



Understanding & Restoring Ocean Access For California's Tribal Communities



A Report for the California Ocean Protection Council

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report documents the perspectives of individuals from the Tribal community in California's central coast on ocean access, stewardship, and cultural revitalization. Drawing from interviews with twelve respondents from Chumash and Ohlone tribes, it explores how relationships with the ocean are grounded in sacred responsibility, reciprocity, and gratitude. Respondents emphasized that the ocean is not a resource but a living relative whose care and vitality are tied to Tribal identity, well-being, and intergenerational responsibility.

Interviews revealed that colonial histories—land dispossession, criminalization of Indigenous practices, and restrictive policies—continue to shape barriers to ocean access. These barriers include costly fees, limited coastal land ownership and access, lack of recognition for non-federally recognized Tribes, complex permitting processes, and inconsistent enforcement that fails to honor Tribal rights. Participants also described ongoing gatekeeping and racism that inhibit safe and equitable access to coastal spaces both from institutions and from the public.

At the same time, respondents offered clear pathways for restoration. Solutions centered on: (1) protected ceremonial and temporal access to coastal areas; (2) recognition of inherent Tribal rights to harvest, fish, and use fire; (3) creation of cultural centers and Tribal stewardship spaces; (4) co-management and co-stewardship frameworks granting decision-making authority; (5) reforms to permitting and policy processes to standardize Tribal exemptions; (6) training for agency staff and enforcement officers on cultural awareness and sovereignty; (7) investments in youth, workforce development, and community-led monitoring; and (8) funding for these solutions.

These perspectives underscore that equitable and regenerative ocean management requires not only access but also respect for Tribal sovereignty, knowledge, and leadership. Genuine co-management offers a pathway toward governance that reflects relational values—care, reciprocity, and interdependence—shared between people and the ocean.



Summary Table 1. Solutions proposed by respondents for allowing Tribes to access, steward, and maintain relationships with the ocean and coast.

Theme	Description	Representative Quotes	Example Solutions
<p>Protected Temporal & Ceremonial Access</p>	<p>Creating provisions for Tribal members to have broad access to public ocean and coastal spaces for ceremony and gathering.</p>	<p>“I don’t think [agency staff] fully understand what we need, or are prepared for the ceremony...When we mention how many people are coming, that there will be a fire, and that it’s going to take days, not just during their 9 to 5 hours. That’s when they want us to explain everything.” (CR-N-REC-02)</p> <p>“People went to the ocean for prayer during the summer equinox and spring solstice, and it would be great if that practice was respected enough to be included in policy.” (CR-N-REC-01)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establishing a free Tribal pass for individual and group ocean access that integrated across agencies and governments. Can draw from provisions in AB 2939. - Dedicated Tribal-only 3-4 day weekends at coastal parks and beaches. - Establishing rights of Tribes to have access opportunities without the general public. - Creating a registry of land owners who have property in coastal areas who are willing to permit Tribal access. - Creating a fund for the state to assist Tribes on the California Native American Heritage Commission (https://nahc.ca.gov/) to purchase coastal land in their historical territories. - Dedicated travel funding to support Tribal members - particularly displaced families in non-coastal areas - to access oceans, cultural resources, and ceremonies.

Theme	Description	Representative Quotes	Example Solutions
Tribal Harvesting & Fishing Rights	Protecting Tribal rights to gather, harvest, and fish and recognition that these activities are a core part of Tribal culture and Tribal sovereignty.	<p>“Gathering rights would be another priority, and fishing rights would be second because we need to sustain ourselves with nutrients.” (CR-N-REC-01)</p> <p>“Fire is sacred to harvesting and collecting plant material and medicine and then utilizing it.” (CO-REC-01)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create a statewide pathway for a Tribally led process for each Tribe on the California Native American Heritage Commission list to permit Tribal members to harvest, gather, and fish in coastal areas. - Create statewide fire permits for Tribal members to hold ceremonial fires, including burning offerings such as sage.
Cultural Centers & Education	Create a pathway to permit and fund a network of Tribal cultural centers in beach and coastal areas across the state where community building and cultural teachings could take place.	<p>“Being able to have Tomol houses, where we can teach, where we can maintain our careers, where we can have a space to be ourselves... safe spaces for our canoes to be able to rest, and for our people to be able to come and learn, and for that space to be utilized by our community, so that it can be us and not just an exhibit for the public... ”(CH-REC-09)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Centers should focus on regeneration of Tribal culture and potentially have an outreach component, focused on contemporary Tribal culture. - These co-developed centers should include, for example, basic infrastructure (e.g., places to sleep, bathrooms), a room for community gatherings and cultural workshops, working space (e.g., Tomol maintenance and storage, seaweed and fish processing, tying traditional nets, regalia making).

Theme	Description	Representative Quotes	Example Solutions
Co-Management & Tribal Stewardship	<p>Increasing Tribal authority and decisionmaking over coastal areas through co- management and co-stewardship. These are the shared responsibility and decision making around management of ecosystems and natural resources.</p>	<p>“We deserve the opportunity and the right to be involved in all decisions happening in our territories’ lands and waters. So that ‘stakeholder’ phrasing is not a great way to identify native peoples. However, in all things that do impact stakeholders, native peoples need to be in the room. Ideally, we promote conscious decision-making through a consensual dynamic, offering as much education as possible, infused with empathetic storytelling and connection to the data. We need Indigenous insights and consultation to provide such data.” (CO-REC-01)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create funded positions for Tribal members to be involved in decisions around ocean management and ocean access. - Set requirements for early and meaningful Tribal engagement in ocean decisionmaking. - Invite and fund Tribal members to be involved with working groups and advisory councils. - Create and implement management paradigms and standards that draw on concepts of braiding knowledge structures (also known as ‘Two-Eyed Seeing’ (Reid et al., 2021). - Include Tribes recognized through the California Native American Heritage Commission. - Ensuring recognition of Tribal sovereignty.

Theme	Description	Representative Quotes	Example Solutions
Policy & Permits Reform	<p>Formalizing, simplifying, and standardizing Tribal permit exemptions for access, fires, & harvesting. Creating protections for cultural practices to be carried without interruption by enforcement or the public.</p>	<p>“I began to see just how much our grandfather had to go through to get the permits he needed to gather, and how hard it was to navigate all the regulations. I don’t want it to be this difficult for us forever, though. We're doing this work now so that when we’re gone, it’s easier for the next generation.” (CR-N-REC-02)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Initializing a state-led process that creates a streamlined and integrated pathway for Tribal rights to access ocean spaces (e.g., state parks, municipal beaches), including: - A blanket permission for Tribal members to harvest, gather, fish, and have fires for cultural reasons. - Cultural reasons should be defined by the Tribal leadership, but without justification to the state or local agencies. It would be appropriate for such definitions to remain internal to the Tribe rather than becoming public. - We recommend that all Tribes registered with the California Native American Heritage Commission be included in this process (California Native American Heritage Commission website: https://nahc.ca.gov/). - Expand Tribal exemptions in Tribal Take Areas to include all Tribes registered with the California Native American Heritage Commission. - We recommend that the state identify a pathway for providing access for non-affiliated Tribal individuals.

Theme	Description	Representative Quotes	Example Solutions
Training for Enforcement and Agency Staff	Training enforcement personnel and agency staff about Tribal topics.	“Making cultural sensitivity and cultural awareness training mandatory for anybody who's going to have some sort of deep impact.” (CO-REC-01)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mandatory, regional specific trainings for agency staff, including enforcement officers about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + distinctions between Tribal and non-Tribal rights, and Tribal exemptions. + significance of traditional practices and ceremony + successful approaches for protecting Tribal members from gatekeepers and racist community members.
Youth Engagement, Exchange, & Workforce Development	Developing training and job opportunities for Tribal members in conservation and resource stewardship, and cultural exchanges.	“I don't qualify to be a park ranger because I don't have a bachelor's degree, and that's frustrating. Why shouldn't I qualify to be a steward of the land if I know what's right? ... Policies should take into account Indigenous Knowledge, because there's so much depth to that experience, especially in ceremonial spaces.” (CR-N-REC-01)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Train and employ Tribal members as stewards, scientists, rangers, conservation officers, educators, and knowledge holders, ensuring financial support to build Indigenous leadership in ocean management. - Create pathways for Indigenous Knowledge to help people qualify for ocean jobs. - Provide opportunities for learning and mentoring through intergenerational training about oceans. - Create a pathway for Tribal fisheries in California, including funds to support training and mentoring. - Fund cultural exchanges that help communities build solidarity and shared stewardship practices.

