



Memo

Date: February 13, 2025

To: Members of the State Coastal Conservancy

From: Amy Hutzal, Executive Officer
Evyan Borgnis Sloane, Deputy Executive Officer

CC: Legislative Oversight Members

Subject: 2025 Strategic Plan Progress Report

In December 2022, the Coastal Conservancy (“Conservancy”) adopted the [2023-2027 Strategic Plan](#). This is the second progress report on implementation of that Strategic Plan covering activities from January 2023 through January 2025, approximately 40% of the way through the five-year Strategic Plan timeframe.

In recent state budgets, the Governor and Legislature have appropriated substantial resources to the Conservancy primarily to fund nature-based climate adaptation. Due to these resources, the Conservancy has made significant progress achieving the objectives of the 2023-2027 Strategic Plan, especially those targets related to sea level rise planning and conservation of land. We have also made excellent progress on our equity objectives. With the passage of the 2024 Climate Bond (Proposition 4) on November 5, 2024, the Conservancy anticipates continuing to achieve swift and significant progress in the coming years.

There are four goals in the Strategic Plan with measurable objectives under each goal. The fifth goal is qualitative and focuses on our organizational objectives. This report provides an update on progress against each goal and all the objectives. There is a description of some example projects to illustrate how the Conservancy is achieving its objectives and a discussion of progress or challenges achieving the objectives.

Goal 1 – Prioritize Equity

The Coastal Conservancy is committed to addressing injustices and inequities along the California coast. There are four objectives under this goal, the Conservancy has made significant progress on each of them.

Objectives	Target	Progress	% Done
1.1.1. Commit Funding to Benefit Systemically Excluded Communities	40%	66%	---
1.2.1. Projects that Return Power to Tribes	35	20	57%
1.3.1. Projects with Meaningful Community Engagement	60	63	105%
1.4.1. Projects that Incorporate Workforce Development	40	26	65%

The Coastal Conservancy’s 2023-2027 Strategic Plan targets spending 40% of the agency’s funding to benefit systemically excluded communities and California Native American tribes. To-date, two thirds (66%) of Conservancy funding supported projects that benefit systemically excluded communities. The Conservancy also set a target of implementing 60 projects that meaningfully engage systemically excluded communities and in 2024, the Conservancy exceeded that goal with a total of 63 projects.

The Conservancy is committed to improving and expanding our efforts to return power to tribes, including prioritizing tribal partnerships in our work. The Conservancy has funded 20 projects since 2023 in collaboration with Native California tribes. This includes funding of \$2,505,000 to the Mendocino Land Trust to acquire the 157-acre Bell Point coastal blufftop property for the eventual return to the tribally chartered non-profit organization, Kai Poma, for tribal ownership and management. Kai Poma intends to protect the traditional tribal lands, employ Traditional Ecological Knowledge in the management of the lands, and increase public and recreation access with a public access easement to the Mendocino Land Trust to build new California Coastal Trail.

Goal 2 – Enjoy the Coast

Improving the ability of all Californians to access and enjoy the coast is central to the Conservancy’s mission. This includes objectives related to Explore the Coast, Explore the Coast Overnight, and Coastal Stories programs that support coastal experiences to foster joy and belonging for people and communities who face challenges accessing the coast. It also includes accessibility improvements for people with disabilities, trail building, and amenity enhancements to reduce barriers and create new recreational resources so everyone can enjoy the coast.

The Strategic Plan has fourteen objectives under this goal. The table below shows progress to date on each of these objectives. As of January 2025, the Conservancy has exceeded targets for six of the fourteen objectives. Progress on Objectives 2.1.1 and 2.4.2 is slow mostly because there has

been less one-time funding for access. While the number of Explore the Coast Grants has only reached 33% of our target to date, it’s worth noting that we are well on-track for meeting our target for number of Explore the Coast Priority Community Members served.

