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California Coastal Commission awards \$2 million in grant funds to boost education, conservation and access

SAN FRANCISCO, April 17, 2026. The California Coastal Commission approved on Wednesday \$2 million in grants for schools, nonprofits and tribes. The grants advance public education, conservation and access to the coast.

The Coastal Commission approved 47 grants after receiving a record-breaking 434 applications requesting a total of nearly \$17 million. Many of these requests came from first-time applicants with innovative proposals to engage communities facing barriers to coastal access and education.

The selected projects will impact communities across every coastal county as well as the inland counties of Siskiyou, Modoc, Plumas, El Dorado, Sacramento, Stanislaus, Fresno, and Riverside. Half of the funds are for projects led by, in partnership with, and/or directly engaging California Native American tribes and tribal communities.

“We’re excited to support all of these wonderful projects,” said Annie Kohut Frankel, the Coastal Commission’s Public Education Program Manager. “There’s clearly an overwhelming need for this funding so we’ll continue to work to expand the Whale Tail program to meet the need.”

This year’s grants are being funded from a partnership with the Ocean Protection Council with funds from California Climate Investments.

The Whale Tail grant program is the longest running outdoor access and coastal stewardship grant program in the state. It started in 1998 when the Coastal Commission launched the Whale Tail specialty license plate to fund public education programs. Since then, the plate has supported more than 1,100 grants as well as popular education and stewardship programs such as California Coastal Cleanup Day.

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Whale Tail Grant recipients

47 competitive grants, listed roughly north to south

Tolowa Dee-ni' Nation, \$49,970

Project Title: Day-la Ghii~i~? (What-is-it You-see?): A Taa-laa-waa Mvlh-wan-te (Tolowa Guide) for Reconnecting with the Coast

Engaging Communities in: Del Norte County

A culturally grounded species identification handbook in the Tolowa Dee-ni' language will be created, and offshore educational excursions and land-based stewardship activities will engage Tribal citizens in ecological literacy and community connection to traditional homelands.

DIY Art / Ink People, \$49,988

Project Title: Native American Coastal Ecology S.T.E.A.M. Classroom Kits

Engaging Communities in: Humboldt and Del Norte Counties

A Native Advisory Group will design, pilot, and make available STEAM classroom kits that pair with the new Native American Studies Model Curriculum, hold teacher training sessions for the kits, build a database of Native experts and culture bearers available as classroom speakers in Humboldt and Del Norte County classrooms, and design a best practices guide to intercultural teaching of coastal ecology with accompanying videos.

Northern California Indian Development Council, \$50,000

Project Title: Coastal Foodways and Stewardship Project

Engaging Communities in: Humboldt and Del Norte Counties

Native youth and young adults will engage with four traditional coastal foodways (mussels, eels, surf fish, and salmon) through cultural education seminars, tool and materials workshops, guided harvest workshops and processing and preservation workshops.

Resources for Indian Student Education, \$47,647

Project Title: Native Youth Water Protectors

Engaging Communities in: Modoc, Siskiyou, Plumas, and El Dorado Counties

Youth leaders will develop a handbook to prepare tribal partners to conduct a community Water Festival. Tribal partners including Pit River in Alturas & Paiute in Fort Bidwell, Modoc of Siskiyou County, Maidu of Plumas County, and Miwok of El Dorado County will attend a Water Festival and develop plans to hold their own, and tribal youth and adults will take part in a four-day coastal trip to learn history, ecology, hydrology, and conservation career opportunities.

Playhouse Arts: Our Space, \$19,875

Project Title: Our Space

Engaging Communities in: Northern Humboldt County

Community members who are unhoused or housing insecure will co-create a series of coastal day trips that may include education, foraging, habitat restoration, and art activities. Participants will share their experiences on a local radio program and other media outlets.

Rios to Rivers, \$47,389

Project Title: Paddle Tribal Waters

Engaging Communities in: Northern California

Indigenous youth from Karuk and other Northern California tribes will participate in multi-day paddling and leadership skills trainings, including the impact of dams and dam removals on the health of river and coastal watersheds, and traditional ecological knowledge and cultural preservation practices; program alumni will expand local paddling and community education clubs in Hoopa Valley and Eel River Basin; and a documentary will be finalized of youths' successful first source-to-sea descent of the undammed Klamath River in 2025.