Theme	Description	Representative Quotes	Example Solutions
Funding and Grants	Creating funding streams to support the proposed solutions through state funding and tax-credits.	<p>“It’s hard to sustain who we are and still make time for these ceremonies, especially when it’s a challenge to secure funding for them. If those obstacles could be eased, it would make a huge difference.” (CR-N-REC-01)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Grants, subsidies, in-kind donations, and fee waivers that cover the costs of permits, fees, and use. - Grants that fund cultural activities, knowledge sharing, and job training. - Raising funds through revenues such as a Tribal tax and philanthropic support of Tribal cultural revitalization.

INTRODUCTION: JOURNEY TO A NEW PERSPECTIVE

We recognize that many readers of this report are well-versed in ocean policy and Western governance paradigms through formal training or professional experience. In contrast, fewer may have direct exposure to Indigenous paradigms, including place-based Indigenous Knowledge (IK) from California’s central coast, or to contemporary Indigenous communities more broadly. Yet Indigenous peoples, including the authors of this report, are integral to American and Californian society. With this context, we begin by outlining Western and Indigenous approaches to coastal management, reviewing current structures and Tribal communities along the central California coast, before presenting our research methods, findings, and recommendations.

Western Knowledge Systems Emphasize Resources

Western ocean management has often been rooted in the view that people and nature are separate, and that natural resources exist primarily to benefit humans and did not need to be treated with care. Thomas Huxley’s 1883 claim that fisheries were “inexhaustible” reflects this perspective by minimizing human impacts on nature. In contemporary governments, there has been a continued focus on economic benefits from the ocean (for example, reports including Nicolls et al., 2020; NOAA 2024). Over time, this thinking evolved into models such as social-ecological systems, which treat people and ecosystems as distinct but interacting subsystems, while still emphasizing material benefits like food and income (Ostrom 2009). More recent frameworks, such as the well-being approach, expand the Western paradigm to include non-material benefits—like connection to others, cultural identity, and the inherent value of nature (Ota et al. 2023). Western perspectives about management - and knowledge more broadly - are also tied to knowledge systems that prioritize generalizable insights over place-based understanding.



Indigenous Knowledge Systems Emphasize Relatives

Indigenous paradigms differ fundamentally from Western ones by viewing the world as a family of animate and inanimate - including animals, plants, water, rocks, and the ocean - rather than resources for human use (Simpson 2017; Cordero et al., 2019; Topa & Narvaez 2022; Smith 2022). Tribal nations in California and across North America see nature as intelligent and living, and maintain sacred connections between people and nature (Simpson 2017; Topa and Narvaez 2022). Humans are neither central nor superior in this family, but hold responsibilities of care, gratitude, and reciprocity to all their non-human relatives. As Chumash elders explain, their cosmology carries a sacred duty to live in knowledgeable, regenerative relationships with the land, waters, and non-human beings (Cordero et al., 2019). As with all families, there is a fundamental responsibility for stewardship and care of these non-human relatives. Indigenous Knowledge is also deeply place-based: knowledge is tied to specific landscapes and relationships, not generalized abstractions (Wilson 2008; Million 2015). Goeman writes that, “Indigenous peoples make place by relating both personal and communal experiences and histories to certain locations and landscapes - maintaining these spatial relationships is one of the most important components of politics and our identity” (2015). There is a growing awareness that these underrepresented perspectives - and knowledge systems - which center regenerative care for nature and place-based relationships can be important for marine resource management, including for California’s oceans (Dawson et al., 2021; Reid et al., 2021; OPC 2023; Strand et al., 2024; Teixidor-Toneu et al., 2025)

Table 1. Key Terms for understanding the relationship between Tribal communities and the more-than human relatives that inhabit the oceans and coasts of California.

Indigenous Principles	Definition
Reciprocity	Mutual and reciprocal gifting between humans and the earth, emphasizing a balanced relationship where humans give back in gratitude and care what they receive from the natural world. - Kimmerer (2013)
Regenerative	Interactions that foster increases in resource health and abundance. - Cordero et al (2019)

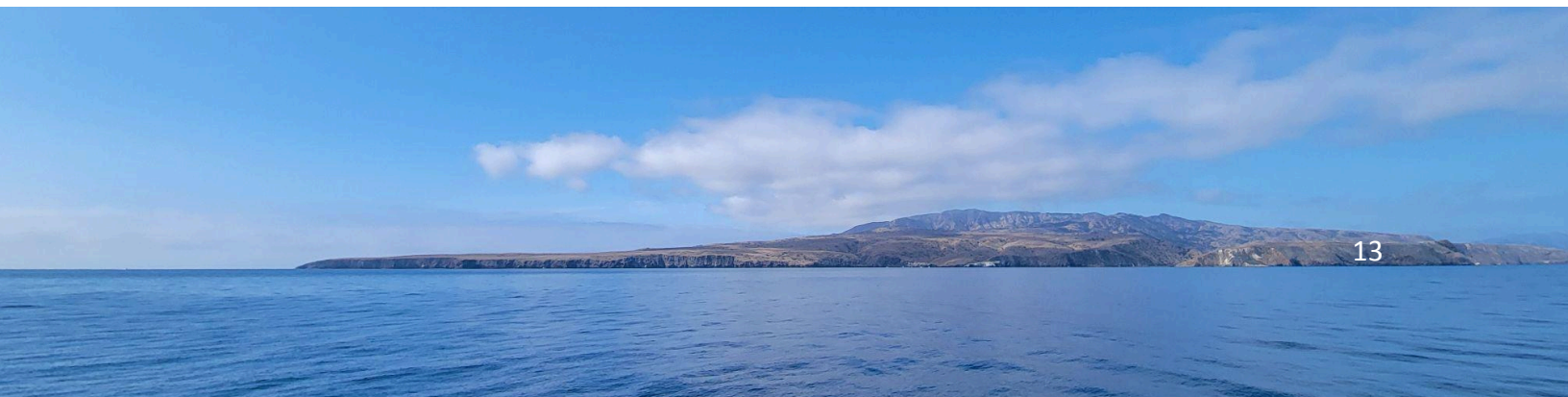
Regeneration for Central California's Coastal Tribes

Our project focuses on ocean access and contemporary Tribal communities. However, a discussion about ocean access requires context of the history and structures that have shaped California's Tribal communities.

For millennia (13,000–18,000+ years), California's coastal Tribes have managed and harvested food from the ocean through fishing, gathering, hunting, and burning practices, each tied to distinct laws, traditions, and ancestral territories (Anderson et al., 1997; Erlandson et al., 2007; McGinnis et al., 2014; OPC, 2023; Gamble, 2025; Native Land Digital website: <https://native-land.ca/>). Colonization profoundly disrupted management and harvesting practices through Spanish missions (1769–1834), land grants which gave Native American land to settlers (1784–1846), disease, state- and federally-sanctioned violence (e.g., Burnett, 1861), and slavery (e.g., California's Act for the Government and Protection of Indians (1850)).

More recently, government policies and funding have focused on destroying Tribal identity and assimilating Indians into broader society. Native American religions - including any type of ceremonial and community practice - were illegal in the United States from 1883-1978 (*Code of Indian Offences* (1883) until *Federal American Indian Religious Freedom Act* (1978)). For nearly two centuries (1819-1969) the U.S. Government appropriated more than \$23.3 billion (FY23 inflation adjusted dollars) to fund residential schools and related programs that sent Native American children away from their families, culture and language (Newland 2024). Such widespread colonization practices erased Indigenous cultures. And many of these practices persist in mainstream narratives and policies today.

Yet Tribal communities are revitalizing culture, rebuilding their Nations, and reasserting their values and knowledge systems (Simpson, 2014). Recent ocean management milestones include the Tribal Marine Stewards Network (2022), the Indigenous Marine Stewardship Area (the first Tribally led MPA in California, 2023), and the Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary (the first co-managed National Marine Sanctuary in the U.S., 2024). Renewed stewardship and equitable ocean access, such as we explore here, are central to this process.



METHODS

This work is part of a larger project looking at benefits and barriers to accessing California's oceans (California Ocean Access project webpage: <https://www.californiaoceanaccessandmpas.com/>). Phase I of that project focused on the experience of communities in five coastal counties in central California (Ventura, Santa Barbara, Monterey, Santa Cruz, and San Francisco), with an emphasis on reaching underserved and Tribal communities. The report for Phase I of the project is available at www.californiaoceanaccessandmpas.com/reports-and-papers, including an abbreviated version of this report. Here we provide an extended report on the Tribal aspect of this project.

We sought to understand: (1) What are the foundations of Tribal relationships with coasts and oceans; (2) What are barriers that impede or make it difficult for Tribal members to access ocean spaces, maintain their culture, and/or benefit from the ocean?; (3) What solutions could strengthen coastal Tribal cultures and relational values, and reduce barriers?; and (4) How can Indigenous ways of knowing, rooted in ancestral ties to oceans and MPA sites, inform and enrich Western marine science and policy?

