



Staff Recommendation

December 12, 2023

Item 5

Action Item:

Consideration and Approval to Disburse Funds to Establish a Pilot Ocean Conservation Corps Program

Maria Rodriguez, Climate and Environmental Justice Program Manager

Recommended Action: Authorization to disburse up to \$1,500,000 to the California Conservation Corps to establish a pilot Ocean Corps Program, in collaboration with local conservation corps and partners, to enhance coastal resilience and provide equitable workforce development opportunities for young adults.

Location: Fortuna, Long Beach, and San Diego regions

Strategic Plan Goals and Objectives: This project would implement strategic targets in Goal 2: Advance Equity Across Ocean and Coastal Policies and Actions. Specifically, within these objectives: Objective 2.2: Enhance Engagement with Underserved Communities, and Objective 2.3: Improve Coastal Access.

Equity and Environmental Justice Benefits: Enhanced coastal habitat, ocean and coastal resiliency and access opportunities, engagement with underserved communities, local community capacity-building structures, such as: ocean and coastal workforce development and training, youth training, career pathways, internships, and stewardship programs.

Findings and Resolution:

Staff recommends that the Ocean Protection Council (OPC) adopt the following findings:

“Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibit(s), OPC hereby finds that:

1. The proposed projects are consistent with the purposes of Division 26.5 of the Public Resources Code, the California Ocean Protection Act;

2. The proposed projects are consistent with the Budget Act of 2022 which included a \$50 million General Fund appropriation for grants or expenditures for resilience projects that conserve, protect, and restore marine wildlife and healthy ocean and coastal ecosystems; and
3. The proposed projects are not ‘legal projects’ that trigger the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Public Resources Code section, section 15378.”

Staff further recommends that OPC adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 35500 *et seq.* of the Public Resources Code:

“OPC hereby approves the disbursement of up to \$1,500,000 to the California Conservation Corps to establish a pilot Ocean Corps Program, in collaboration with local conservation corps and partners, to enhance coastal climate resilience and provide equitable opportunities for young adults.

This authorization is subject to the condition that prior to disbursement of funds, California Conservation Corps shall submit for the review and approval of the Executive Director of the OPC detailed work plans, schedules, staff requirements, budgets, and the names of any contractors intended to be used to complete the projects, as well as discrete deliverables that can be produced in intervals to ensure the projects are on target for successful completion. All projects will be developed under a shared understanding of process, management and delivery.”

Executive Summary:

Staff recommends disbursement of up to \$1,500,000 to the California Conservation Corps (CCC) to establish a California Ocean Corps Pilot Program. Building on CCC’s extensive experience leading environmental programs that provide skills and work training for young adults ages 18 -25, OPC funding will support the CCC in implementing the Ocean Corps Pilot Program within three local programs operating in coastal regions (CCC Fortuna District, Conservation Corps Long Beach, and Urban Corps of San Diego). The Ocean Corps Pilot Program will advance equitable opportunities and workforce capacity by engaging Corpsmembers in hands-on coastal resilience and conservation efforts while providing training, mentorship, internship opportunities, and other

types of support to young adults, particularly those from underserved¹ communities. The Program will directly facilitate placement in green jobs and will be tailored to meet local and regional needs while advancing OPC's strategic goals address climate change, increase equity, and protect coastal and ocean biodiversity.

Project Summary:

Background:

The CCC, as the largest and oldest conservation corps in the nation, has extensive experience mentoring and empowering youth through natural resource work and climate resiliency initiatives. The mission of conservation corps is to train and provide positive work experiences and service opportunities for young adults 18-25 years old and veterans up to age 29 as they enhance and protect California's natural resources and communities. At the heart of conservation corps are the Corpsmembers: young adults seeking to improve their lives while serving their communities and stewarding the environment for future generations. Since its inception in 1976, the CCC has provided more than 1.6 million hours towards fish habitat improvement projects and Corpsmembers have planted more than 24.6 million trees statewide. Approximately 3,000 Corpsmembers from all over the state enroll in the CCC annually and reflect the diversity of California.