Eel River Wailaki / Trees Foundation, \$31,030

Project Title: Coral Point Traditional Ecological Knowledge Project

Engaging Communities in: Southern Humboldt County

Eel River Wailaki Cultural Educators will develop a Traditional Ecological Knowledge curriculum, provide in-school workshops at Redway Elementary, create a TEK Club at South Fork High School, and lead field trips to Coral Point.

Native Health in Native Hands, \$50,000

Project Title: Tehlaan Chii (Whale Tail)

Engaging Communities in: Covelo and Willits in Mendocino County, Loleta and Hoopa in Humboldt County

The extended Kinest'e Native community will reconnect with ancestral territory and coastal cultural practices at a beach camping event, college-ready young adults will attend a college and career culture camp hosted by Sherwood Valley Band of Pomo Indians, and an environmental careers event will be organized with Cal Poly Humboldt.

Potter Valley Tribe, \$49,900

Project Title: Potter Valley Tribe Youth TEK Project

Engaging Communities in: Mendocino County

Native American youth and community members will explore Mendocino Coast lands and learn about food sovereignty and cultural gathering practices for mushrooms, fish, clam, seaweed, huckleberry, and acorn, through classroom learning and field trips. Youth will enjoy an inter-tribal environmental campout at tidepools and camping at the Klamath Salmon Festival.

Sherwood Valley Band of Pomo Indians, \$49,741

Project Title: Bridges of Heritage: Coastal Education for Native Youth

Engaging Communities in: Mendocino County

Native youth will take day trips to coastal and watershed locations for traditional gathering and to learn about kelp and abalone monitoring and about dam impacts, and overnight trips to visit other tribes in the Eel River watershed and to the Monterey Bay Aquarium, as well as a multiday coastal camp to learn about stewardship and restoration careers.

Alliance for Felix Cove / Movement Strategy Center, \$45,784

Project Title: Tamal liwa Indigenous Youth Kayak Program

Engaging Communities in: Marin, Sonoma, Solano, Contra Costa, Alameda, and Mendocino Counties

California Indian youth will take day trips and overnight kayak camping trips on Tomales Bay, learning bay navigation, wildlife identification, geology, and how to make toy tule canoes, duck decoys, cordage, and fire using a bow drill fire.

EGE Foundation, \$50,000

Project Title: EGE Out! Environmental Education Program

Engaging Communities in: Sacramento

Weekly after-school learning sessions and four weekend family coastal camp experiences will allow youth to explore their curiosities and career options in coastal and environmental science topics.

Amah Mutsun Land Trust, \$49,996

Project Title: Coastal Cultural Learning for AMLT Youth Stewardship Programs

Engaging Communities: Statewide, especially Central Valley

Amah Mutsun Tribal Band families will participate in a five-day Coastal Stewardship Summer Camp, with Native Stewardship Corpsmembers taking on a mentoring role for young campers and interns.

Atomic Hands, \$48,520

Project Title: Signs of the Sea: Connecting Citizen Science Across Communities through American Sign Language (ASL)

Engaging Communities in: Fairfield in Solano County

Scientifically accurate and linguistically accessible ASL-based instructional materials will be developed and piloted for a classroom community science program investigating thiamine deficiency in California salmonid populations, in collaboration with California Department of Fish and Wildlife and UC Davis.

Mycelium Youth Network, \$50,000

Project Title: Youth Belonging to Coastal Histories and Futures

Engaging Communities in: Oakland and San Francisco

High school youth will engage in a ten-month climate classroom education series and internship program, including field visits and education on wetlands and estuarine ecosystems, with a focus on Traditional Ecological Knowledge to foster coastal stewardship.

YMCA of Greater San Francisco, \$50,000

Project Title: Waves of Wisdom: Intergenerational Coastal Stewards

Engaging Communities in: San Francisco

Youth from Bayview Hunters Point and older adults from the Mission will share coastal ecology and nature-based learning experiences as part of 14-week cohorts, including nature walks, birdwatching, beach cleanups, habitat restoration, and art and storytelling activities.