To address these questions, we wove together Western and Indigenous knowledge systems (Figure 2) (Kimmerer 2013; Reid et al., 2021; Strand et al., 2024). We developed an interview protocol for Indigenous community members in the central California coast (Appendix 1) which focused on topics including: relationality and reciprocal care/stewardship; ocean connections, access, & places; climate change experiences & concerns; awareness & experiences with California's network of marine protected areas (MPAs) & National Marine Sanctuaries; traditional ocean uses; Indigenous contributions to ocean management; and solutions.

We invited 29 respondents from eight central California coastal Tribes to participate (Amah Mutsun, Chalon, Chumash, Coastnoan, Esselen, Ohlone, Rumsien, Salinan) with a 34% response rate. We sought to include a variety of experiences within the Tribal community including Federally recognized Tribes, non-Federally recognized Tribes, and non-affiliated individuals with Tribal heritage. We invited people to participate to share their personal experiences, and not to speak as formal representatives of their Tribes. We conducted 10 interviews - some of which included more than one respondent - for a total of 12 participants. With respondent's permission, we recorded interviews and transcribed them using [grain.com](https://www.grain.com). From our two-eyed seeing framework (a guiding principle for understanding the world through eyes of both Indigenous and Western knowledge systems; Figure 2) (Reid et al., 2021), indigenous research paradigms (Smith 2022), and social-ecological systems (Ostrom 2009), we developed codes

which we used to analyze interviews (Table 2). Interview quotes used in the results are edited slightly for clarity and to preserve anonymity.

While Western scholarship often emphasizes outcomes, Native American and Indigenous Studies (NAIS) scholars highlight the importance of process—long-term relationships, co-creation, iterative questions, and ethical engagement. Research can also surface harms, including grief tied to lost access to homelands, ceremonies, and food systems. Guided by the CARE Principles, our team worked with an NAIS PhD candidate who helped design the framework and was set to code interviews. However, the trauma of hearing her community's struggles led her to step back, and we shifted to integrating a structured coding approach in R with keyword searches in transcripts to analyze themes of reciprocity (including species), barriers, and solutions. R code for coding interviews is available on Github at https://github.com/jselgrath/mec_indigenous.



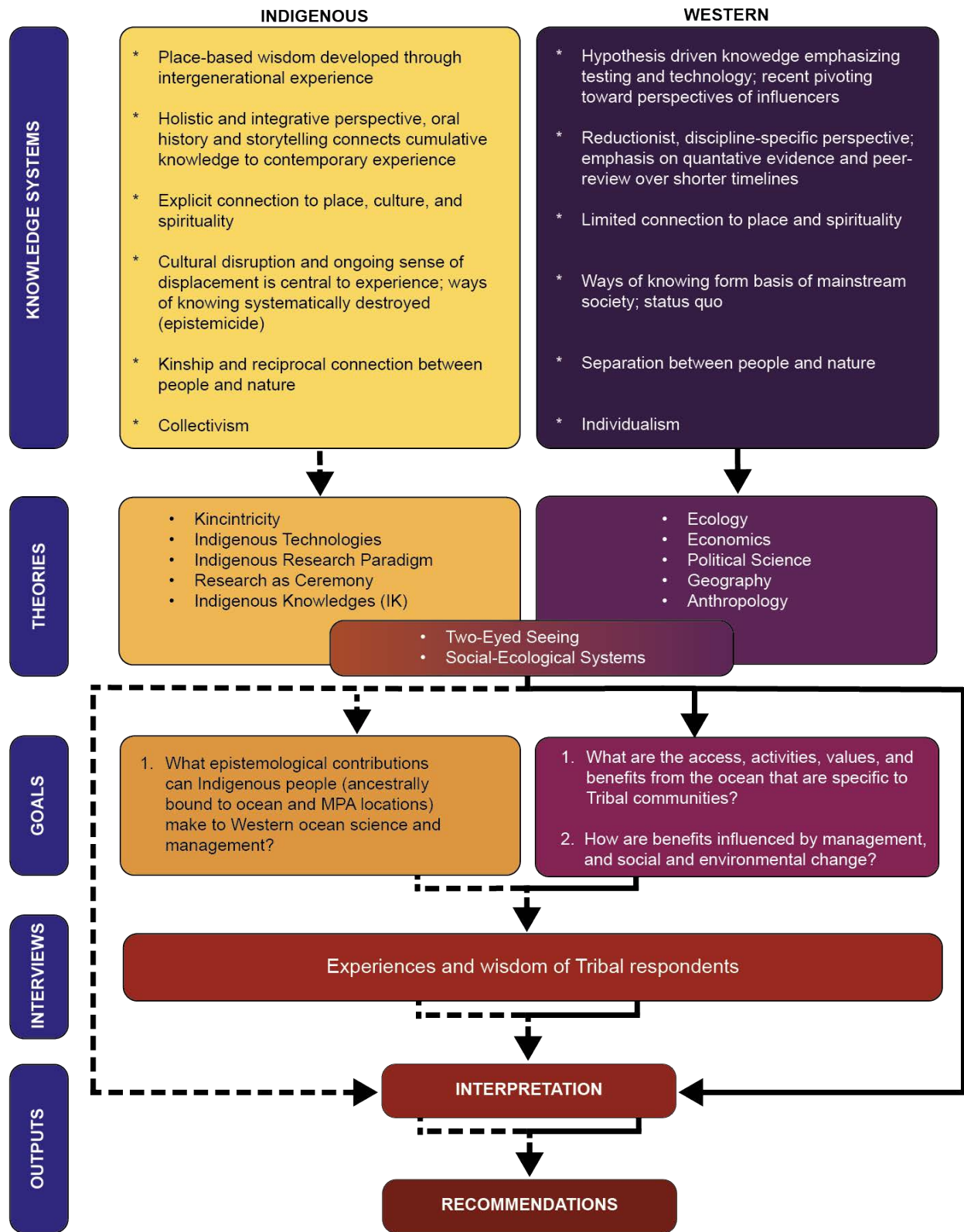


Figure 1. This project used an Indigenous-Western research framework to develop questions, interpret interviews, and develop recommendations.

Table 1. Codes, descriptions, and themes used for analyzing transcripts from interviews with Tribal members in central California for relational values, barriers, and solutions.

Code	Definition	Themes	References
Relational values	Values linking people and ecosystems via tangible and intangible relationships to nature as well as the principles, virtues and notions of a good life that may accompany these.	Relational values, or kincintricity, include a "fundamental gratitude to the land, waters, and living beings of this area for our existence, sustenance, and wellness. Embedded in this gratitude is a sacred responsibility to protect, care for, and live in deeply knowledgeable, reciprocal, and regenerative relationship with these relatives." Here, relatives are considered to be human and non-human. Non-human relatives comprise animals, plants, rocks, places like the ocean that have spirit/are animate. This is in contrast to inanimate objects (such as your water bottle). Relational values include a responsibility for stewardship and care of these non-human relatives, and are a core part of individual and community identity, social cohesion, and livelihoods.	Cordero et al. (2019); Martinez et al. (2023); Pratson et al. (2023)
Barriers	Factors make it difficult for Tribal members to access ocean spaces, maintain their culture, carry out activities and ceremony, and/or benefit from the ocean.	Barriers that prevent access include personal, social, knowledge, physical and environmental. For Indigenous communities, barriers include the social structures that prevent or hinder community access to ocean spaces and activities, and the lack of knowledge by (non-Indigenous) officials and the public about how to interact with indigenous people involved in practices such as ceremonies and gathering marine life (e.g., seaweed, mussels). Barriers also include structures and procedures that California uses to manage ocean spaces and resources that restrict cultural activities or practices (realized or unrealized).	Bennett et al. (2021); Reineman et al. (2016)

Solutions	Changes which create greater wellbeing and more equitable circumstances.	Solutions can lead to changes in policies, priorities, systems, actions, cultures, perspectives, engagement, outreach, community building, indigenous futures, and co-management/co-stewardship.	Sterling et al. (2020)
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RESULTS

Respondents were from two Tribal groups (Chumash and Ohlone) and ranged in age from 33 to 80 years old (median age = 50 years). Over half of the respondents fell into the Acutely Low - Very Low Income Levels (Table 2), reflecting the low incomes of Tribal communities more broadly (CA State Income Limits, 2025). Tribal languages were spoken in varying levels of proficiency by 71% of respondents, showing a remarkable commitment by respondents to language revival.

Table 2. Demographics of the respondents who were interviewed from central California’s Tribal Communities.

