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Ocean Protection Council Evaluates First Five Years

Seafloor and coastal mapping highlight achievements as OPC charts course for next five years

San Francisco – Sept. 7, 2010 – On the eve of *California and World Ocean 2010*, the Ocean Protection Council (OPC) will evaluate its first five years and chart its course for the next five. The OPC will meet at 1 p.m. at the Hyatt Regency. Established in 2004, under the California Ocean Protection Act, the seven-member cabinet-level council is charged by statute with coordinating the activity of numerous state agencies into a single ocean policy effort.

“During the last five years the Ocean Protection Council has dramatically advanced ocean protection policy, by improving our coastal water quality, fisheries, and beaches and the environmental and economic resources they support,” said California Secretary for Natural Resources Lester Snow. “When we look back upon the natural resources legacy of the Schwarzenegger administration the achievements we’ve made to safeguard our ocean and coast will stand atop the list and may very well stand the test of time.”

In its coordinating role, the OPC reduces duplication of effort by leveraging the state’s limited financial and human resources. During its first five years in operation, OPC’s work has resulted not only in more efficient use of state resources, but also in increased support of coastal communities dependent upon healthy fish populations, thriving profitable fisheries, clean beaches and tourism to drive their ocean economies. The OPC’s investment in California’s improved ocean health is also an investment in the state’s economic well being.

Some key OPC five-year milestones include:

Mapping the Seafloor: The OPC led a project to map the entire California seafloor that is likely to serve as a national model for seafloor mapping. The project’s success can largely be credited to OPC’s development of collaborative partnerships with federal agencies, universities, industry, and funders and its leverage of \$14.5 million in federal matching funds. These maps will forever change the way we “see” our oceans by providing accurate statewide images of the seafloor to support numerous ocean management decisions, including the designation and monitoring of marine protected areas, decisions about sediment management, and approaches to improve shipping safety.

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Helping to Create and Monitor a Network of Marine Protected Areas: The mapping program helped the Marine Life Protection Act Initiative finalize work on creating proposals for a network of marine protected areas that run along California's open ocean coast. The 1999 Marine Life Protection Act had languished until Governor Schwarzenegger demanded action to complete the Act's implementation phase along California's open ocean coast before the end of his administration. Without the OPC's efforts that include the coastal mapping program and investing over \$20 million to collect baseline data to evaluate the effectiveness of the marine protected areas, this would not have been possible.

Elevating the Role of Science: The council elevated the role of science to inform governmental decisions and provided a direct communication link between policy makers and the scientific community. The executive director of the Ocean Science Trust, an independent non-profit dedicated to ensuring that the best available science informs ocean policy, serves as the OPC's science advisor. OPC funded studies during the last five years have been credited with "informing the dialogue" in a number of important ocean management areas such as once-through cooling, offshore oil and gas platform decommissioning, and sea level rise due to climate change impacts.

Addressing Climate Change: The OPC developed a cohesive statewide forum for evaluating various climate change impacts on the state's ocean and coastal resources. The OPC leads the state's coastal and ocean climate change planning process, a complex multi-agency effort, to help develop a strategy and implementation plan for adaptation actions and mitigation activity for coastal climate change impacts.

Reducing Marine Debris: The council passed a groundbreaking resolution that brought widespread attention to the problem of marine debris and spurred legislation and local government action to reduce marine debris pollution.

Promoting Sustainable Fisheries: The council also brought diverse fishing and environmental groups to the table to carry out a variety of innovative projects to promote sustainable fishery practices. The success of these projects has led to additional opportunities for partnerships and attracted more stakeholders to the table.

The OPC includes the Secretary for Natural Resources, Lester Snow, Secretary for Environmental Protection (CalEPA), Linda Adams, State Lands Commission Chair and State Controller John Chiang, public members, Geraldine Knatz, Port of Los Angeles executive director and Susan Golding, CEO and founder of the Golding Group and former San Diego mayor. The council also includes two legislative ex-officio members, Senator Fran Pavley (D- Santa Monica) and Assemblymember Pedro Nava (D-Santa Barbara). For more information on the OPC meeting see the Web site:

<http://www.opc.ca.gov/2010/08/ocean-protection-council-meeting-september-7-2010/>

California and the World Ocean 2010, Sept. 7-10 at the Hyatt Regency, San Francisco, is an international ocean conference held every four years. Scientists, policy experts, and leaders from around the world meet to exchange ideas, share scientific discoveries, help memorialize achievements made to date in ocean and coastal protection and management, and shape approaches to meet future global ocean challenges. For more information see the CWO '10 Web site <http://www.cce.csus.edu/cwo>