California Field School / Santa Cruz Hub for Sustainable Living, \$50,000

Project Title: Bike the Coast: A Bicycle Journey Through California's Coastal Ecosystems
Engaging Communities in: Oakland

High school students will complete 4-day educational bike camping trips from Guerneville to San Francisco, exploring coastal ecosystems as they learn about ecological and cultural history.

Bayview Community Concerned Citizens, \$50,000

Project Title: Bayview to the Bay: Intergenerational Coastal Literacy, Stewardship, and Healing
Engaging Communities in: San Francisco

Bayview–Hunters Point youth and elders will participate in a 6-month intergenerational marine education and stewardship program, with learning sessions, coastal trips, beach cleanups, journaling and healing circles, and a youth leadership track culminating in a Coastal Justice Zine, plus a reusable coastal curriculum and debris survey toolkit.

Muwekma Ohlone Preservation Foundation, \$50,000

Project Title: Oochamin 'Ooyakma Youth Campout: A Muwekma Ohlone & Stanford University Partnership for Land and Marine Stewardship
Engaging Communities in: San Francisco Bay Area

Tribal community members will enjoy two-night campouts at Jasper Ridge and coastal sites for cultural activities, Chochenyo language learning, traditional cooking, and watershed education.

Waterford Junior High School, \$17,445

Project Title: From Source to Sea: Tuolumne Watershed Education for Washington Jr. High Students
Engaging Communities in: Waterford in Stanislaus County

Junior high students will trace the Tuolumne River from snowpack to ocean on field trips to Yosemite Valley, Don Pedro Dam, and Monterey, while examining environmental impacts, watershed health, and the role of water in agriculture and power generation.

Healing Waters Wilderness Adventures, \$19,370

Project Title: Immigrant Youth Wilderness Leadership Development and Empowerment
Engaging Communities in: San Bruno in San Mateo County

Recent immigrant students will participate in a week-long science education and leadership development camp on the Klamath River and California coast. At the end of the camp, students will be offered the opportunity to train as river guides. Other students will participate in a one-day sea kayaking trip in Tomales Bay.

Coastal Watershed Council, \$50,000

Project Title: River Stewards
Engaging Communities in: Santa Cruz

People experiencing homelessness will engage in weekly environmental education and stewardship along the lower San Lorenzo River, emphasizing plant and wildlife identification, habitat health, and restoration.

Black Surf Santa Cruz, \$41,422

Project Title: Black Surf Santa Cruz

Engaging Communities in: Santa Cruz County

BIPOC community members will gain confidence, skills, and knowledge of ocean safety, coastal ecosystems, and marine stewardship through multi-week ocean education programs, single-day surf lessons, and Juneteenth "Liberation Paddle Outs" with equipment and instruction provided.

Bird School Project, \$48,349

Project Title: Bilingual Birding With Families: From Neighborhoods to the Elkhorn Slough

Engaging Communities in: Santa Cruz and Monterey Counties

Community members will enjoy bilingual neighborhood bird walks, guided family boat trips on Elkhorn Slough, and hands-on learning tools that support bird identification and understanding of coastal ecosystems.

Seventh Generation Rising, \$48,000

Project Title: Coastal Healing & Stewardship: An Indigenous-Led Enrichment Program for CCC Youth

Engaging Communities in: Central Coast: Santa Cruz, Monterey, and nearby counties

In partnership with Elkhorn Slough Foundation, Carmel Band of Rumsen Indians, and Santa Cruz Barrios Unidos, California Conservation Corpsmembers will experience coastal immersion days along with talking circles and workshops that combine estuary and coastal science, restoration, and culturally grounded wellness practices.

Monterey Waterkeeper, \$28,519

Project Title: Central Coast Water Leaders: A River-to-Sea Community Stewardship Initiative

Engaging Communities in: Salinas and Castroville

Youth and community members will engage in coastal education and watershed stewardship, including Elkhorn Slough field trips for middle schoolers, weekly creek clean-ups with high school and community volunteers, and river restoration activities with youth and families.

