



# CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMISSION NOAA COASTAL MANAGEMENT FELLOW PROGRAM

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Application for 2024 - 2026:  
*Advancing Offshore Wind Energy Development in California  
through Sound Science and Meaningful Engagement*



*Photo: California Energy Commission*

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## 1. Background and Introduction

California is experiencing the impacts of climate change at a rapid pace. In just the past several years, the state has also suffered its largest wildfires in recorded history, severe drought coinciding with record low snowpack, and increasingly frequent heat waves and major storm events (Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment and California Environmental Protection Agency, 2018). These many manifestations of climate change are already causing far-reaching impacts on California’s residents, resources, economy, and infrastructure, and are only expected to worsen in the coming decades. To combat the adverse effects of climate change in the coastal zone, the California Coastal Commission leads multiple adaptation efforts across the state. To date, the Commission has produced critical guidance documents with policy direction for local governments on sea level rise planning and adaptation and has awarded over \$12.4 million to local governments through its Local Assistance Grant Program to fund Local Coastal Program (LCP<sup>1</sup>) updates focused on sea level rise and climate resiliency. These adaptation efforts are critical to facing current and projected climate change impacts. However, without significant and immediate reductions in global greenhouse gas emissions, the impacts of climate change are only expected to continue and accelerate. California is an international leader in policies to mitigate the impacts of climate change through reducing greenhouse gas emissions and expanding the use of renewable energy to generate electricity. In 2006, the state passed the Global Warming Solutions Act, which required a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions to the 1990 level by 2020 (Nunez, Chapter 488, Statutes of 2006). The current target, set by Senate Bill 32 is 40 percent below the 1990 level by 2030 (Pavley, Chapter 249, Statutes of 2016) with carbon neutrality by 2045, including cutting greenhouse gas emissions by 85% below 1990 levels (CARB, 2022 Scoping Plan for Achieving Carbon Neutrality).

Transitioning to 100% renewable energy, including offshore wind energy, is a necessary step to slow the pace of climate change and it is critical that this transition be done in a way that protects California’s invaluable coastal and marine resources. As California considers how to approach offshore wind development along its coast, careful planning and comprehensive examination of potential impacts, meaningful outreach to tribal and environmental justice communities, and a commitment to adaptive management are central to ensuring coastal resource protection. The efforts made to understand, avoid, and minimize impacts now will also help inform future floating wind project design.

The California Coastal Commission’s role in the state’s development of renewal offshore wind energy is critical. For projects in federal waters, the Commission has two opportunities to weigh in on offshore wind through its federal consistency and state regulatory process. The first occurs prior to a Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) lease sale. At this stage, the Commission assesses whether the leasing process, including any reasonably foreseeable development within a proposed lease area, is

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<sup>1</sup> Local Coastal Programs or LCPs are land use planning documents that lay out a framework for development and coastal resource protection within a city or county’s coastal zone area. They are prepared by the local jurisdiction and submitted to the Coastal Commission for certification.

consistent with Chapter 3 policies of the Coastal Act. The second opportunity occurs after specific projects are proposed. Here, the Commission reviews the specific development proposed and must issue both a coastal development permit for project components in the Commission's direct jurisdiction (i.e., state waters and some onshore areas) and a consistency certification for project components in federal waters. While the Commission has worked steadily to implement its federal consistency authority over these processes, there is more to do than agency resources can handle and staff have struggled to make timely progress on several priority goals, such as implementation of a working group to address offshore wind impacts on coastal fisheries, providing guidance on appropriate engagement with coastal communities, especially environmental justice and tribal communities, and development of a research and monitoring program to assess the impacts of offshore wind development. For the 2024 National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Coastal Management Fellowship, the Commission seeks a forward-thinking fellow to be integrated as a core staff member with the offshore wind and environmental justice and tribal liaison teams. The fellow will have a far-reaching impact throughout the state by playing a critical leadership role in building out the Commission's offshore wind program. As a member of the team, the fellow will also work with the agency's environmental justice and tribal liaison teams to further the agency's implementation of its innovative Environmental Justice Policy and Tribal Consultation Policy as it relates to offshore wind development. Meaningful engagement is a central component of achieving environmental justice for communities and tribes who disproportionately experience environmental burdens and are often left out of the decision-making process. The fellow will also play a central role in the team's work on developing monitoring, research, and mitigation approaches for offshore wind. The fellow's work will fill a critical gap in efforts to make greater progress on these priority areas in line with the agency's 2021-2025 Strategic Plan and its 309 Assessment and Strategy.