Category		No. People
Gender		
	Male	3
	Female	7
	Two Spirit	1
	Prefer not to answer	1
Tribal Language		
	Spoken	7
	Not spoken	5
Income		
	\$10,000 to \$19,999	3
	\$20,000 to \$49,999	4
	\$50,000 to \$79,999	2
	\$80,000 and above	2
	Prefer not to answer	1

Table 3. Tribal affiliations of the respondents who were interviewed from central California’s Tribal Communities.

Tribe	Band	Tribe Code	Federal Recognition, State Recognition, & Affiliation	ID	No. of Respondents
Chumash	Chumash - Unaffiliated	CH	Non-Affiliated. No recognition by Federal or State governments.	CH-N-AF	4
Chumash	Coastal Band of the Chumash Nation	CH	Non-Federally Recognized. Recognized by California Native American Heritage Commission.	CH-N-REC	4
Costanoan Rumsen	Costanoan Rumsen Carmel Tribe	CR	Non-Federally Recognized. Recognized by California Native American Heritage Commission.	CR-N-REC	2
Costanoan Ohlone	Indian Canyon Chualar Tribe of Costanoan-Ohlone People	CO	Federally Recognized. Recognized by California Native American Heritage Commission.	CO-REC	1
Chumash	Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians	CH	Federally Recognized. Recognized by California Native American Heritage Commission.	CH-REC	1

FOUNDATIONS OF TRIBAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH COASTS AND OCEANS

Sacred Responsibility & Care

Many Tribal respondents emphasized a sacred duty to care for the ocean, describing it as a responsibility inherited from ancestors and central to Tribal identity. As one noted, “We definitely have the responsibility for the ocean because that's what we know we lived by and inhabited. We understand that this landscape is not ours, but it's for the next seven generations to come. Therefore, it's our responsibility to maintain it in us and enjoy exactly what we are enjoying. This sense of responsibility influences me because I know how important it is... It's the understanding of the footsteps that have been left behind by those who came before us and the footsteps that are ahead of us, guiding future generations. Knowing that we carry both the lessons from our past and the hopes for our future is what motivates me to continue this work” (CR-N-REC-01).

Responsibility for the ocean also comes from seeing the ocean as a relative: “When you remind people of their connection to nature, they can't commodify it, because as a family unit, a mother, a father, a child, that's your circle. When you think about [the ocean], as a human being, this is [in] our circle. You don't commodify those things if you truly love them. [The ocean and people] are inherently one together - a family” (CH-N-REC-05). The ocean is also a central part of spirituality: “There is a spiritual connection to the ocean. Chumash people have a spirituality tied to it, similar to how Christianity might have its own spiritual practices. I don't think the details need to be shared, though. Just knowing that connection exists is enough” (CH-N-AF-03).

Respondents talked about the value of revitalization of their Tribal culture as illuminating their “obligation ... not only to be ourselves in coastal spaces, but to continue to pass on ... our responsibility to take care of the spaces that take care of us. That's one of the most important ways that I've grown up in our maritime spaces” (CH-REC-09). Others echoed this sense of duty in deeply personal terms: “I think [our responsibility for and connection to the ocean are] a huge influence in us, in our community, because we're coastal Chumash people. So we have this direct relationship to the ocean and responsibility to it. If we take care of the ocean, it's going to take care of us. And I think we carry that in our community in a really amazing way” (CH-N-REC-01). Other respondents reinforced this stewardship ethic, saying, “The ocean

connects us more than anything... The ocean is part of who we are, and [protecting the ocean is] a fight worth fighting” (CR-N-REC-02). Taken together, these voices illustrate how multi-generational responsibility is not just symbolic, but an active and enduring commitment to protection and care that is grounded in Tribal worldviews.

Reciprocity

Respondents spoke about how their responsibility toward the ocean emerges from their experience of reciprocity, a principle that guides how people live in relationship with the ocean and its living beings (i.e., marine life). Reciprocity was described not just as giving back resources, but as maintaining balance— “making sure that we're remembering our value system - taking care of those [marine life relatives] who are providing for you. Honoring that your [ocean] relatives are dying so that you can live. Taking care of that [ocean] space and making sure that you're ... contributing to the growth and repopulation of that area and different animals and plants too” (CH-REC-09). Another speaker emphasized the reciprocity ethic directly: “It's very important to understand that Indigenous Knowledge is not about thinking we are the end all, be all. It's because we live in reciprocity with the land, which has made us knowledgeable about what the land offers - and what needs to be protected. This is crucial to speak to our tribes and communities, because our elders are our libraries, and our youth are our future. [This] knowledge is passed down through generations. We have many stories that may seem holistic or mythological, but those stories are proven facts that show us how to interact with our landscape and explain why things are the way they are. That's how we pass on knowledge to the next seven generations... Our relationship [with the ocean] will continue to be infinite because we understand that we are the water, and the water is us.” (CR-N-REC-01 2:21:54). These insights frame reciprocity as a way of living that is both ecological and cultural, rooted in knowledge passed down through generations.

Gratitude and Ceremony

Respondents repeatedly emphasized gratitude for the resources and spiritual presence of the ocean. Gratitude was often embodied in the practice of restoration, offerings and ceremony - a way of acknowledging the gifts of the ocean and reaffirming bonds with place. Restoration is one way that people express gratitude, “When my sister and I started the [Indigenous Youth Program], it was important not only to access that space for historical knowledge, but also to recognize our responsibility to restore the land. We've done three restoration projects at Point Lobos with our youth to help bring back the vegetation” (CR-N-REC-01). Several respondents highlighted ceremonial practices as expressions of gratitude, “In the ceremony, everything is a prayer for us. Even when we gather, we begin with a prayer and offerings. That’s the most

important way we interact with the ocean.” (CR-N-REC-01 28:54). Others described their gratitude and dedication which meant that through “the concentrated energy of the community coming to the land, the amplification of prayer and ceremony, and the awareness through education and community building, our community is honoring its oceanic connection. Even though we as a community don't get to visit the ocean as much, we do to the best of our ability. We pray, love, and speak to the ocean, sing to the ocean. We fall asleep to oceanic sounds on YouTube” (CO-REC-01).

Ceremony can “connect your spirit to your place of being” (CH-N-AF-02) and create a reciprocal relationship that begins with acknowledgement and care. “When we go out to fish, it requires a ceremony beforehand like giving offerings on the boat, cleansing, and gathering, and talking afterward” (CH-N-REC-04 33:56). Ceremony is also central to culture. “Ceremony is super important to our people because that's our way of life. That's what keeps us connected to our culture. I think if we had more access to spaces to do those things at the certain times that we need to do [ceremony], I just think that the world would be great (CR-N-REC-02). These perspectives reinforce that gratitude, reciprocity, and ceremony are inseparable from cultural revival and ocean stewardship, shaping how Tribal communities continue to honor their responsibilities to marine life and coastal places.

Connection to the ocean and the power of the ocean to heal individuals and communities infused interviews. “To maintain a relationship with the ocean ... there are many ways: surfing, fishing, paddling tomols, building tomols and just being at the ocean to heal our souls by breathing the ocean air and seeing this huge body of water. Our families believe that the ocean is female and holds the power to heal all of us” (CH-N-AF-07). The gift from the ocean to people was described simply: “The ocean will help us to heal. That's why I'm here” (CH-N-AF-02).

Marine Relatives & Harvesting

For community members, marine life is part of community and family, often referred to as more than human relatives. “I don't think "harvesting" is the right word. It's more like having a relationship with the local abalone, clams, and seaweed” (CH-N-AF-03). Westerners often ask Tribal members to identify the most important species (personal observation of authors during meetings with researchers and policy makers), but the relationship between people and marine relatives was described in an inclusive way, “In our stories, there are absolutely those who are more powerful than others when it comes to animals on the land and in the ocean and plants that have more significance than others to us. But you know when you're taking care of those plants and animals, you inevitably are learning about everyone else [i.e., other marine life] in the area too” (CH-REC-09).

Harvesting marine relatives is seen as an intimate part of maintaining culture through spending time in relationship with the environment. “Our gathering, our harvesting, our fishing—they’re not just culture sharing, they’re how we monitor the health of our environment” (CH-N-REC-04). Materials that are gathered often become part of regalia. “As a regalia maker, I source all of our abalone and Olivella shells... I’m also a Tule gatherer, and there’s a tule patch near the ... River that leads to the ocean, a place where pelicans gather, and we can source pelican feathers” (CR-N-REC-01). Respondents point out that “Regalia is not a costume. Regalia is how we present ourselves in community, both from in ceremony or how we just dress daily. Because today even, native peoples have always used cultural resources around them to dress themselves from the plants and the animals” (CO-REC-01). Furthermore, “our regalia is a bioregion. It is something that has to die in order for us to live, and it repurposes its life by giving its skin, bone marrow, or anything like that to be part of our regalia ... We want access to the ocean to give new life to these species. While there’s nothing else living in the ocean to make it their home, we wear [shells in] our necklaces, which are alive with us, carrying on their second life” (CR-N-REC-02). Creating regalia from marine relatives is also a sacred practice. “The community who is involved in making these strands of abalone shells put every shell attached to these strands in prayer. So my mom said, “whenever we make our regalia, every bead is a prayer. So while you're working on this, you need to put your good energy and your prayers into it so every bead, every abalone shell, is a form of connection to the land and to the community”” (CO-REC-01).

