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**California Coastal Commission awards new Whale Tail grants amid surge in popularity**  
*Surplus-era funding reveals need for coastal programs serving working communities*

SAN FRANCISCO, February 18, 2025. The Coastal Commission's Whale Tail Grant program, which boosts public education and access to the state's iconic shoreline, has experienced a huge growth in demand in recent years.

In February, the Coastal Commission approved 53 Whale Tail grant applications totaling \$1.7 million to nonprofit organizations and schools as well as local and tribal governments for programs focused on coastal education, conservation and public access.

"These Whale Tail grants reflect California's love for the coast and commitment to protecting it for future generations," said Coastal Commission Chair Justin Cummings. "The focus on inland and underserved communities reminds us that the coast belongs to all of us, regardless of race, zip code, age, orientation or ability."

The annual number of Whale Tail grant recipients has more than tripled in recent years thanks in large part to a one-time injection of \$10 million in state funding in 2021. Since then, the Coastal Commission has awarded 259 competitive grants totaling more than \$9.2 million — compared to 87 projects totaling \$1.7 million in the four years leading up to the pandemic.

For this latest round of grants, Coastal Commission staff received a record-breaking 299 applications requesting \$11.3 million. Many were first-time applicants with innovative proposals to engage communities historically excluded from coastal access and education opportunities. The 53 projects selected this year will impact communities in every coastal county as well as the inland counties of Glenn, Madera, Plumas, Riverside, San Benito, Shasta, Siskiyou, and Tulare.

"These funds allow the next generation of Californians to fall in love with the coast and become coastal stewards," Cummings said. "We want to thank everyone who has purchased a [Whale Tail License Plate](#) and remind California taxpayers to donate to the [Protect Our Coast & Ocean fund](#) on your tax forms."

The Whale Tail grant program started in 1998 when the Coastal Commission launched the specialty license plate to fund public education programs. Since then, this funding has provided more than \$25 million through more than 1,000 grants supporting experiential education, recreation and stewardship.

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## **2025 Whale Tail Grant recipients (north to south)**

### **Save California Salmon, \$20,000**

Project Title: North Coast Tribal Youth Environmental Education Program  
Engaging Communities in Del Norte, Humboldt, Mendocino, Siskiyou, and Trinity Counties.  
Northcoast tribal community members will enjoy an Indigenous Science camp at Sue-Meg State Park, Yurok Tribal members will enjoy a traditional Canoe Camp, and Northcoast schools will take part in field trips focused on dam removal impacts, estuaries, and tidepools.

### **Salmon River Restoration Council, \$49,969**

Project Title: Headwaters to Ocean Program  
Engaging Communities in Somes Bar & Orleans.  
Mid-Klamath region youth will explore the connection between the Klamath River and the coast through in-class lessons and a three-day coastal camping trip where they will learn from Yurok Tribal members and Cal Poly Humboldt Marine Lab naturalists and will then present their learning at a watershed education fair in their community.

### **Eel River Watershed Improvement Group, \$7,789**

Project Title: Creek Days Environmental Education Fair  
Engaging Communities in Humboldt County.  
A multiday environmental education fair will host over 300 students with redwood tours, educational booths on coastal watersheds and redwood forest habitats, and an ecological restoration project.

### **City of Redding, \$50,000**

Project Title: From Land to Sea: The Pathways of our Water  
Engaging Communities in Redding.  
The City's Martin Luther King Jr. Center will host a six-week summer camp to engage elementary-age youth in the interconnectedness of the Sacramento River and the Pacific Ocean through an art curriculum and weekly field trips, culminating in a day trip to the Humboldt coast for a beach cleanup.

### **Wild Wonder Foundation, \$14,750**

Project Title: Watershed: Learning That Flows from Nature  
Engaging Communities in Plumas County.  
Sixth graders will take a four-day trip from the mountains to the Pacific, following the path of water through the watershed. A documentary film will document the trip and profile Plumas County Unified School District's exemplary environmental education program.

### **River Jim Learning Solutions, \$19,204**

Project Title: Mountains to the Sea  
Engaging Communities in Willows.  
Middle school students will explore rivers and reservoirs during canoe and camping trips as they learn about the Sacramento River watershed and their interconnectivity with the Pacific Ocean.