## **2. Goals and Objectives**

The goal of the Commission's NOAA Coastal Management Fellow proposal is to create a mitigation strategy and policy guidance critical for the agency's long-term implementation of its offshore wind program, and environmental justice and tribal consultation policies. Policy research and tasks related to these issues will be another component of the fellow's workplan and will be co-developed with the fellow based on the interests and skill sets they bring to the position. Objectives for this proposal include:

- 1) Work collaboratively with the Commission's Offshore Wind and Fisheries Working Group (Working Group) to draft a Strategy to avoid, minimize, and mitigate impacts to fisheries from offshore wind development. Work with Commission staff and California Native Tribes to develop a similar strategy for tribal fisheries. When lessees submit their projects to the Commission for review, they will have to demonstrate how their projects and fisheries mitigation agreements are consistent with this Strategy.
- 2) Develop guidance materials on meaningful environmental justice and tribal community engagement and inclusion in the context of offshore wind development and related port

development. Develop related guidance on Commission expectations for developers of industrial port projects related to offshore wind.

- 3) Participate in project review and state coordination, including reviewing and responding to lessees' survey and site assessment plans, and coordinating with other agencies to implement the state's strategic plan to achieve 2-5 gigawatts of offshore wind energy by 2030 and 25 gigawatts of offshore wind energy by 2045.
- 4) Participate in development of a guidance document for staff on mitigation approaches and potential mitigation projects to consider when reviewing future offshore wind project proposals.

### **3. Milestones and Outcomes**

Phase 1: August 2024 – January 2025 (Months 1-6): Review and understand existing Coastal Commission guidance on offshore wind, environmental justice, tribal consultation, and fishing agreement products and information. Become oriented to the Commission's existing community engagement practices. Complete fellow work plan. Begin attending Working Group meetings and sub-meetings, and begin drafting offshore wind and fisheries strategy (Working Group Strategy) chapters and materials. Become familiar with the interagency coordination landscape in offshore wind and start working with agency partners to implement the state's strategic plan for offshore wind. Review lessee survey and site assessment plans for the five existing leases. Some travel throughout the state may be necessary during this phase. Travel expenses will be covered by the host.

Phase 2: February 2025-December 2025 (Months 7-17): Work with the Working Group and Commission staff to continue to develop and finalize the Strategy. Begin working with environmental justice and tribal communities in Humboldt, Morro Bay, Long Beach, and other relevant locations to develop guidance materials for project proponents on appropriate engagement and/or consultation in the context of offshore wind projects. Continue interagency coordination and review of materials submitted by the lessees. Begin working with Commission staff to develop a guidance document on mitigation approaches and projects for offshore wind development. Review and revise fellow workplan. Travel to district offices and meet with community groups. Travel expenses will be covered by the host.

Phase 3: January 2026-July 2026 (Months 18-24): Work with Commission staff to prepare a staff recommendation to the Commission on the Working Group Strategy.<sup>2</sup> Participate in bringing the Strategy to a Commission hearing before the end of the fellowship term. Finalize the guidance for project developers on engagement with environmental justice and tribal communities. Continue to participate in and assist with finalizing the offshore wind mitigation guidance for Commission staff.

Final Products or Outcomes: (1) Final, adopted Strategy to avoid, minimize, and mitigate impacts to offshore wind and fisheries. (2) Participation in five full working group meetings, and additional sub-group meetings, (3) Guidance on engagement with environmental justice and tribal communities for

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<sup>2</sup> As per the requirements of [State Senate Bill 286](#), the Commission shall review, modify if necessary, and adopt the Strategy at one of its publicly-noticed hearings.

project developers, (4) Lead review of lessees survey plans and site assessment plans, (5) Participation in developing mitigation guidance for offshore wind projects.