Marine relatives were the subject of songs and dances, although many of those traditions have been lost. “We have a traditional swordfish dance and that has been carried forward to this day.

So we have community members that do that dance. We have songs that go back to the islands as well, which is pretty amazing. We have a song about seaweed ... it's about our relationship to the seaweed and how it's hard to explain the way it dances in the ocean... So it's very deep in our culture, our ties to the ocean and the islands” (CH-N-REC-01).

Respondents shared the view that “I've talked about a lot of the species, but I also think it’s important to note that there’s no hierarchy. Abalone is just as important as the barnacle or the starfish. It’s important because we understand that everything is connected in an ecosystem. Everything has its role ... It's about balance” (CH-N-AF-03). Therefore we, as authors, do not offer any prioritization of species and materials in terms of importance. We have summarized the species that were mentioned by respondents during interviews (Table 4).

Table 4. Marine and terrestrial relatives that were discussed during interviews in terms of harvesting, regalia, stories, and other relationships held by Tribal members.

Marine Species	Terrestrial Species	Materials
Abalone	Pine	Asphaltum
Barnacle	Redwood	Natural paints
Clam	Tule	Diatomaceous earth
Crab		
Dolphin		
Kelp		
Lobster		
Mussel		
Olivella		
Otter		
Pelican		
Salmon		
Sea anemone		
Sea lion		
Sea otter		
Sea urchin		
Seagrass		
Seal		
Seaweed		
Shark		
Starfish		
Swordfish		
Tuna		
Whale		

BARRIERS PREVENTING OCEAN ACCESS, CULTURAL PRACTICES, AND OCEAN BENEFITS

Colonial and Historical Barriers

Participants in our project spoke about the link between present day restrictions and a longer legacy of dispossession and forced separation from the ocean. This legacy includes prohibiting traditional Tribal practices and forcing people away from coastal spaces. One respondent reflected on how colonialism interrupted cultural continuity: “There’s such a large amount of people and it’s been privatized, we have no access there... What upsets me most about the privatization [of the beach] by individuals is that they’re not even there most of the time... For their momentary pleasure, we’re prohibited from our right to access our lands ... But I can’t move somewhere else, ... culturally, personally, and spiritually, I can’t move somewhere else. This is where I belong” (CH-N-REC-01). Today, there are many policy and social restrictions on these practices: “Oftentimes don’t feel comfortable, respected or safe ... accessing deceased animals for medicine and regalia and instruments... It makes me really sad to be in that frame of mind when I’m gathering medicine. And then I just have to kind of pray and do it anyways” (CH-N-REC-06).

It’s important to note that laws prohibiting and/or restricting gathering, hunting, and fishing were intended to make Tribal culture - and Tribal food security - illegal (Simpson 2014). “But there’s also the fact that there are laws now about not harvesting abalone or clams. It’s a tough subject because those laws were passed to target our people’s ability to survive. They didn’t want us to harvest our food, they wanted us to buy bad food at the grocery store, which is what we’re doing now” (CH-N-AF-03). Although contemporary lawmakers may not recognize that darker side of such legal history, laws targeting Tribal access to natural resources continue to be widespread across the US, including in California. When asked about traditional harvesting methods respondents said that they were not using them “because we haven’t been allowed to because of laws” (CH-N-REC-06). Another shared: “Growing up, my family still interacted with the ocean, like going to the tide pools, but we weren’t collecting or gathering. I think it might be illegal to gather Olivella [a culturally important species] now. I mention this because my family stopped doing certain things because they were trying to follow the law” (CH-N-AF-03).

Several respondents we interviewed were culture bearers for their tribes, which provides them with a strong knowledge of and commitment to their Tribal culture and its values. Respondents acknowledged the influence of colonialism on some members of their communities - and pathways toward revitalization. “A symptom of colonization that we have to also work through

as a community is that not everybody [in our community] has an understanding of being able to harvest and fish sustainably, and they don't always have the understanding this is our cultural obligation. Through that unfortunate process of colonization and assimilation [they think] 'oh, this is a take zone now... Let's start fishing and harvesting'... I want to make sure that it is understood, that we're not just going there to take, and that it's our responsibility to help first... I know that we will get there because we have a lot of cultural knowledge bearers who have that understanding. And when we're able to sit in the same room and generate that conversation [as part of the process of creating a Tribal Fishing and Harvesting License]. I think it'll be really successful" (CH-REC-09).

Some respondents felt that MPAs limit Tribal access to the ocean and reduce Tribal sovereignty: "The problem with MPA's is native people are not allowed to fish and do things like they used to. They get controlled also" (CH-N-REC-05). Another shared: "I think [state MPAs have] caused a great division in the Tribal community. I think they've influenced our autonomy and our sovereignty about what we even want. I think they've influenced people and convinced people to give away our fishing rights and not fight for our fishing rights. I haven't even really been able to get to a place to want to fight for ocean conservation because I'm still stuck on the erosion of our sovereignty. They've influenced and impacted my family's ability to fish in spots we were fishing in before they put them in 2010" (CH-N-REC-06).

Dispossession and Limited Access

Disposition of Tribal culture and ocean connections are visible through the absence of Tribal rights in California's coastal areas. For example, along the entirety of California's coastline, there are only five coastal or coastal-adjacent reservations or conservation reserves providing dedicated Tribal coastal access (Tolowa Dee-ni' (Smith River); Yurok; Pulikla Tribe of Yurok People (formerly Resigini Rancheria); Big Lagoon, Cher-Ae Heights (Trinidad); Wiyot; and Kashia Band of Pomo Indians) (Figure 3). All six are small, and located in northern California, away from California's highly populated regions. One respondent shared "There's so much about the ocean that's a part of the Chumash people and others. I want to also acknowledge all the other coastal indigenous people, historically, who keep trying to come back [to our traditional land and ocean]. We just keep coming back to it as much as we can... It's kind of heartbreaking" (CH-N-REC-05). Physical access to the ocean from coastal territories can be difficult in some situations. For example, at the Kashia Coastal Reserve reaching the water involves rappelling down a cliff (<https://www.tpl.org/our-work/kashia-coastal-reserve>).

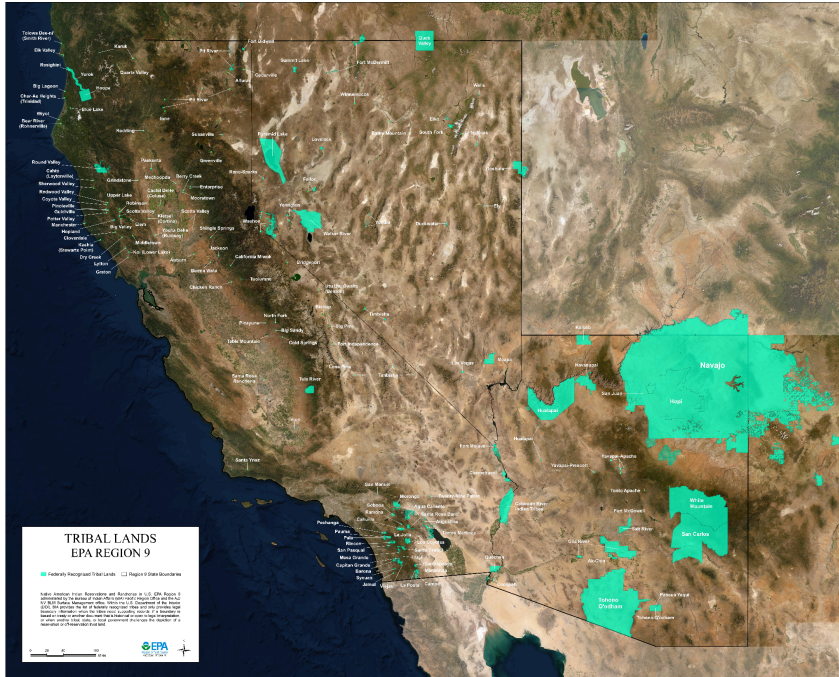


Figure 2. Map of the Reservations/Tribal Land of Federally Recognized Tribes in the west (EPA Region 9) shows that only five Tribal reservations in California have coastal access .We also consider a sixth site to be the privately purchased Kashia Coastal Reserve in Sonoma County at Tribal land by the ocean. Original EPA map at <https://www.epa.gov/Tribal-pacific-sw/federally-recognized-tribes>.