**Reef Check Foundation, \$49,806**

Project Title: Dive into Science for North Coast Tribes

Engaging Communities in Mendocino and Sonoma Counties.

Northcoast region tribal members, ages 16 and above, will receive Open Water, Advanced, and Rescue SCUBA training and become eligible to be Reef Check Citizen Scientist Divers as they explore Traditional Ecological Knowledge, ancestral ties to the ocean, and MPA monitoring and management.

**Sweetwater Spectrum, \$3,678**

Project Title: Sweetwater Spectrum Ecology Club

Engaging Communities in Sonoma.

Residents of an independent living community for autistic adults will take part in a series of environmental learning workshops with watershed art projects and film screenings, organize beach and creek cleanups, and enjoy educational hikes, nature observation, and other outdoor recreation activities.

**Project Avary, \$50,000**

Project Title: Equity, Access & Empowerment for Children with Incarcerated Parents

Engaging Communities in Northern California.

Children of incarcerated parents will enjoy weeklong residential camp at Point Reyes, overnight coastal retreats, and day programs that include activities such as surfing, kayaking, fishing, and tidepooling, with two Family Unity Days and an annual Family Camp on the coast.

**Sacramento - Inspiring Connections Outdoors / Sierra Club Foundation, \$20,000**

Project Title: Three-Day Adventures at the Coast for Underserved Sacramento Youth

Engaging Communities in Sacramento County.

Youth and young adults will enjoy three-day outings at a coastal hostel, with exploration of marine habitats, hikes in coastal forests, and coastal wildlife observation.

**EGE Foundation, \$16,300**

Project Title: EGE Out! Natural Resource Education Program

Engaging Communities in Oak Park and Del Paso Heights in Sacramento County.

A weekly afterschool program will engage students over three months as they explore STEAM careers, coastal and marine habitats, nonpoint source pollution, and coastal stewardship, including field trips to the beach, the Delta, and a local sustainable farm.

**California Indian Museum and Cultural Center, \$50,000**

Project Title: Tribal Youth Ambassadors: Being with Bears on the Coast

Engaging Communities in Sonoma County.

Tribal Culture Bearers and a wildlife ecologist will educate Native American youth about black bears in coastal and riparian zones, and the intersection of first foods and bear foods, through hands-on ecological stewardship and cultural arts activities, field trips, and a camping trip.

**American Canyon Community & Parks Foundation, \$49,917**

Project Title: Stream to Sea: Napa Watershed Education Initiative

Engaging Communities in American Canyon, Napa County.

Napa Valley Unified School District elementary students will engage in a watershed education program with in-class learning and field trips to the local wetlands for nature study and ecological restoration. An EV shuttle will be purchased to enhance trail access for disabled students.

**Five Keys Schools and Programs, \$39,695**

Project Title: Five Keys' Coastal Connections

Engaging Communities in the San Francisco Bay Area and Los Angeles County.

Transition-aged and adult high school students will learn about marine science in a new curriculum unit and participate in six interpretive and stewardship events such as beach exploration, aquarium visits, and naturalist-led walks.

**Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy, \$49,765**

Project Title: Linking Individuals to Their Natural Communities

Engaging Communities in the San Francisco Bay Area.

High school students will take part in a six-week leadership, service learning, and career development program about habitat restoration, environmental justice, and coastal exploration including kayaking and camping trips.

**Pacific Islander Community Partnership – Bay Area, \$49,700**

Project Title: Pacific Ocean Guardians Climate Justice Program

Engaging Communities in the San Francisco Bay Area.

A six-month educational initiative for Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander youth will focus on climate justice, sea-level rise, and ocean conservation, with hands-on workshops, coastal site visits, beach clean-ups, seafaring navigation and protection history of Polynesians, culminating in a youth-led Pacific Ocean Guardians Climate Justice Summit.

**Earth Team, \$49,742**

Project Title: Blue Ocean Internship 2025: Balancing Health & Wealth of the Ocean

Engaging Communities in San Pablo, Richmond, and Oakland.

High school students will take part in a year-long ocean health project, including plastic pollution data collection, multiple field trips, campus awareness campaigns, and learning about the Coastal Act and how to participate in Coastal Commission hearings via public comment.

**Point Molate Alliance / Blue Frontier, \$48,145**

Project Title: Richmond Youth Leadership Program

Engaging Communities in Richmond.