#### **4. Project Description**

The fellow will complete the project in three phases. Phase 1 will focus on fellow orientation and integrating the fellow into the work of the Offshore Wind and Fisheries Working Group, specifically drafting of the Working Group Strategy. Phase 1 will also integrate the fellow into the interagency coordination work being done to implement offshore wind in California, including survey plan and site assessment plan review from offshore wind developers. The second phase of the fellowship will be focused on finalizing the Working Group Strategy and receiving approval from the working group. Also during the second phase, the fellowship will include the development of a guidance document on engaging with environmental justice and tribal communities in the context of offshore wind and related developments. Similarly, the second phase will include development of a guidance document on mitigation approaches and projects to address offshore wind impacts. The third phase will focus on bringing the Working Group Strategy before the Commission for its consideration at a public hearing, and finalizing the environmental justice and tribal engagement guidance. If time allows, the fellow will also assist with finalizing the mitigation guidance during the third phase. The fellow will primarily be working with the agency's statewide Ocean Energy Resources and Federal Consistency Unit, but will also work collaboratively with the Federal Programs Manager, Environmental Justice Unit, and the agency's Tribal Liaisons. Woven throughout the duration of the two-year fellowship, the fellow will participate in extensive interagency coordination and development of the state's approach to implementing its strategic plan for offshore wind.

#### **Phase 1 (Months 1-6) – Orientation, review background materials; begin work with Offshore Wind and Fisheries Working Group and drafting strategy chapters; develop fellow work plan**

Mentors will orient the fellow to the Coastal Commission and its staff, laws and policies, and the regulatory processes governing development in the coastal zone. The fellow will also review information such as staff reports that illustrate the breadth of projects and issues that come before the agency. This includes materials that address offshore wind, environmental justice and tribal issues, the Coastal Act, the Coastal Zone Management Act, the agency's 2021-2025 Strategic Plan, and other key documents. Finally, the fellow will be introduced to the offshore wind team, the environmental justice unit, tribal liaison team, and the Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion team, and will be included in relevant ongoing internal meetings. During this initial phase of the project, the fellow will also be introduced to the Environmental Justice Policy and Tribal Consultation Policy, as well as the existing materials and resources the environmental justice unit has developed. The fellow will also be introduced to prior fishing mitigation agreements that the Commission has accepted in the past, as orientation for the work of the Working Group. The fellow will familiarize themselves with the Commission's current approach to outreach and engagement with affected communities as well as district staff work on environmental justice issues, including understanding the agency's approach to tribal consultation and intersections with environmental justice. Once familiar with the existing resources, the fellow will begin working with

the Working Group, including preparing drafts of the Strategy the working group is charged with developing. Phase 1 will also include development of a two-year work plan that reflects the fellow's interests and skills, including the potential for engaging on other Commission projects as interest and time allows, which will be updated at least every six months.

**Phase 2 (Months 7-17) – Finalize Working Group Strategy, begin guidance on engagement with environmental justice and tribal communities.** The fellow will work with the working group and mentors to finalize the Working Group Strategy. This will include participation in up to three meetings of the working group, with additional meetings of the sub-group likely. During this phase, the fellow will also engage with environmental justice and tribal communities in areas that are likely to experience port development from offshore wind and will work with environmental justice and tribal community representatives to prepare guidance for project proponents on appropriate environmental justice engagement, as it relates to their projects and offshore wind under the Coastal Act. The fellow will continue their engagement with interagency partners on implementing the state's strategic plan for offshore wind and their work coordinating with lessees on the site assessment phase of offshore wind development. The fellow will also begin participating in the development of a mitigation guidance document with staff that outlines the likely impacts of offshore wind and identifies mitigation approaches and projects that would mitigate for those impacts.