Objectives	Target	Progress	% Done
2.1.1. Number of Explore the Coast Grants	100	33	33%
2.1.2. Number of Explore the Coast Priority Community Members Served	35,000	14,289	41%
2.2.1. Number of Coastal Stories Program Grants	16	14	88%
2.3.1. Number of Projects that Expand Accessibility	35	43	123%
2.4.1. Miles Trail Planned	125	511	409%
2.4.2. Miles Trail Built	80	24	32%
2.4.3. Miles Great Redwood Trail Rail-banked	231	170	67%
2.5.1. Recreation Facilities & Amenities Planned	40	170	425%
2.5.2. Recreation Facilities & Amenities Built	30	35	117%
2.6.1. Pier and Waterfront Projects Planned	8	10	125%
2.6.2. Pier and Waterfront Projects Built	4	7	175%
2.7.1. Explore the Coast Overnight Projects Planned	8	2	25%
2.7.2. Explore the Coast Overnight Projects Built	4	1	25%
2.7.3. Pilot Projects that Expand Explore the Coast Overnight Projects Partnerships	2	0	0%

Since 2023, 33 Explore the Coast projects were awarded grants. An example project is a grant to My Day Counts to provide adults with physical cognitive, and/or emotional disabilities with enjoyable and adaptive coastal exploration experiences in Orange County. Staff estimates that these 33 projects will engage over 14,200 people. Of these people, project partners estimate that the program will serve over 11,600 low-income Californians, 12,300 people of color, 2,000 youth who are homeless or in foster care, approximately 2,450 people for whom English is not their first language, and at least 4,000 people with physical, cognitive, and/or emotional disabilities.

The Conservancy awarded \$646,000 to plan two segments of the Great Redwood Trail in the Eel River Canyon, totaling 13.6 miles. An additional 5.8 miles of Great Redwood Trail funded by the Conservancy is currently under construction, 1.6 miles in Willits and 4.2 miles in Eureka.

The Conservancy awarded \$3,000,000 to the East Bay Regional Park District to construct an additional eight acres of parkland amenities at the Tidewater Day Use Area of Martin Luther King, Jr. Regional Shoreline in the City of Oakland. The new park’s infrastructure was designed to be sea level rise resilient and includes natural play structures, an outdoor classroom, a new parking lot, a boat storage area, drinking foundations, a new restroom, and approximately 1,000 planted trees and shrubs.

The Conservancy awarded \$6,600,00 to the San Diego Port District to restore beach and salt marsh habitat and build a new waterfront promenade at Harbor Park, a 25-acre urban park in the City of

Chula Vista. Chula Vista is at great risk from sea level rise and the community is systemically excluded with limited access to the coast and open space. The waterfront promenade will include a connection to the existing Bayshore Bikeway, trashcans, and benches. The habitat restoration has been designed to provide sea level rise resilience to the park.

In 2024, the Conservancy awarded \$150,000 to two non-profit organizations, TreePeople and Inland Empire Waterkeeper, for projects that bring youth and their families to natural areas of the Santa Ana River under the Conservancy’s Explore the River grant program. In 2023, the Conservancy authorized over \$4,600,000 for several projects along the Santa Ana River in Riverside County to develop the Santa Ana River Trail and Parkway. Once completed, the Trail will extend over 100 miles from the San Bernardino Mountains westward to the coast.

Explore the Coast Overnight projects continue to move forward, but progress continues to be slow. We are working with State Parks and the Coastal Commission to advance additional projects in the coming years and have completed a five-year project update report for the program. This year, the Conservancy granted \$865,000 to the County of Santa Cruz to prepare plans to construct low-cost cabins and associated amenities at Greyhound Rock County Park in Santa Cruz County. The project involves developing plans for approximately 8-15 camping cabins and associated amenities. More information can be found on the Explore the Coast Overnight Five-Year Project Update report here: <https://scc.ca.gov/files/2025/01/LCOA-Five-Year-Update-2025.pdf>.

Goal 3 – Protect & Restore the Coast

The Conservancy works to ensure the coast is protected and restored for existing and future generations. We support projects and activities that protect and enhance the coast’s scenic, natural, and agricultural resources, which are vital to the state’s economy and quality of life, as well as to the wildlife that depends upon them.

There are seven objectives under this goal. With the significant one-time funding, the Conservancy has made major progress on many of these objectives including a 40% increase in the acres of habitat restored or enhanced compared to 2023.