Several Tribal members spoke about the difficulty of maintaining connections to the ocean after being displaced inland, far from their ancestral coastal homes - including the Channel Islands. One respondent shared: “I think that a lot of people found it really difficult to talk about those things because of the trauma involved with being removed from the islands... It's different when it's a choice. [But people] were forcibly removed and I think that's really difficult. I think a lot of that was suppressed in community members because it was difficult to talk [about]. But it doesn't lessen the tie to the islands at all” (CH-N-REC-01).

The cost of coastal areas led to the coastal Tribal community being scattered across the region. “It's hard and people are forced into having to be in one place rather than being able to easily go to and from the ocean as we needed to. Since my family did not have financial resources for multiple generations, we were unable to afford private property by oceans” (CH-N-AF-03). This migration away from their homeland makes it hard for Tribal communities to be together. “Financially, it's really hard for people [in our community to access the ocean and coastal areas]. They need gas. The actual reality of going somewhere and then they have to turn around and drive back to Riverside or Orange County where they live... We should have a place that we can go and camp as well as stay and be together. There should be some place like that, and there

isn't. There just isn't. That's been a really difficult thing for our community. It's a bit fragmented because there's people who live in different places and we can't ever really get together to build the relationships that we need. It has a very big direct effect on the actual health and sustainability of the future of our Tribe and our community. It's difficult. I don't know what to say. It's hard... All we can do at this point is have monthly meetings or post events, but that doesn't really do much. [What we need is a place] where we go and hang out and maybe sit around the fire because everyone loves that. And stay for a while, because people have to come from all over, and bring their children. We have people raising their grandchildren so what I see is really a detriment is the inability to be in a place for more than one day" (CH-N-REC-05).

Housing costs further complicate this, as one participant noted, "if you're barely making in this area as expensive as it is, you're going to grasp at anything that you can to survive. It's like hanging on to a rope" (CH-N-AF-07). Another echoed the challenges of affordability: "Plus all the infrastructure, like the fences, the private ownership of land. It's hard to get to the water, but ... it's also challenging to get property [near the ocean] or get the jobs you need to buy property" (CH-N-AF-03).

Financial Barriers: Travel, Parking and Fees

For many Tribal community members, the cost of parking, site use fees and permits represent an unjust barrier to their inherent rights that restricts their ability to engage in cultural, spiritual, harvesting, and community practices at the coast. What should be considered inherent rights tied to ancestral connection instead become restricted privileges that must be purchased. "[We experience] barriers around having to pay to enter certain places, such as state parks where there's coastal access. That's a problem. I think places that probably were historically accessible before folks arrived here are less accessible now because people bought property on the ocean, and so you can't go to those places anymore... I have a friend who is the former chairman for a coastal tribe in Northern California who made a really broad statement in front of the county supervisors where his community lives and said, 'It is abhorrent that we have to pay [to access the coast]. There's just no reason why we should have to pay to go to a place we pray at.' I have taken that to heart" (CH-N-REC-01).

This model of financialized access also creates an emotional burden. "Parking is really difficult at most of our beaches, not just because there's a lack of spaces, but also because we have to pay for parking. Some people say, "Oh, you can't afford \$8 to park all day?" But it's not about the \$8! It's about the fact that we, as Indigenous people whose land was stolen, are being asked to pay to be on our own land. That doesn't feel good. We do it anyway, but it still doesn't feel right" (CH-N-REC-04).

The cost and logistics of getting to the Channel Islands is challenging. “There are barriers [because] you have to pay to get out there and you have to take the ferry to get out there. Some of our community can't afford those things. It's expensive and I think that's an issue... So many community members are tied to that ancestral village [Swaxil], ... and it's our place of creation. To not be able to access your place of creation is a huge barrier” (CH-N-REC-01).

Permitting Cultural Activities

Challenges with permitting and fees surround other cultural activities as well. The need for permits includes permits for gathering and harvesting marine life, permits to light the fires and burn incense (including plants such as sage) that are a central part of ceremonies. Permits also regulate the ability of communities to gather at the beach in the evenings or overnight, and permits to keep traditional boats near the water. Permits can be regional, state, or federal and are required by a complex network of agencies at different levels of government (e.g., cities for boat storage (local level), harvesting permits and fishing licenses (state level), camping at the Channel Islands (federal level). “Even docking a boat, or keeping a traditional Tomol [a traditional Chumash canoe made from redwood planks, tied and sealed with local tar from tar seeps] on the beach, was something we had to fight for. It's only recently that it's been agreed to by those who have the money to make it happen. But even so, we still have to pay for a license or permit to keep a Tomol on the shore, which feels wrong. When Cabrillo came here, there were hundreds of Tomols on the beach. Now, they want me to pay to put mine there. It doesn't feel right” (CH-N-REC-04). Outside of the interviews, a Tribal member shared the antidote of a time when a Tomol was left at a beach and was given a parking citation. Such experiences are seeds for a larger frustration: that participation in traditional lifeways is dependent on navigating bureaucratic systems that prioritize revenue generation over the cultural continuity and rights of Tribes.

For Tribal community members, gathering marine life for food, regalia, and ceremony (including fire) are key cultural practices that reaffirm community, maintain tradition, and provide opportunity for Indigenous monitoring and knowledge of environmental conditions. But in California, such basic Tribal practices must be permitted by authorities. “I think the moment that really stuck with me was when I was about ten and a ranger told me I couldn't gather shells, that I had to throw them back. I didn't understand why we couldn't be in those spaces or gather the way we had always done” (CR-N-REC-02). Respondents talked about opportunities when staff at state and local levels had opportunities to create easier pathways for Tribal cultural practices, and refused. “We've had trouble even when we've asked the city for permission to keep a Tomol on the beach. We brought it to the city, talked to the waterfront department, and they said they'd approve it if the city gave the go-ahead. But when we spoke

to the city, they said, "We can't do that because everyone will want to do it." We asked, "What do you mean everyone?" They said, "Well, other organizations like yours will want to do it, too." We said, "If other Chumash organizations are asking for coastal access for their Tomols, it should be allowed." But the city said, "The other groups aren't like you. They're not a Chumash nonprofit with a traditional Tomol that belongs here." That was their excuse. These kinds of barriers to access are frustrating" (CH-N-REC-04).

This example highlights a common excuse of officials and enforcement officers - that a Tribal exception would create a hassle for them due to the lack of support and understanding by the general public. This blanket refusal also suggests that the officials are unaware of official distinctions between stakeholders (e.g., most nonprofits and community groups) and rightholders (Tribes and Tribal members) (CITE UNDRIP**). Furthermore, such permitting requirements signal to Tribal members that their relationships with the ocean and coast are subject to external control and gatekeeping, rather than being honored as sovereign practices with cultural and spiritual significance. "Park rules limit our time from sunrise to sunset, but how do they know we don't have a connection to the ocean and the moon? The moon is just as significant as the ocean itself, and we need to pray to both at the same time. People don't understand how interconnected everything is. Our biggest obstacles are explaining why we need to be there and what we're doing when we get there. We constantly have to go through the same processes and explain the same things, when the understanding should already be there. That this is necessary and must happen" (CR-N-REC-01). In this way, the burden of permits not only restricts physical access but also undermines the respect and autonomy that Tribal communities have long sought in coastal governance.

Enforcement and Recognition

In cases where Tribal members have obtained the required permits, respondents shared that cultural activities remain fraught with challenges from conservation/ enforcement officers. "Lack of awareness by conservation officers is a big issue. When I was working with [a Northern California Tribe], that was a big issue because they have [harvesting] exemptions in their traditional area. So if they're out there harvesting, the conservation officers would come up to them and say, 'You can't do that.'" And they'd say, "Oh, but I can do this because this is part of our exemption area.' So that's an issue" (CH-N-REC-01). Respondents highlighted how enforcement officers often lacked awareness of Tribal rights, Tribal exemptions, and the cultural context behind Indigenous practices at the ocean. "Unless you already have a previous relationship or unless they've met a native person, majority of the time they're just following the rules that they've been taught. So a representative of any institution, i.e. state park or any type of protective service member, from fire to plant to oceanic, they're usually just doing their

job. I'm not against them doing their job. However, I want them to prioritize things like needing cultural sensitivity training and awareness training with historical land acknowledgment and history awareness" (CO-REC-01).

