

FACT SHEET

A HEALTHY OCEAN FOR ALL: THE PROMISE OF 30X30 FOR CALIFORNIA

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Californians love the ocean. More than half of all Californians visit the coast at least once a year for recreation.¹ While a trip to the beach may call up visions of swimming, visitors come for a variety of activities. They sightsee, walk the shore, explore tide pools, watch birds, scuba dive, surf, and kayak.²

However, our ability to enjoy and benefit from California's unique coastal and ocean ecosystem is under threat. Climate change and biodiversity loss are transforming ocean and coastal habitats. For example, in the past 75 years, approximately 90 percent of California's tidal marshes have been lost and 90 percent of historical eelgrass beds have disappeared.³ For decades, California's kelp forests—which

support close to 1,000 species—suffered early impacts from overfishing.⁴ In recent years, these same kelp forests have seen declines and dramatic ecological shifts caused by climate change-related marine heat waves and the resulting disappearance of sea stars.⁵ These changes not only negatively impact ocean health and marine populations but decrease quality of life for Californians.



To protect biodiversity and strengthen climate resilience, scientists believe we must conserve at least 30 percent of the ocean and 30 percent of land and inland waters by 2030, a global goal known as 30x30.⁶ In 2020 Governor Newsom ensured that California would lead the way in this effort when he signed an executive order committing to the 30x30 goal.⁷ California’s pledge includes conserving ocean life through marine protections, ensuring equitable input in implementing 30x30, and increasing access to the ocean and coast for *all* Californians.

STRONG MARINE PROTECTED AREAS ARE THE MOST EFFECTIVE PATH TO 30X30

To support thriving biodiversity and climate-resilient marine ecosystems under the 30x30 initiative, the state should create, strengthen, or expand highly and fully protected Marine Protected Areas (MPAs).⁸ Strong marine protected areas are the sea’s equivalent of a national park. They provide safe havens where ocean life can rebound from stresses of harmful industrial activities such as fishing, dredging, and large-scale aquaculture. MPAs also serve as an insurance

policy in the face of climate change. They safeguard diverse, healthy populations of plants and animals so that they are more resilient and can better adapt to changing ocean conditions.⁹

THE MOST EFFECTIVE TYPES OF MPAS

To be most effective at conserving biological diversity and enhancing the resilience of marine ecosystems to climate change, MPAs need to be either “highly protected” or “fully protected” from environmentally damaging activities.¹⁰

- Fully protected areas do not allow extractive or destructive activities, and all abatable impacts are minimized.
- Highly protected areas allow only light extractive activities such as minimal fishing and low-impact aquaculture, with all other abatable impacts minimized.

Fully or highly protected MPAs encourage greater species abundance, size, and reproductive output; restore ecosystem health; and promote increased resilience and adaptation to climate and other changes.¹¹

“Protecting our playground and making it more accessible to everyone is how we make sure a healthy and abundant ocean is available for future generations.”

–Lizelle Jackson, cofounder of Color the Water



30X30 MEASURES MUST EMPHASIZE EQUITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

California’s ocean belongs to everyone, yet not everyone in California has equal access to it. Communities of color are three times more likely than white communities to live in nature-deprived places.¹² The 30x30 initiative is an excellent opportunity to improve access to nature, particularly California’s coasts and ocean. In fact, as part of his 30x30 pledge, Governor Newsom made a commitment to “expand equitable outdoor access and recreation for all Californians” and to “engage stakeholders across California’s diverse communities.”¹³

To achieve these 30x30 equity goals, the state should take the following actions:

Establish strong marine protections. Effective marine protections are a prerequisite to equitable access. By making the ocean healthier and more resilient to climate change, stronger marine protections preserve everyone’s ability to enjoy these areas and ocean life through a variety of recreational activities far into the future.

Establish a 30x30 Ocean Equity Advisory Panel. An Ocean Equity Advisory Panel should be created to develop an ocean-focused summary document that provides insight into ways to protect and support communities that are most vulnerable to sea level rise, increase and expand access to the coast, and improve water quality. This panel should include ocean-focused tribal and environmental justice leaders, community-based organizations, and academic experts.

Establish programs to facilitate ocean access. The 30x30 initiative has the potential to break down barriers that have prevented or discouraged underserved communities from fully enjoying coastal opportunities. Programs should address equity across all dimensions of ocean access, from having the resources to get to the coast to the quality of people’s experiences once there. These programs should include, among other opportunities, free or subsidized transit

and parking for inland communities, funding for initiatives that teach youth from underserved communities water skills and safety, and robust water quality testing and reporting to ensure all Californians have access to a safe and healthy beach experience. Decision makers should also provide more clarity on metrics used to determine accessibility to conserved areas.

Ensure that at least 50 percent of implementation funding goes toward equity programs. At least 50 percent of all 30x30 implementation funding should be appropriated to equity-based work, with the goal to improve marginalized communities’ ability to participate in and enjoy the benefits of California’s coast and ocean. This includes community-led land acquisition and restoration; equitable access programs; and recreation, education, climate resilience, or adaptation grant programs that directly benefit Black, Indigenous, and people of color and environmental justice communities.

The ocean benefits us all. It belongs to us all. We all have a stake in ensuring its protection.





Californians enjoy the ocean and the California coast in large numbers every year and in a variety of ways.

- Researchers estimate that Californians take more than 109 million trips every year to the state’s spectacular coastline.¹⁴ Most come to the coast simply to experience being by the sea.¹⁵
- The Vans U.S. Open of Surfing in Huntington Beach has long been the largest professional sports competition festival in the world, drawing hundreds of thousands of attendees each year.¹⁶ The allure of California’s beaches increased during the pandemic, as evidenced by a boom in surfing.¹⁷
- Boating is very popular in the state. There are just under an estimated 2.5 million recreational boats in California, approximately 75 percent of which are nonmotorized.¹⁸ More accessible paddle sports like kayaking and stand-up paddleboarding are connecting increasing numbers of people to the ocean.
- Sightseeing on the water through activities such as whale and nature cruises, kayak tours, and cocktail and dinner cruises is building in popularity. In 2019, 216 businesses employed more than 1,800 people in the “scenic water tours” industry.¹⁹
- Overall, California’s ocean tourism and recreation economy employed more than 446,000 people in 2019.²⁰
- Marine fishing is an important recreational activity for a dedicated portion of California residents. Surveys have found that one-fifth of Californians engage in some type of marine fishing or collecting of marine species in their lifetimes.²¹ This includes residents and nonresidents who fish for free off public piers and jetties for sustenance, the vast majority of whom are from underserved communities.²²
- California’s Pacific Coast Highway 1—the iconic highway adjacent to the ocean—draws scores of visitors to the coast for its breathtaking views, providing a connection to nature. For example, approximately 1.5 million vehicles pass over the out-of-the-way Big Sur River Bridge each year.²³
- Collectively, ocean-based recreational activities help buttress California’s \$28 billion ocean tourism and recreation economy, making significant contributions not only to coastal communities but to inland communities as well.²⁴ Money spent on coastal tourism helps support the inland economy through the manufacturing of recreational equipment and supplies for the hotel and restaurant industries, for example.

ENDNOTES

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