Objectives	Target	Progress	% Done
3.1.1. Acres of Land Conserved	50,000	72,457	145%
3.2.1. Habitat Restoration or Enhancement Projects Planned	85	42	49%
3.2.2. Acres of Habitat Restored or Enhanced	11,000	6,266	57%
3.2.3. Wildlife Corridor Protection or Enhancement Projects	15	7	47%
3.2.4. Anadromous Fish Habitat or Watershed Projects	30	18	60%
3.3.1. Projects to Support Working Lands	30	10	33%
3.4.1. Projects to Cut Green Tape	8	4	50%

We have already far exceeded our five-year objective for acres of land conserved and will continue to support land protection and restoration projects with 2024 Climate Bond funds. In Alameda County, the Conservancy provided The Trust for Public Land with \$3,000,000 to acquire the 430-acre Newark Baylands property, which includes 250 acres of wetlands and open water and 181 acres of uplands for future restoration, sea level rise resilience, public access, and tribal cultural uses. This leveraged a grant of \$25,000,000 by the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority, which is staffed by the Conservancy and others.

The Conservancy awarded \$8,000,000 to the Big Sur Land Trust to restore 67 acres of wetland and upland habitat and construct public access improvements at Carr Lake in the City of Salinas, Monterey County. This project was developed through extensive community engagement and will increase access to open space for a systemically excluded and park-poor community, restore critical wetland habitat, and construct stormwater treatment green infrastructure to improve water quality.

The Conservancy awarded \$35,000,000 to The Nature Conservancy to complete permitting and implement the first phase of the Ormond Beach Restoration and Public Access Plan. The project will restore approximately 650 acres of wetland and dune habitat in the City of Oxnard. This project will enhance hydrologic connectivity, restore ecosystem functions, create diverse microhabitats, and enhance ground water recharge. It will also create many public access features that will provide much-needed coastal access to the community of Oxnard.

The Conservancy awarded \$30,000,000 to the Southwest Wetlands Interpretive Association to implement the Tijuana Estuary Tidal Restoration Program II, Phase I, consisting of restoring 85 acres of wetlands and associated habitats and enhancing public access at the Tijuana River estuary in San Diego County. The Tijuana Estuary is one of the last relatively intact estuarine ecosystems in southern California. However, the estuary has been subjected to continued degradation over time. Activities affecting the estuary include river channel modification, damming, cross-border sewage flows from Mexico, unseasonal freshwater flows, and excessive sediment deposition. This project is a large restoration designed to reverse degradation and preserve the remaining resources at the Tijuana Estuary.

Due to slow progress on habitat restoration/enhancement last year, Conservancy staff focused on this objective and increased restored acreages by 40% in 2024. The Conservancy has made less progress on supporting working lands and will focus on this objective in the coming years.

Goal 4 – Climate Ready

The Conservancy is funding and supporting local communities, nonprofits, public agencies, and other partners to plan multi-objective climate change adaptation strategies along the coast and implementation of nature-based climate adaptation projects to mitigate the current and future impacts of a changing climate including rising seas, intense storms, and catastrophic wildfires.

Between July 2022 and February 2025 (including projects considered today), the Conservancy Board will have authorized more than \$530 million of General Fund and Greenhouse Gas Reduction Funds for coastal protection and sea level rise adaptation projects. We have made significant progress on our Climate Ready objectives with four of the seven objectives already exceeding targets.

Objectives	Target	Progress	% Done
4.1.1. Sea Level Rise Projects Planned	50	53	106%
4.1.2. Sea Level Rise Projects Implemented	30	27	90%
4.1.3. Sea Level Rise Adaptation Interpretive or Educational Projects	8	4	50%
4.2.1. Wildfire Resilience Projects Planned	20	17	85%
4.2.2. Acres of Wildfire Resilience Projects Implemented	5,000	11,017	220%
4.3.1. Multi-benefit, Nature-based Climate Adaptation Projects Planned	20	20	100%
4.3.2. Multi-benefit, Nature-based Climate Adaptation Projects Implemented	15	21	140%

In Marin County, the Conservancy awarded \$1,403,200 to the Town of Tiburon to implement a nature-based sea level rise adaptation strategy of restoring estuarine beach habitat that will buffer wave and storm energy and protect the adjacent community.

In Santa Monica Bay, the Conservancy awarded \$7,275,650 to the Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains for planning a multi-benefit project with habitat restoration, resource protection, public access and recreation, and climate resilience in approximately 23 acres of lower Topanga State Park.

In San Francisco, the Conservancy awarded \$1,000,000 to the Recreation and Parks Department to conduct technical studies, community engagement, and conceptual alternatives to prepare Upper Great Highway for sea level rise impacts. Now that the city has voted to permanently close this section of highway to cars, this project will look at how to adapt the site to deliver the greatest recreation, ecological, and climate adaptation benefits.