Corpsmembers—the young adults who enroll in the CCC—join for a year of paid service to the State of California and work on environmental projects and response to natural and human-made disasters. Crews engage in over 900 projects annually and work with and for more than 250 local, state, and federal agencies each year.

Community conservation corps (“local corps”) were established soon after the CCC. The CCC operates over two dozen locations statewide and regularly coordinates with certified local corps to provide training, education, and employment opportunities to Corpsmembers. The first local corps

¹ The terms, “Disadvantaged”, “Marginalized”, and “Underserved” provided by Senate Bill 1000 (Leyva) (Ch. 587, Stats. 2016) added *Government Code Section 65302(h)(4)(A)*, expanding the definition of “disadvantaged communities” for the purpose of general plans to mean “an area identified by the California Environmental Protection Agency pursuant to Section 39711 of the Health and Safety Code or an area that is a low-income area that is disproportionately affected by environmental pollution and other hazards that can lead to negative health effects, exposure, or environmental degradation.” This staff recommendation may use the terms interchangeably, as it intends to encompass not only the definitions contemplated by Senate Bill 1000, but also to include other low-income and minority populations that are disproportionately burdened by or less able to prevent, respond, and recover from adverse environmental impacts.

was founded in 1982 in Marin County. There are currently 14 certified local corps in California; they are either private nonprofits or operated by municipal government branches (e.g., county office of education). California local corps have impacted 40,000 young adults statewide since they began operations over four decades ago. The CCC and local corps have worked closely for decades championing shared priorities in positive youth development and environmental conservation.

Project Summary:

This funding will establish an Ocean Corps Pilot Program, a specialized statewide youth workforce development program focused on coastal habitat restoration and climate resiliency, helping conserve ecosystem health and addressing immediate threats posed by climate change to the state's biodiversity and people. By partnering with local corps, the CCC will leverage existing relationships and resources to tailor the Ocean Corps Pilot Program to meet local and regional needs and considerations while advancing OPC strategic priorities to address climate change, increase equity, and protect biodiversity. OPC funding will support CCC in establishing the Ocean Corps Pilot Program within three existing corps locations: the Urban Corps of San Diego and local Conservation Corps Long Beach, both certified local corps; and the CCC Fortuna District.

The Ocean Corps Pilot Program will contain three main phases: planning, project work, and internship/employment. Ocean Corps Corpsmembers will be recruited from existing local conservation corps centers and CCC districts as well as external youth development and conservation organizations. Through the Pilot Program, numerous partners including nonprofits, local governments, conservancies, tribal entities, state, and federal partners will be engaged to provide Corpsmembers with a diverse range of work and professional experiences. The Pilot Program will include both a crew-based model and internship-based model to allow local centers to utilize whichever model will have the greatest impact and provide the best opportunities for their Corpsmembers. By piloting the Program in multiple centers that span the entire California coast, the goal is to prove a model that can be replicated across the state by both CCC districts and local conservation corps, providing benefits to the environment and local communities across the state.

The Ocean Corps Pilot Program will build on the conservation corps' work by developing a new program focused on coastal resource conservation, restoration, monitoring and research. Project work could include, but not be limited to: habitat restoration, invasive species removal, native flora planting, implementation of nature-based solutions, wildlife studies, erosion control, and other activities focused on the coastal and marine environment. Ocean Corps Corpsmembers may also respond to coastal emergencies and develop volunteer service projects and research collaborations with local organizations and universities.

CCC Fortuna District: The CCC Fortuna District is one of the CCC’s longstanding residential programs that provide critical environmental and conservation programs, all driven by Corpsmembers and CCC staff, to the North Coast. Developing an Ocean Corps Pilot Program at this residential center will advance an important equity component by providing residential housing to Corpsmembers and allows Corpsmembers from across the state to participate. Interns at the CCC Fortuna Ocean Corps Program will be offered room and board should they choose to take advantage of the residential option; they may also choose to decline CCC housing and commute from their own residence.