Sanger Unified School District, \$25,000

Project Title: Central Valley to Catalina: Opening STEM Pathways through Marine Science

Engaging Communities in: Sanger in Fresno County

Eighth graders will learn marine science and attend a three-day residential program on Catalina Island, followed by each participating student planning a related education session and presenting to multiple younger grade classes.

Camp Ocean Pines, \$24,491

Project Title: Expanding Coastal Access for Homeless and Incarcerated Participants

Engaging Communities in: San Luis Obispo County

Families experiencing homelessness will enjoy a weekend overnight camp at Camp Ocean Pines; fun, educational programs will be delivered to residents of emergency shelters; and students in a juvenile hall program will learn about marine ecology and visit local tidepools.

Momoy Arts & Education Circle, \$50,000

Project Title: Tomol Crew Training for Northern Chumash

Engaging Communities in: San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara Counties

Chumash community members will receive intensive instruction and practice in tomol handling and traditional tomol protocols in classroom and coastal locations, construct their own wood oars, and graduate as Tomol Maritime Culture Ambassadors.

Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians, \$50,000

Project Title: Chumash Waters Ways: A Tribal Community Marine Stewardship Program

Engaging Communities in: Santa Barbara County

Santa Ynez Chumash families will enjoy a bi-monthly marine stewardship and education program, with classroom sessions and field trips to coastal sites, marine research facilities, and natural reserves, with topics including traditional ecological knowledge, safe harvesting, species identification, and environmental monitoring.

Ventura Land Trust, \$25,544

Project Title: Nature By Design: Engagement with California's Coast for Inland Elementary Students

Engaging Communities in: Santa Paula in Ventura County

Elementary students will each take part in three field trips to coastal and inland watershed locations throughout Ventura County, with hands-on, group, and reflective activities exploring food webs, watersheds, erosion, stewardship, and climate science.

Oxnard Performing Arts Center Corporation, \$50,000

Project Title: Creative Tides: Artist Residencies for Environmental Action + Connection

Engaging Communities in: Oxnard and Port Hueneme

Three, four-month Artist-in-Residencies will engage the community in artist-led workshops and events focused on local coastal environments, culminating in free public arts presentations highlighting the relationship between people, culture, and coastal and marine health.

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

Project Title: Project Ocean Access

Engaging Communities in: Los Angeles County

Surf lessons and overnight camp programs will increase access to ocean recreation and coastal stewardship for low-income QTBIPOC adults.

Para Los Niños, \$21,941

Project Title: Ripples to Waves: Youth Activism through Media

Engaging Communities in: Los Angeles

Fifth graders will take six field trips over the school year to learn about the connection between the LA River and the ocean, and record their observations through audio, video, and photography to create short conservation-centered media productions.

Ready Study Go, \$9,659

Project Title: Connecting Underserved Students to California's Coastal Waterways Through Inclusive, Hands-On Learning

Engaging Communities in: Southeast Los Angeles County

Over six months, elementary and middle school students in a neurodivergent after-school program will work with high school mentors to raise and release fish through "Trout in the Classroom," learn about marine and estuary ecosystems, and enjoy four field trips throughout the watershed.

Culture Club South Bay, \$50,000

Project Title: Restoring Youth Access to the Coastline

Engaging Communities in: Los Angeles, Inglewood, and Anaheim

During field days at the beach, youth will gain comfort in the ocean environment while enjoying surfing and beach volleyball, Bruce's Beach cultural history, guided reflection and photography, and marine science lessons.

San Gabriel Band of Mission Indians Gabrieleno/Tongva, \$50,000

Project Title: Gabrieleno/Tongva Cultural Marine Stewardship on Catalina

Engaging Communities in: Los Angeles and Orange Counties

Gabrieleno/Tongva tribal members will connect to ancestral coastal and marine heritage through workshops and facilitated trips to Catalina Island, with topics including coastal history, seafaring, language, basketry, ethnobotany, habitat restoration and other stewardship skills.

DiverSeaFy, \$40,100

Project Title: DiverSeaFying Diving 26-28

Engaging Communities in: Los Angeles and San Diego Counties

High school youth will learn about the local marine ecosystem and environmental stewardship as they achieve PADI Open Water Scuba certification.