**Phase 3 (Months 18-24) – Bring Working Group Strategy before the Commission for consideration, finalize guidance on engagement with environmental justice and tribal communities.** The fellow will work with mentors and Commission staff to prepare a staff recommendation on adopting the Working Group strategy, respond to comments, and present the strategy to the Commission at a public hearing. The fellow will also work with Commission staff to finalize the guidance on engagement with environmental justice communities prior to the end of the fellowship term. Finally, the fellow will assist with finalizing the mitigation guidance document, as time allows. The candidate's work during their fellowship will live on after the program ends in several ways. The Strategy developed by the fellow, in concert with the working group, will be used to evaluate whether offshore wind developers' project design and mitigation packages are sufficient to address fisheries impacts. This strategy will also be used, if future leases off the coast of California are issued, as a starting point for addressing fisheries impacts. The environmental justice and tribal engagement guidance developed by the fellow will be provided to and discussed with project proponents to ensure they understand the importance of environmental justice and tribal engagement as it relates to their project, and the agency's expectations when projects are submitted. Finally, the mitigation guidance will be used by staff to determine the best methods of mitigating project impacts and to write conditions for future projects.

## **5. Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice**

The project objectives seek to advance the principles of diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice by working with targeted environmental justice and/or tribal communities and individuals to enhance and expand the Commission's meaningful engagement as it relates to offshore wind energy development in

California. The fellow will also work with the Commission's tribal liaisons to improve relationship with California Native American Tribes. The fellow's work will result in protocols and materials that will enhance the Commission's and partner agencies' ability to consider environmental justice and tribal considerations in offshore wind planning, permitting, and projects. Through this work the fellow will take a leadership role in engaging with and supporting underserved and historically marginalized communities; reducing procedural barriers to participating in the Commission's regulatory process these communities face, including by broadening access to information; and analyzing and addressing the needs of environmental justice and tribal communities related to offshore wind, coastal hazards, and public access.

## **6. Fellow Mentoring**

The Commission has a very strong and proven commitment to NOAA's Coastal Management Fellowship Program as demonstrated by the many fellows the agency has had over the course of the program. The agency continues to cope amidst a steady number of retirements and we are looking for new staff to carry on the Commission's important mission under the Coastal Act. The program has introduced exceptional candidates to the Commission, which has hired many of its fellows. The supervising mentor will be the Commission's Federal Programs Manager Ashley Reineman, with supporting mentorship and primary project supervision from Senior Environmental Scientist, Holly Wyer and Energy, Ocean Resources, Federal Consistency Program Supervisor, Joseph Street, and the Energy, Ocean Resources, Federal Consistency, and Technical Services Program Director, Cassidy Teufel. The supervising mentor will be responsible for the fellow and provide project direction, time management, and guidance as the candidate works with other Commission staff members on project implementation and other tasks. The supporting mentors and project supervisor, as well as project team members, will be available for day-to-day management of specific tasks and activities and coordination assistance amongst agency staff and with outside partners. The fellow will have the opportunity to meet with the supervising mentor on a regular basis during which time the mentor will review completed work, update the fellow's work plan as needed, and facilitate collaboration with other agency staff. The fellow will also have direct and frequent access to other mentors and project team members for direction and guidance.

This project offers a challenging and exciting opportunity for professional development as an integral member of the offshore wind and environmental justice teams, both of which are small interdisciplinary teams at the agency. The fellow will also have the opportunity to collaborate with other Commission staff members working closely with community groups and individuals, California Native American Tribes, local jurisdictions, and other partners to include environmental justice and tribal considerations into planning and regulatory decision making. The fellow will have specific responsibilities and is expected to complete the tasks as outlined in the project description to help fill critical gaps in the Commission's offshore wind, environmental justice, and tribal relations work.

The fellow will be included in all opportunities offered to the Commission's professional staff. The fellow will have the opportunity to participate in and contribute to the Commission's broader tribal consultation efforts and climate work, including various special projects such as tribal consultation and

environmental justice community engagement on the proposed port development to support offshore wind in Humboldt Bay. This work could extend to multi-state agency collaborative efforts including the Energy Commission's Tribal Working Group on offshore wind and others. The fellow will also have access to training and educational materials provided by the Commission as well as other professional development opportunities outside of the agency and through conversations about the fellow's interests and professional development goals. The fellow will be supported and guided in ways to meet those goals during their two years at the agency.