The Fortuna Center has a rich history of working with California State Parks, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), United States Forest Service, United States Fish and Wildlife Service, California Fish and Wildlife Department, and a number of local and community organizations that has resulted in millions of Corpsmember service hours to provide natural habitat restoration and related work. The CCC Fortuna’s Ocean Corps Program will seek to enroll Corpsmembers from Wiyot, Hoopa Valley, and/or Yurok Tribes in the internship program and/or place current CCC senior Corpsmembers with the tribes. The Fortuna Center is currently in ongoing dialogue with tribal partners to coordinate and design this opportunity based on needs identified by engaged tribes. There is an unlimited amount of environmental restoration service work and research that needs to be done in the North Coast, especially service projects and work that include North Coast tribal youth. Through this model, tribal partners will be empowered to identify and develop their own coastal or watershed-based projects that provide benefits to the tribe, advance conservation goals, as well as offer opportunities for learning, workforce development, and service by Ocean Corps Corpsmembers.

Conservation Corps of Long Beach: The Conservation Corps of Long Beach (CCLB), a 501(c)(3) private non-profit organization, was founded in 1989 by a legion of civically minded community leaders from both the private and public sector. Since that time, CCLB has become a national leader in youth and workforce development and alternative education for urban youth and young adults. CCLB operates with a full-time staff of 50 employees who serve over 500 young people each year.

Since its inception, CCLB has provided conservation training, internship and employment opportunities, and services to young adults in the Greater Long Beach region. The CCLB works with federal, state, local governmental, and private partners to provide job training and educational opportunities for young adults from the most underserved communities in the region. CCLB Corpsmembers primarily reside in North and West Long Beach as well as the communities of Lynwood, Paramount, Compton, and South Gate. The ocean, local beaches, marinas, wetlands, and rivers that are near where CCLB’s Corpsmembers live provide the greatest opportunity to engage young adults in conservation training and stewardship, and nature. The CCLB Ocean Corps

Pilot Program proposes to deepen the relationship between Ocean Corps Corpsmembers and nature by expanding job training and internship opportunities specifically around the coastal environment, as well as the two urban rivers that “bookend” Long Beach: the Lower Los Angeles River and San Gabriel Rivers.

The Ocean Corps Pilot Program will expand CCLB’s youth development and expand training and services focused near and around the marine, intertidal, wetlands, estuarine, and coastal environment. The CCLB will implement a combination of crew and internship-based models. Ocean Corps Corpsmembers will be recruited internally and within the communities CCLB serves. The Ocean Corps Pilot Program will develop internship placement opportunities with current and new partnerships, including but not limited to: the Los Angeles River Ambassador, Seal Beach National Wildlife Refuge (SBNWR), Catalina Island and Los Cerritos Wetlands. CCLB is currently working with coastal/estuarine partners, such as National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) scientists and researchers at the SBNWR, Catalina Island Conservancy, The Nature Conservancy/Santa Cruz Island, City of Long Beach Marine Bureau (within their Parks, Recreation, and Marine Department), Los Cerritos Wetlands Authority, The Lower LA and San Gabriel Rivers and Mountains Conservancy, Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy, and Los Angeles County Flood.

Urban Corps of San Diego: The local Urban Corps of San Diego (UCSD) has provided youth development and environmental services in San Diego for over 35 years. UCSD and over 200 Corpsmembers serve all of San Diego County, Southern Orange County, and Imperial County by providing recycling, environmental restoration, fire prevention, coastal protection, and community service work to San Diego’s most underserved communities.

The UCSD Ocean Corps Pilot Program will include natural resource conservation work and internship placements at the Cabrillo National Monument, where Corpsmember interns will work directly with National Park Service (NPS) staff to deliver tide pool and environment education programs, participate in coastal water surveys and research, and work directly on coastal clean-ups and restoration projects at the monument.

