channel Islands to learn about coastal watersheds and conservation, conduct habitat restoration, and enjoy tidepooling, snorkeling, and kayaking.

53. YES Nature to Neighborhoods, \$20,000

Project Title: Coastal Conservation Corps Educational Activities

Engaging Communities in: Richmond

Teens will plan and implement two bioblitz events in Richmond for youth, adults, and families to investigate coastal ecosystems and learn about the species that inhabit them, leading to conservation efforts to protect the local shoreline.