Youth will be empowered to take leadership roles in coastal public education and park planning about East Bay Regional Park District's newest park, Point Molate, through workshops on topics including Ohlone history, eelgrass ecology, sea level rise and nature-based solutions, community science projects, public speaking and media training, as part of a six-week summer program.

**YES Nature to Neighborhoods, \$20,000**

Project Title: Coastal Conservation Corps Educational Activities

Engaging Communities in Richmond.

Teens will plan and implement two bioblitz events in Richmond for youth, adults, and families to investigate coastal ecosystems and learn about the species that inhabit them, leading to conservation efforts to protect the local shoreline.

**BORP Adaptive Sports & Recreation, \$19,800**

Project Title: Adaptive Kayaking Environmental Day Trips

Engaging Communities in Alameda and Contra Costa Counties.

Six kayak day trips, including on-the-water environmental education about natural and cultural history, will engage people with disabilities.

**Literacy for Environmental Justice, \$49,823**

Project Title: Coast & Climate Eco-Adventures Program

Engaging Communities in San Francisco.

Youth will take part in outdoor field lessons on coastal ecology, coastal climate impacts, and climate adaptation strategies; will work to build climate-resilient Bayfront habitats at Candlestick Point State Recreation Area; and will connect with the marine environment through kayaking and fishing. Two shoreline cleanups will engage the local community.

**Oakland International High School / Oakland Public Education Fund, \$30,252**

Project Title: Oakland Newcomer Youth Coastal Exploration, Belonging, and Stewardship Program

Engaging Communities in Oakland.

Newcomer high school students will take part in hands-on coastal ecology and fieldwork through coastal field trips, coastal camping trips, coastal cleanups, and community-wide outdoor education and community-building events, as well as through classwork that integrates language learning and ecology.

**Center for ArtEsteem, \$50,000**

Project Title: Waterways Exploration from the Mountains to the Coast

Engaging Communities in East and West Oakland.

A six-month program will engage 7th-12th grade youth in experiential education about protecting California's waterways and coastal and ocean ecosystems through classroom lessons and a week-long trip from the foothills to the Pacific Ocean, while connecting with Indigenous land stewards and water protectors.

**Salted Roots / Social Good Fund, \$49,723**

Project Title: Soul Surfer Community Surf and Environmental Stewardship Programs

Engaging Communities in Alameda, Contra Costa, San Francisco, and San Mateo Counties.

Girls and gender-expansive individuals of color will develop ocean and surfing skills through a four-week summer camp and through community program days throughout the year. Other community events will focus on environmental stewardship with tidepooling, beach cleanups, and ecological restoration.

**Healing Waters Wilderness Adventures, \$12,441**

Project Title: Immigrant Youth Wilderness Leadership Development & Empowerment

Engaging Communities in San Bruno.

High school English language learners will participate in a week-long watershed science and leadership development camp as they raft the Klamath River, leading to opportunities to train as river guides for future camps.

**North Fork Elementary School / Chawanakee Unified School District, \$17,900**

Project Title: The Watershed Life Cycle

Engaging Communities in North Fork and Bass Lake.

Seventh and eighth grade students will learn about watersheds, participate in a cleanup of Bass Lake, and attend a multi-night academic field trip to Catalina Island, followed by a student-led educational assembly for the rest of the school.

**Coastal Watershed Council, \$50,000**

Project Title: River Stewards Program

Engaging Communities in Santa Cruz.

People experiencing homelessness will be offered weekly environmental education, stewardship opportunities, and services via a partnership with Downtown Streets Team. Training will emphasize plant and wildlife identification, stewardship principles related to habitat, and plant care as team members remove debris and invasive species, plant new native species, weed, water, and perform other site maintenance activities along the San Lorenzo River.

**University Corporation at Monterey Bay, \$20,000**

Project Title: Immersive VR Dive Curriculum for At-Risk Youth: Investing in Future Ocean Stewards

Engaging Communities in Monterey and San Benito Counties.

An immersive virtual reality dive curriculum and community science program studying the local offshore environment will engage youth in juvenile detention centers and court schools.

**Salinas Community Science Workshop / Community Initiatives, \$10,278**

Project Title: Salinas Students as Teachers of Our Shores

Engaging Communities in Salinas.