UCSD will also provide Corpsmember internship positions in partnership with California Department of Parks and Recreation (State Parks) and within the Tijuana Estuary. Through those internships, Corpsmember interns will work side by side State Parks staff to address and work the many challenges that the Tijuana Estuary faces today—including endangered species management, pollution, sediment management, and the integration of recreation and access to the estuary. Corpsmember Interns will participate in environmental clean-up and restoration, water quality surveys, environmental education, and community service projects throughout the year. Interns are anticipated to receive coastal training consisting of research and monitoring,

stewardship, education, and monitoring. Projects with State Parks could also include other coastal locations in addition to the Tijuana Estuary including the research reserve, Border Field State Park, and the San Diego Coast District.

The UCSD Ocean Corps Pilot Program aims to transform workforce capacity in coastal resiliency by providing training and hands-on marine and coastal work experience to young adults and directly facilitating their placements into green jobs. Environmental and educational training for all Ocean Corps Corpsmembers will be an integral part of the Pilot Program. Trainings will vary by site and partnership and may include CalNaturalist training, flood fighting training, Hazardous Waste Operations & Emergency Response (HAZWOPER) training, water safety and rescue, CPR First Aid, trail building, chainsaw certification, OSHA 10 certification, erosion control and watershed restoration training, scientific survey and/or water quality trainings, and traditional tribal knowledge. This Pilot Program will also support services to Corpsmembers to mitigate or eradicate barriers to access and success within the Program, such as providing counseling, mental health first aid, scholarships, healthcare, and housing.

Overall, the Ocean Corps Pilot Program has the potential to be leveraged and expanded to six CCC centers and eight local corps operating in coastal regions, pending available federal funding. CCC submitted a letter of intent and intends to submit a full proposal through the NOAA 2023 Inflation Reduction Act, Climate Ready Workforce for Coastal States, Tribes, and Territories Competition to support the expansion of the Ocean Corps Program. CCC staff anticipate learning the outcome of this funding competition in Summer 2024.

The Ocean Corps Pilot Program advances three goals from OPC’s Strategic Plan: safeguarding coastal and marine ecosystems and communities in the face of climate change (Goal 1), advancing equity across ocean and coastal policies and actions (Goal 2), and enhancing coastal and marine biodiversity (Goal 3). All corps locations in the Pilot Program regularly execute projects that directly or indirectly benefit the coast and ocean—from ocean litter abatement to offshore habitat restoration to water quality research and beyond. OPC staff and CCC believe that this Ocean Corps Pilot Program will have an exponentially positive impact on California’s youth and environment.

Equity and Environmental Justice Benefits:

The Ocean Corps Pilot Program advances the following equity objectives from Goal 2: Equity in OPC’s Strategic Plan: Objective 2.2: Enhance Engagement with Underserved Communities, and Objective 2.3: Improve Coastal Access. This Program also directly aligns with priorities in [OPC’s Equity Plan](#), such as: through OPC-funded projects and programs, identify opportunities that optimize local economic benefits for community members through workforce development, youth training and other community capacity-building structures (Strategy 1.3.6); build an inclusive

Workplace and Workforce for California’s Coast and Ocean by becoming a leading organization in the effort to create a more diverse ocean and coastal science and policy workforce throughout the state (Objective 2.1); and expand coastal access to ensure equity in both physical access and quality of experience for all communities across California (Objective 3.5). The CCC prides itself in championing equity and will ensure the totality of work completed through this Pilot Program meets or exceeds statewide equity and environmental justice initiatives.

Equity is a priority within corps programs, policies, and procedures. The Ocean Corps Pilot Program will advance equitable opportunities by engaging Corpsmembers in climate resiliency initiatives while providing mentorship, internship opportunities, and other types of support to young adults, particularly those from underserved communities. Corpsmembers come from all walks of life: for example, some begin the corps with a bachelor’s degree while others enroll with a sixth-grade education level (and obtain their high school diploma while in the corps due to corps partner charter school programs). The majority of Corpsmembers are young adults of color from urban communities. Conservation corps seek and provide opportunities for not only personal and professional development but also wraparound supportive services like mental health counseling, language access resources, housing, and transportation solutions (e.g., bus passes). Partnerships with local colleges and universities will also be emphasized to provide opportunities for research collaboration, training, and classroom learning.