## **7. Office Environment**

Most of the agency's staff is on a hybrid work schedule working ~2 days in the office and ~3 days from home. The fellow could be based at our headquarters in San Francisco, or in one of our district offices such as Ventura where there is a supervising mentor. Regardless of location, the fellow may need to travel to meet with staff in other offices and with other state agency representatives, community groups, local governments, etc. Extent of travel will depend on available budget, scheduling constraints, and other factors. The fellow will be expected to check-in weekly or bi-monthly with the supervising mentor and will be included in standing meetings for all applicable projects. The fellow will be included in all virtual and in-person all-staff, or district-specific office meetings and gatherings. The Commission will provide networking opportunities with sister agencies and through conferences, when available. The fellow will be provided with all necessary hardware and software to ensure their successful completion of the project, including a laptop, keyboard, mouse, and monitor.

## **8. Project Partners**

This project will be highly interactive and require contact with a broad range of experts including federal, state, and local agency staff, environmental justice and tribal communities, academics, and others. The fellow will be expected to work with all these groups to complete the work described. The fellow will participate in biweekly calls of the interagency offshore wind team, which includes a wide range of agencies with expertise in energy planning, transmission, and natural resources management, including: the California Energy Commission, the California Public Utilities Commission, the Governor's Office of Planning and Research, the Ocean Protection Council, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the California State Lands Commission, among others. As described above, the fellow will also participate in quarterly meetings of the Offshore Wind and Fisheries Working Group, with additional sub-working group meetings, and outreach meetings as-needed with environmental justice community leaders. The fellow will also participate in NOAA Office of Coastal Management-facilitated calls with representatives from California, Oregon and Washington to discuss offshore wind development and federal consistency review along the west coast. The fellow will also have the opportunity for inter-state collaboration through the Coastal States Organization calls on offshore infrastructure, which brings together coastal states around the country to discuss offshore wind. Finally, the Commission staff collaborates closely with both the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management and the National Marine Fisheries Service in its review of offshore wind activities, and the fellow will participate

in these informal collaborations with federal agencies. In addition to this, the fellow will participate in biweekly staff meetings and additional internal team meetings as-needed.

### **9. Cost-Share Description**

The \$15,000 cost-sharing element of this proposal will be funded from the Coastal Commission's California Coastal Management Program federal assistance under the Coastal Zone Management Act. In addition, the state will provide the fellow with other in-kind services, including office space and general supplies, computer equipment, training and mentoring, telephone, and some travel costs, depending on budgetary constraints. The Commission will prepare its federal grant budget to ensure that the \$15,000 is available for the fellow over the two-year period. If the fellow is based in the agency's headquarters office, the Commission will also provide a monthly public transit subsidy equal to what is given to state employees if needed.

### **10. Strategic Focus Area**

The proposed project addresses multiple components of all three Strategic Focus Areas. Under "Healthy Coastal Ecosystems" the fellowship will help "engage and convene meaningful partnerships with federal, state, territorial, and local agencies, as well as nongovernmental organizations . . . to . . . address the scope and scale of coastal ecosystem challenges" and "increase and enhance opportunities for the public . . . to understand and appreciate coastal ecosystems, and motivate community involvement in resource management" by engaging in all aspects of California's offshore wind energy development process and working with stakeholders and targeted communities to enhance and expand the Commission's outreach and engagement with environmental justice communities.

Under "Resilient Coastal Communities," the fellowship will "foster engagement and coordination among public- and private-sector partners to leverage resources", "increase understanding of the equity issues that arise as communities face coastal hazard and climate impacts, and foster inclusion and meaningful assistance for all" as well as "provide coastal hazard- and climate change-related . . . guidance, training, and technical assistance to people working to enhance community resilience and to communicate risk to the public" by working on offshore wind related issues with the public, stakeholders, project developers, and federal and state agencies, and analyzing and addressing the needs of environmental justice communities related to offshore wind.

Finally, under "Vibrant and Sustainable Coastal Economies" the fellowship will "increase the understanding of the social and economic implications of coastal and ocean management approaches" and "protect economic investments along the coast, including important ecological, cultural, and historical areas, for public enjoyment" through the fellow's work on offshore wind energy development in California.