Middle school youth will take part in an overnight camping trip to Sunset State Beach and learn together about the physics, biology, chemistry and geology of the shore. This leadership group will then serve as guides and teachers for a day trip to the beach for families and other youth.

**Elkhorn Slough Foundation, \$46,313**

Project Title: Water Stories: Building Connections with Elkhorn Slough through Natural Dyes and Intergenerational Interviews

Engaging Communities in Las Lomas, Seaside, and Arvin.

Fourth and fifth graders from Las Lomas, undergraduate environmental science students from CSU Monterey Bay, and elder members of an Arvin art collective will contribute to this project to collect and communicate intergenerational “water stories” through interviews, art exhibits, and natural textile dyes, and an investigation of the response of natural dye colors to local water pollutants.

**Woodlake Unified School District, \$33,000**

Project Title: From the Central Valley to California's Shores: Woodlake Channel Islands Restoration and Education Project

Engaging Communities in Woodlake.

High school students will take a five-day trip to the Channel Islands to learn about coastal watersheds and conservation, conduct habitat restoration, and enjoy tidepooling, snorkeling, and kayaking.

**Valley Children's Hospital of Valley Children's Healthcare, \$20,000**

Project Title: Diving Into Discovery: Marine Education and Stewardship for Foster Youth Engaging Communities in Tulare County.

Youth in the foster care system and their Court Appointed Special Advocates will learn about the ocean through marine-themed crafts, lessons, and a virtual reality dive followed by a visit to Monterey Bay Aquarium and Pacific Grove tidepools.

**Morro Coast Audubon Society, \$19,808**

Project Title: Fostering Environmental Awareness Through High School Education and Research

Engaging Communities in Nipomo and Paso Robles.

High school students will experience at least 10 classroom sessions on coastal and marine ecosystems, go on at least 4 field trips to coastal sites, collect and sort debris from local beaches, and receive college application support.

**Central Coast Aquarium, \$6,049**

Project Title: Sea2School

Engaging Communities in Nipomo.

A new program will provide 6<sup>th</sup> grade students with four in-class lessons on ocean literacy and environmental stewardship and a field trip to Hazard Canyon Reef in Monaña de Oro State Park for exploration and biodiversity data collection.

**Barbareño Band of Chumash Indians / Committees for Land, Air, Water and Species, \$32,480**

Project Title: Ikmen – Waves of Connection: Deepening our Relationship with Ocean, Community and Homeland

Engaging Communities in Santa Barbara and Goleta.

Coastal place-based, culturally responsive programming for Barbareño Chumash community members will include Chumash storytelling, traditional food practices, cultural history sharing, sacred site visits, and tule boat making and racing.

**Crossing the Channel for Cause, \$20,000**

Project Title: Santa Paula to the Sea

Engaging Communities in Santa Paula.

Middle grade classes will learn about the biodiversity and stewardship of the Santa Barbara Channel through a trip to Santa Cruz Island, a harbor cleanup, monitoring of sandy beach habitats, on-campus weather and trash surveys, a student bike repair program, and community outreach campaigns during a year-long program.

**Ventura County Resource Conservation District, \$49,165**

Project Title: Ag Family Summer Program

Engaging Communities in Oxnard and El Rio.

Youth and parents from farming households will enjoy field trips to Santa Cruz Island, Ventura Harbor, local tide pools, and beaches, fostering coastal stewardship and knowledge of coastal career paths.

**Telesis Academy of Science and Math, \$5,100**

Project Title: Aqua Adventures

Engaging Communities in West Covina.

TK-8th grade students and their families will experience the ocean through a Traveling Tide Pool and a family engagement night featuring hands-on activities, interactive demonstrations, and experiments related to marine biology, water conservation, and human impact on the California coast.

**Mujeres de la Tierra, \$20,000**

Project Title: Vamos a la Playa

Engaging Communities in Los Angeles.

Families will receive education on water health and stewardship and enjoy a beach field trip.

**Black Surfers Collective, \$34,900**

Project Title: Surf to Stewardship: Connecting Communities with the Coast

Engaging Communities in Los Angeles.

Youth will enjoy free surf lessons incorporating environmental education, Pan African Beach Days will take place twice monthly during summer and early fall, and Nick Gabaldón Day in Santa Monica will honor one of California's first known Black surfers.