Corpsmembers experience many firsts during their time in the corps: their first paycheck, first time living away from home, first time camping, or even their first time experiencing a supportive environment. The corps expands the availability and reach of these opportunities to both the public through the projects completed by Corpsmembers and the Corpsmembers themselves through the professional experience and training gained through the program.

About the Grantee:

The CCC is the oldest and largest corps in the nation. Created in 1976 by Governor Jerry Brown, it was soon made a permanent state department under the umbrella of the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA). For the past 47 years, the CCC has worked extensively in natural resource and energy conservation and impacted the more than 120,000 young adults who have served in the CCC since its inception. Approximately 3,000 young adults enroll each year in the CCC’s 1,500+ member positions. With over two dozen residential and non-residential locations throughout California, it is the only state program with year-round residential centers.

Project Timeline:

The Ocean Corps Pilot Program is anticipated to launch in late Spring to early Summer 2024 to develop up to two-year programs specific to each local corps: CCC Fortuna District, Conservation

Corps of Long Beach, and Urban Corps of San Diego. Ocean Corps internships will range between 6-month and 12-month terms.

Project Financing:

Staff recommends that the Ocean Protection Council (OPC) authorize encumbrance of up to \$1,500,000 to the California Conservation Corps (CCC) to establish a California Ocean Corps Pilot Program, in collaboration with local conservation corps and partners, to enhance coastal climate resilience and provide equitable opportunities for young adults.

Ocean Protection Council	\$1,500,000
TOTAL	\$1,500,000

The anticipated source of funds will be from the Budget Act of 2022, which included a \$50 million General Fund appropriation to OPC for grants or expenditures for resilience projects that conserve, protect, and restore marine wildlife and healthy ocean and coastal ecosystems. The proposed disbursement is an appropriate use of this General Fund appropriation because the Ocean Corps Pilot Program is designed to enhance climate resilience through ocean and coastal-related habitat restoration projects, which support proactive measures to safeguard coastal biodiversity, improve coastal access, and provide equitable workforce development opportunities for young adults.

Consistency with California Ocean Protection Act:

The proposed project is consistent with the Ocean Protection Act, Division 26.5 of the Public Resources Code, because it is consistent with trust-fund allowable projects, defined in Public Resources Code Section 35650(b)(2) as projects which:

- Eliminate or reduce threats to coastal and ocean ecosystems, habitats, and species.
- Improve coastal water quality.
- Allow for increased public access to, and enjoyment of, ocean and coastal resources, consistent with sustainable, long-term protection and conservation of those resources.
- Improve management, conservation, and protection of coastal waters and ocean ecosystems.
- Provide monitoring and scientific data to improve state efforts to protect and conserve ocean resources.

- Protect, conserve, and restore coastal waters and ocean ecosystems.
- Address coastal water contamination from biological pathogens.
- Provide funding for adaptive management, planning coordination, monitoring, research, and other necessary activities to minimize the adverse impacts of climate change on California's ocean ecosystem.

Compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA):

The various proposed projects are not considered 'legal projects' that trigger the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA") pursuant to Public Resources Code section 21068 and Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations, section 15378. If any were determined to be a 'legal project' under CEQA, the proposed project(s) may be categorically exempt from review under CEQA pursuant to 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15306 because the projects involve information collection, consisting of data collection, research, and resource evaluation activities that will not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource.

The CCC will be responsible for ensuring compliance with CEQA for proposed projects or activities that are considered 'legal projects.' OPC funds will not be released for proposed projects or activities that are considered 'legal projects' until CEQA compliance is completed.