Perris Elementary School, \$10,951

Project Title: Perris Grizzlies Explore our Watershed

Engaging Communities in: Perris in Riverside County

Sixth graders will learn about their watershed through after-school activities and trips to local waterways and the coast, and create a mural about the ocean for permanent display on campus.

Pechanga Band of Indians, \$50,000

Project Title: Youth Environmental & Coastal Education Project

Engaging Communities in: Pechanga Indian Reservation and Temecula in Riverside County

Pechanga high school students will take a three-day trip to Catalina Island to gain hands-on experience in restoration, water conservation, and coastal ecology, followed by using these newly acquired skills to guide Tribal elementary students in restoration and preservation efforts along Pechanga Creek and its tributaries.

County of Orange, \$50,000

Project Title: Classroom to the Sea Coastal Erosion Education Program

Engaging Communities in: Anaheim and Santa Ana

A middle school environmental engineering curriculum will be co-designed with teachers and students in partnership with OC Department of Education and UC Irvine, blending classroom investigation with a hands-on field trip to analyze coastal erosion and its impacts on ecosystems and infrastructure.

Juaneño Band of Mission Indians, Acjachemen Nation-Belardes / Payómkawichum Kaámalam, \$49,800

Project Title: Payómkawichum Water Stories: Revitalizing Cultural Knowledge from Springs to the Sea

Engaging Communities in: Orange County

Through field visits, interviews with Tribal Elders, and archival materials of culturally significant waterways and coastal areas, tribal youth and young adults will develop a Payómkawichum Cultural Waterways Map, along with educational materials for classroom and community use that connect cultural teachings with contemporary coastal stewardship themes. Participants will learn digital archiving, project organization, and environmental storytelling.

CSU San Marcos, \$50,000

Project Title: Sovereign Shores

Engaging Communities in: San Diego and Riverside Counties

The California Indian Culture and Sovereignty Center will engage youth and young adults from Tribal Nations across San Diego and Riverside Counties in cultural workshops on ethnobotany, foodways, shoreline language and place names, and take field trips to Tribal coastal homelands, including cultural activities and surf sessions. At least one curriculum-aligned digital module featuring short youth films, storywork, and other content will be produced.

Pala Band of Mission Indians, \$50,000

Project Title: Pala Cultural Stewardship from the San Luis Rey Watershed to the Pacific Coast

Engaging Communities in: Pala Reservation in San Diego County

Pala Band youth will experience a coastal field trip to learn about marine ecology, food sovereignty, coastal stewardship, and marine policies, followed by a presentation to the Tribal Council; community members will engage in history and ecology workshops on the San Luis Rey watershed, restore riparian habitat, and learn about career pathways; and the Pala Environmental Department will create an educational coloring book for local elementary students.

Botanical Community Development Initiatives, \$50,000

Project Title: Reaching Roots: San Luis Rey River-to-Sea Youth & Elders Watershed Series
Engaging Communities in: Oceanside and North San Diego County

In partnership with the San Luis Rey Band of Mission Indians, intergenerational learning and stewardship experiences will engage youth in the San Luis Rey watershed from Palomar Mountain to the ocean with ethnobotany and traditional ecological knowledge alongside watershed science, structured reflection, and a shared celebration of learning and connection.

San Diego River Park Foundation, \$49,569

Project Title: From the Source to Sea: Connecting Kumeyaay Youth through Ecological Journeys and Traditional Ethnobotany, following the San Diego River to the Pacific Ocean
Engaging Communities in: Lakeside in San Diego County

In partnership with the Barona Band of Mission Indians, grantee will deliver a two-year cultural and environmental STEM program for 3rd and 7th grade Kumeyaay youth on the San Diego River watershed, including field trips, whale watching, and classroom lessons, and installation of interpretive signage at a local park.

Paddle for Peace, \$50,000

Project Title: Diversify the Coast
Engaging Communities in: City Heights, Lemon Grove, Spring Valley, National City, Southeast San Diego

A five-week program of classroom sessions and field trip will connect marine science learning with hands-on coastal and conservation experiences, including tidepooling, beach cleanup, and art-based reflection activities.