**Audubon California, \$48,286**

Project Title: Coastal Leadership Program

Engaging Communities in Los Angeles County.

A cohort of students and early professionals will engage in a 6-month education and leadership program including field trips to coastal sites, guest speakers in coastal and marine careers, and a capstone project.

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

Project Title: Project Ocean Access

Engaging Communities in Los Angeles County.

Scholarships will increase accessibility for low-income adults to single day and overnight surf lessons and beach programs designed for LGBTQ+ sustained ocean belonging and connection.

**EmpowHer Institute, \$46,308**

Project Title: Social Justice STEAM Camp

Engaging Communities in Los Angeles County.



A five-week, two-session summer program for girls of color will include coding projects focused on climate justice, community resilience, and environmental stewardship, a week on Catalina Island, and opportunities to gain PADI Scuba diving and ASA 101 Keelboat Sailing certifications.

**Los Courage Camps, \$19,890**

Project Title: Los Courage Summer Camps

Engaging Communities in Los Angeles.

Free summer surf camps will provide recreation, ocean education, and environmental stewardship for Los Angeles youth.

**Sacred Places Institute for Indigenous Peoples / Sierra Health Foundation Center for Health Program Management, \$49,444**

Project Title: Indigenous Youth Environmental Justice Program

Engaging Communities in Riverside and Los Angeles.

Indigenous youth will take part in workshops on coastal emergency preparedness; visit Chumash, Tongva, and Acjachemen lands for traditional games, Indigenous stories about marine life, and coastal stewardship discussions; screen films that explore Indigenous perspectives on marine issues; host beach cleanups and an Earth Day celebration; tour local MPAs; and take part in a six-week environmental education camp as part of this year-round program.

**Latino Outdoors, \$8,800**

Project Title: Connecting Latinos to Whales

Engaging Communities in Wilmington, Los Angeles, San Diego.

Latine community members will enjoy an English/Spanish whale watching boat tour, with a post-tour debrief.

**Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy, \$20,000**

Project Title: Student Naturalist Program for LAUSD Schools

Engaging Communities in Los Angeles County.

Third graders will take part in an in-depth coastal conservation education program in the classroom, culminating in a field trip to White Point Nature Preserve and Cabrillo Beach.

**Un Mar De Colores, \$45,748**

Project Title: Oceanside Ocean Stewards After School Program

Engaging Communities in Oceanside.

An 18-week, three-days-a-week afterschool program for middle school students will provide ocean-based environmental education and surf therapy experiences along with an introduction to multiple environmental career pathways and academic tutoring.

**BIPOC Support Foundation, \$48,940**

Project Title: From Your Neighborhood to the Coast: "Voices of Change"

Engaging Communities in Escondido and San Marcos.

An 8-week summer program will engage middle and high school students in hands-on environmental education, coastal field trips, and media production as they collaborate with

professional mentors and local artists to create environmental art installations and a documentary about local environmental issues.

**San Diego Children and Nature, \$37,018**

Project Title: Promoting Coastal Health by Engaging Teachers in Watershed Exploration Engaging Communities in San Diego County.

Over a period of nine months, a cohort of formal educators will visit and explore six local ecosystems, with a focus on ocean, climate, and watersheds, by directly engaging in science practices to increase environmental literacy and improve outdoor teaching techniques.

**Monarch School Project, \$50,000**

Project Title: Outdoor Equity Program for Unhoused Youth Engaging Communities in Barrio Logan.

Activities such as swim lessons, surfing, tidepooling, and fishing will be part of an environmental stewardship and ocean education curriculum engaging unhoused youth during a 12-month program.

**Groundwork San Diego-Chollas Creek, \$49,379**

Project Title: Southeastern San Diego Coastal Explorers Camp Engaging Communities in Southeast San Diego.

A coastal exploration day camp for elementary age youth will include field trips to an aquarium, estuaries, bays, and the coast to learn about oceanography, biodiversity, climate, and stewardship, while also taking part in fishing, kayaking, swimming, and boogie boarding.

**Living Coast Discovery Center, \$20,000**

Project Title: Coastal Climate Champions Engaging Communities in San Diego County.

Middle school students will learn about climate science and stewardship with a focus on the San Diego region, will restore habitat at San Diego Bay National Wildlife Refuge, and communicate what they've learned to the rest of their school community.