This gap in understanding not only created confusion but also placed Indigenous people at risk of confrontation when exercising their rights. Respondents shared stories of being harassed when they were gathering with permits. "When I was younger, I remember having more struggles with agencies and park rangers. It was a lot harder to do things back then. I always had to explain who we were, why we were there, and where we came from. It made me wonder why we had to go through so much. Over time, as we got older and the people in charge changed, things became a little easier. There was a ranger once who was giving a live talk while my mom and I were gathering. She stopped in the middle of her broadcast to tell us to stop, but I greeted her in our language and told her who we were. She just said, 'Go ahead,' and went back to her talk. If it had been in the past, she probably would've stopped everything and told us to stop or throw things back, like had happened [with other park rangers] before. I want that same respect, to not be bothered while we're gathering. We're there praying, not doing anything else. No one would interrupt a priest during confession, so it should be the same for us" (CO-REC-01).

Another respondent focused on priorities of enforcement practices: "When it's just [Tribal members and no one from the general public is present] 50% of the time a ranger will walk up and say, 'Hey, you can't do that.' So, there are constant interruptions, even when we just want to sit, sing, or hold ceremony. We're often asked [to request] permission, which is understandable, but there should be a more streamlined way to do it. [Tribal members] should be able to walk into the ranger station, say, 'Hey, we're going to be over there gathering some things for about two hours, and then we'll be out,' and be on our way. But instead, we get questioned: 'Who are you with? Do you have permission?' And they say, 'We didn't hear about this.' Those barriers make it hard for us to access the ocean" (CH-N-REC-04).

"It's like, if they just took a step back and observed, they might understand, but that's where the communication gets lost. As my sister said earlier, we have to wear all these different hats and learn this language to break down our needs and make them understood by these agencies" (CR-N-REC-02).

Although the state has created harvesting exemptions for Federally recognized tribes in a limited number of MPAs, this does not apply to most communities including those recognized by the California Native Heritage Commission. "For the Chumash community at large, we don't have the exemption. Santa Ynez Tribal members have the exemptions at Kashait and the other [MPAs], so they can go out and harvest by traditional methods in those areas. But we can't"

(CH-N-REC-01). These remarks underscore how regulatory systems center state authority, sidelining Tribal governance and self-determination. Another respondent emphasized the damaging influence of the distinction between Federal vs Non-Federal recognition: “A big thing, which is recognition. Federal recognition gives them [a inland Federally recognized Tribe] the right to intervene on anything, which isn’t necessarily conducive to the well-being of people that are taking care of Shalawa. The people along the coast who’ve been there forever have a right to have a voice. They should have a voice. Whenever I hear or read about something going on, and that [the inland Federally recognized Tribe] is representing everybody, it doesn’t make sense to me. As a matter of fact, it goes against a lot of traditional understanding that everyone who is involved has a right to speak. That’s just not happening. That’s the colonization that gave the dominant culture the right to define who is and who isn’t. That’s the first problem. Then there are the anthropologists who say, ‘Oh, you are,’ and ‘You’re not’” (CH-N-AF-02).

“I have a Tribal ID [issued by a state recognized tribe] along with my regular [drivers license] ID. If I have both in my hand and I'm in a place where traditional gathering might occur, I think that should answer that question [of my right to be there]” (CH-N-REC-01). When enforcement fails to recognize ceremony and harvesting as cultural rights, the very practices that sustain Tribal identity are threatened.

Gatekeeping

Beyond conflicts with formal authorities, Tribal community members also described feeling policed and excluded by the general public acting as informal - but righteous - gatekeepers of coastal spaces. One respondent shared an example, “Before we began [a ceremony], our spiritual advisor lit a sage near the rocks by the [ocean] water, and an elderly woman, who seemed to walk that [coastal] trail daily, yelled at us to put out the fire, claiming we would start a fire... The ally [a non-Tribal] woman told [the gatekeeper that] we were in a ceremony and asked her to mind her business. The [gatekeeper] called the police, saying we were lighting a fire on the beach. The biggest obstacle we face is the gatekeepers - local residents who call authorities whenever they see us gathering. We have to prove who we are and why we’re there. It’s not that authorities are patrolling, but that people are watching us and assuming we don’t belong” (CR-N-REC-01). Such incidents illustrate how Indigenous presence near the ocean is uniquely scrutinized, reinforcing historical exclusion. This suspicion is often rooted in prejudice, as described by one participant: “When we go to gather, people think we’re just taking, but they don’t see the prayers, the offerings, the songs. They don’t see that it is about respect” (CH-N-AF-02).

Respondents described how part of their experience in coastal spaces was navigating interactions with the curious public who often interrupt Tribal activities, and view Tribal members as relics of the past. “People just have this tendency to make an exhibit of us in their mind, which I find to be common when I think indigenous peoples in general. When they see something that is so far from them, it's like going back in time and seeing something that they've never seen before and having real, physical access to it. So they just can't help themselves. Like ‘Oh, I have to get in here and see this and touch it. Give my opinion. Tell [the Indigenous person] what I know and tell [them] about [their] people.’ The one that gets us is when people say, “Oh, this must be a replica. I remember when I was younger, and my aunt was like, ‘Yeah, we're replica Chumash.’ ” (CH-REC-09)

We have observed a significant need for education on the legal differences between stakeholder interests and distinct Tribal rights, and the historical context that necessitates California's commitments to Tribal self-determination and customary use of coastal and ocean resources (SCTA 2020; OPC 2023). A 2024 Marine Protected Area (MPA) Collaborative Network meeting in Santa Barbara demonstrated this lack of understanding, particularly concerning the proposed Mishopshno State Marine Conservation Area (SMCA) in Carpinteria (CDFW 2025). Recreational fishermen were upset that Indigenous Californians (Rightsholders) would be granted Tribal Take rights within the SMCA—an area where take would otherwise be prohibited to the general public. An fisherman attendee questioned the logic of this differential treatment, stating: “You're going to allow take for Tribal people. Right? So did you write some logic for why it makes sense to exclude everybody else?” This view fails to acknowledge the legal basis of Tribal rights as distinct from general public access (UNDRIP 2007; USDIA 2025). Another attendee dismissed the Tribal perspective by invoking “Manifest Destiny”—an outdated and harmful ideology that justified the displacement and conquest of Indigenous peoples and lands (see CA Executive Order N-15-19). This attendee later accused a young Tribal member of being racist simply for explaining the principles of Indigenous Rights.

Together, these experiences reveal a layered system of exclusion — from officers enforcing rules without recognition of Tribal exemptions, to community members questioning Indigenous people’s right to be at the coast, or their existence in modern society. Such misunderstandings contribute to a cycle of disrespect that undermines cultural survival and the reciprocal responsibilities Tribal members maintain with the ocean.

Co-management

Co-management and co-stewardship are the shared responsibility and decision making around management of natural resources and natural places. The right of Treaty Tribes to co-manage

resources with the Federal government was established through the Boldt decision (1974), although its application has been rare around ocean spaces and species in central California due to the paucity of coastal Treaty Tribes. Co-stewardship is the shared management of resources, including in cases where co-management rights are not specified in Treaties. The NOAA Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary was established in 2024, after most of these interviews took place. This new sanctuary includes provisions for co-stewardship between the Federally Recognized Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians and the Sanctuary ([NOAA's Indigenous Collaborative Co-stewardship Website](https://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/chumash-heritage/management/co-stewardship.html):

<https://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/chumash-heritage/management/co-stewardship.html>).

Co-management and co-stewardship can also be established between the state of California and non-Federally recognized Tribes in state lands and waters.

Respondents in our interviews talked about the importance of including Tribal members in the management of ocean spaces, through methods such as co-management or early consultation that incorporated Tribal advice. Respondents spoke about their frustrations with being brought in for consultation at the end of a project: “The project [in one of our sacred sites] has been ongoing for a while, but they just brought us in toward the end” (CR-N-REC-01). They also shared that the siloing of agency roles lead to uncoordinated projects that harmed their sacred sites, and the ocean “I think we opened up his eyes and he has a lot more questions for the people that are involving him, which I'm glad, because this is part of a larger tourism plan ... I was like, you might as well call it the Carefree concern project because they have no concern for the sacred sites that they are desecrating” (CR-N-REC-01). Another respondent provided a specific example around fisheries, “When we're co-managing and co stewarding, we're looking at the resources. So in Sanctuaries, there's recreational fishing. So who's setting those limits and what do those limits look like for recreational fishing? ... Should there be a separate limit for tribes? I think the tribes would push for something like that. [And then the question of] what [Tribal take] looks like in comparison to what commercial fisheries get and what recreational fishers have. And then we haven't gone into the idea of a Tribal commercial fishery in the ocean [in central and southern California]” (CH-N-REC-01).