The Conservancy has made significant progress achieving its objectives under the wildfire resilience program and implementing multi-benefit nature based climate adaptation projects. The wildfire resilience program has built organizational capacity and workforce development at the local and regional level to implement forest health and fire risk reduction projects that include activities such as prescribed burns, fuel breaks, and cleared ladder fuels. For example, the Conservancy awarded \$4,000,000 to the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy to implement fuels reduction in Tomales Bay State Park and in the systematically excluded community of Marin City using ecological restoration focused treatments that promote regeneration, healthy habitats, low density forests all of which reduce wildfire impacts. The project also supports a workforce development program focused on improving access to sustainable wage careers in the fire services and natural resources management for underrepresented groups through trainings, mentorship, and wraparound services.

Goal 5 – Organizational Goals

The fifth goal relates to building and maintaining an organization with the capacity and skills to implement the Strategic Plan. There are six qualitative objectives under this goal. Below each objective there is a brief description of progress during the first two years of the Strategic Plan.

The first objective of this goal is to support staff development and retention. The Conservancy's staff is our most important resource.

Objective 5.1.1 Provide training for staff to expand skills and knowledge related to tribal engagement, access for people with disabilities, and equity.

The Conservancy continues to provide staff training to expand skills and knowledge related to equity, tribal engagement, and access for people with disabilities. We have held eight internal staff trainings, including two trainings on how to best incorporate workforce development into projects. In addition, staff are encouraged to participate in our Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion committee.

All Conservancy staff are encouraged to participate in the Secretary of Natural Resources speaker series, and staff have attended various workshops and conferences on wetlands restoration, fisheries restoration, land conservation, trails and greenways, and working with tribes.

Objective 5.1.2 Support retention efforts including opportunities to increase salaries, professional growth opportunities, and continued growth of an inclusive workplace.

The Conservancy supports training and professional growth for its employees. In addition to the training discussed under Objective 5.1.1, we provide training opportunities for all employees. We have run in-house trainings on subjects such as Equitable Workforce Development, Indigenous Placemaking Along Trails, Tribal Monitoring and Tribal Cultural Resource Protections, Parks Related Anti-Displacement Strategies, and Education for Equity. We have also started sharing culturally relevant videos during all-staff meetings for each national cultural month, such as the recent Native American Heritage month.

We are actively implementing our workforce plan, including promotional opportunities, wellness activities for staff, and exit interviews with departing staff.

Objective 5.1.3 Support recruitment and hiring efforts that ensure the candidate pools for Conservancy jobs reflect California's diversity, and implicit bias in hiring processes is addressed.

The Conservancy has made extensive changes to our recruitment and hiring practices to increase the diversity of our candidate pools. There are ongoing efforts to review and continue to improve our hiring practices. One specific strategy has been to change the entry level classification we use

when hiring project managers. In 2020, 82% of the Conservancy's project managers were white. In 2024, 59% of the project managers were white. In support of this objective, we also hosted hiring webinars for vacancies at the Conservancy to help applicants develop successful job applications.

Objective 5.2 under this goal relates to transparency and accountability, sharing information about our work and accomplishments with stakeholders and the public.

Objective 5.2.1: Provide annual JEDI Report that includes an audit and review of lessons learned from our tribal engagement and other JEDI initiatives.

We provided our first JEDI Progress Report to the Board in June 2024 covering the period 2018-2023. We will bring the next report to the Board in September 2025. Staff continue to collect information and input for the review of our tribal engagement lessons learned.

The 2024 JEDI Progress Report is posted on the Conservancy's website here:

https://scc.ca.gov/webmaster/ftp/pdf/sccb/2024/2406/20240606Board04A_JEDI_Report.pdf

Objective 5.2.2: Provide annual Financial Report to the Conservancy Board and the public.

The most recent annual financial report was presented to the Conservancy Board in September 2024. It is posted on the Conservancy's website:

https://scc.ca.gov/webmaster/ftp/pdf/sccb/2024/2409/20240905Board4A_SCCFinancialMemo202409.pdf

Objective 5.2.3: Provide annual report on Strategic Plan progress, with qualitative metrics and highlights of major accomplishments.

The first annual progress report under this Strategic Plan was presented to the Conservancy Board in April 2024. It is posted on the Conservancy's website:

https://scc.ca.gov/webmaster/ftp/pdf/sccb/2024/2404/20240418Board4B_Strategic_Plan_Progress_Report.pdf. This report is the second annual progress report under this Strategic Plan.