SOLUTIONS TO STRENGTHEN TRIBAL CULTURES, RELATIONAL VALUES, AND OCEAN ACCESS

Across these interviews, Tribal respondents emphasized the importance of restoring and protecting their inherent rights to access, steward, and maintain relationships with the ocean and coast. Cultural values and place-based science, deeply rooted in relationship and care of the natural world - a foundation that would enrich all ocean policy and management - underlie knowledge solutions and desires of Tribal respondents. Participants called for secure and culturally appropriate spaces for ceremony, gathering, and prayer, as well as the recognition of traditional harvesting, fishing, and fire practices. Many envisioned cultural and educational centers where knowledge sharing, regalia making, and community teaching could thrive alongside opportunities for the broader public to learn about contemporary Indigenous stewardship. Respondents also highlighted the need for policy reforms, standardized Tribal exemptions, and training for agency staff and enforcement officers on cultural awareness and sovereignty. They underscored that sustainable engagement depends on resourcing Tribal communities—especially non-federally recognized Tribes—through dedicated funding, workforce development, and youth training programs that honor Indigenous knowledge as a form of expertise. A foundation for all of these solutions can be genuine co-management and co-stewardship that authorizes Tribes to have decision-making authority over coastal areas. Collectively, these perspectives provide a pathway towards expanded ocean access that accounts for the rights of Tribes to manage and live in relation with the ocean. We recognize, however, that we interviewed a subset of California’s diverse Tribal communities and that these perspectives are the experience of a subset of this community.

A. Protected Temporal & Ceremonial Access, and Fire Rights

Being in ceremony with the ocean is a central part of coastal Tribal culture, which is challenged by the restrictions around being at the ocean and by challenges arising from interactions with non-Tribal community members during ceremony and harvesting. Respondents stressed that the timing of ceremonies and harvesting practices must align with natural rhythms like tides, moon cycles, or seasonal markers. In some cases, ceremonies are supposed to occur at times when public beaches and parks are closed. In other cases, ceremonies last for several days. Yet at other times ceremonies involve building large semi-permanent structures. In this way, creating opportunities for protected access to public spaces would support cultural practices. For example, respondents shared:

- “Our [first priority] would be access to the actual places... There should be unlimited access.” (CR-N-REC-01)
- “Access to space, access to the islands, access to the coastline” (CH-N-AF-07).
- “I don’t think [agency staff] fully understand what we need or are prepared for the ceremony. They’ll say, “Oh, you can come here and gather, do whatever you need to do,” but then when we mention how many people are coming, that there will be a fire, and that it’s going to take days, not just during their 9 to 5 hours. That’s when they want us to explain everything: who, what, where, when, why, and how.” (CR-N-REC-02)
- “People went to the ocean for prayer during the summer equinox and spring solstice, and it would be great if that practice was respected enough to be included in policy. There should be some sort of MOA or MOU with different tribes so they can access cultural resources. But the challenge is that each Tribe is different, so it should be considered on a case-by- case basis, not as a one-size-fits-all. Some Tribes are local to the area and don’t need to travel or camp, but for us, being relocated, we need places to stay in order to access those resources.” (CR-N-REC-01)
- “I’ve always loved the East Bay Regional Park’s gathering of the Ohlone people. My biggest complaint was that, while I love that this day is available to the public, can we have a day for natives to do native activities?” (CO-REC-01)
- “I’d be able to call cousins and say, “You want to go to the ocean?” ... We can call the private landowners on a map that exists of access points, of cultural resources... We also have a map of private land ownership and let them know, ‘Hey, this storm just hit. It’s low tide. We’re here and you’re already on the map. You’ve already mentioned that you already consent to Native people harvesting. We’re letting you know that we’re coming by at five.’ A stronger sense of connection and access that was more flowing of our needs because it would be time sensitive, it would be communal sensitive. When can the community gather? When does everybody have the ride? Is it low tide? High tide? Is it time to go out to the ocean? Is it a ceremony time? Did someone pass? Do we have to start those processes, considerations of a stronger sense of flowing interconnectedness connected?” (CO-REC-01)
- “Having a quiet space where either people are not intoxicated or no children or loud music beyond a certain point... I wouldn’t mind ways of interfacing, but having protective mechanisms in place. It’d be great if there were a couple of signs saying, ‘This is a sacred space beyond this point.’ The public can interface. Don’t take pictures, don’t do this, don’t do that, but advocacy signs that depict that you are in Native land.” (CO-REC-01)
- “I would love to have a gathering for two to four days where we have a safe space with access to the ocean and can navigate in a good way. We could harvest tule,

have a truck or trailer for transporting items, and manage the trimming and burning of materials. I can imagine folding a lot of tule to create a dwelling and using willow while burning the drier leaves and letting them sit in the sun to create shade. We could make a temporary arbor or a non-circular arbor still called an arbor, but with four legs for shade, providing a gathering space that blends traditional and contemporary elements. We'd have a bathroom and a shower, fostering a sense of community." (CO-REC-01)

- "Having access to places, to be able to take our children and adults to the historic places that were our ancestors. [To be] able to go freely so that our children and grandchildren will know their historical cultural value." (CH-N-AF-07)
- "To be [at the ocean and coasts would be part of my ideal future]. So access ... to not have to worry about being reprimanded for being there. (CH-N-AF-08).
- "I always feel that our considerations are rarely ever considered because fire is sacred to harvesting and collecting plant material and medicine and then utilizing it." (CO-REC-01)

Based on the suggestions from respondents we recommend the following for protected Tribal spaces:

1. Creating provisions for Tribal members to have protected access to public ocean and coastal spaces for ceremony and gathering, including times without the general public.
 - Establishing a free Tribal pass for individual and group ocean access that integrated across agencies and governments. Can draw from provisions in AB 2939.
 - Creating provisions for Tribal members to be at beaches during hours that are restricted to the general public, including overnight.
 - Protected space allows Tribal communities to revitalize their ceremony and culture without interruptions by others.
 - Dedicated times without the general public would allow Tribes to choose if the moment is one of private ceremony (when the general public was not there) or one of outreach (when the general public was also there).
 - See Policy topic below for other specific suggestions around policies and procedures to support Tribal access to public beaches and coastal parks.
2. Creating provisions for dedicated Tribal-only 3-4 day weekends at coastal parks and beaches to support longer ceremonies.
 - The timing of such weekends must be set in conversation with Tribes to ensure that the specific dates align with Tribal priorities such as tides, the solstice and equinox.

- Opportunities for Tribal members to camp at the sites would support inclusion of Tribal members who live far away.
 - 3. Creating a registry of private land owners who have property in coastal areas who are willing to have tribes use their land.
 - The state could support the administration of this process and provide incentives for land owners to participate in this process.
 - If incentives are provided it would be preferred if they were tied to 3-6 hour notice, or less.
 - 4. Creating a fund for the state to assist Tribes on the California Native American Heritage Commission ([California Native American Heritage Commission website: https://nahc.ca.gov/](https://nahc.ca.gov/)) to purchase coastal land in their historical territories.
 - An example of this is the Kashia Coastal Reserve (([Trust for Public Land – Kashia Coastal Reserve website: https://www.tpl.org/our-work/kashia-coastal-reserve](https://www.tpl.org/our-work/kashia-coastal-reserve))).
 - 5. Create statewide fire permits for Tribal members to hold ceremonial fires, including burning offerings such as sage.
 - Could include provisions for high fire risk times.
-

B. Tribal Harvesting and Fishing

Several Tribal members described how solutions must center on protecting Tribes' inherent rights to gather, hunt, fish, and have ceremonial fire. These activities are a key part of maintaining and regenerating Indigenous Knowledges about the ocean, through observation, sharing knowledge intergenerationally, and gathering marine life and materials for regalia and food.

- “Gathering rights would be another priority, and fishing rights would be second because we need to sustain ourselves.” (CR-N-REC-01)
- “I strongly feel that [community members] should be able to gather their resources in traditional ways without barriers.” (CH-N-REC-01)
- “Coming from a federally recognized tribe, I do feel that we have self determination to practice traditional harvesting and fishing methods, and ... in that same sentence, it's limited.” (CH-REC-09)
- “Ocean harvesting is something I’m probably forgetting to mention, but one really important thing is that we’re unable to make our plank canoes ... because the redwood driftwood isn’t coming down as much from the north.” (CH-N-AF-03)

Based on suggestions from respondents we recommend the following for Tribal harvesting and fishing:

1. Create a statewide pathway for a Tribally led process for each Tribe on the California Native American Heritage Commission list to permit Tribal members to harvest, gather, and fish in coastal areas.
 - We anticipate that this could range from blanket permission for all Tribal members who possess a Tribal ID to a Tribal Fishing and Gathering permit that requires training by elders and culture bearers.

C. Cultural Centers, Education, and Knowledge Sharing

A strong theme during interviews involved the creation of dedicated cultural and educational spaces. Respondents suggested centers where seaweed processing, regalia making, and cultural teachings could take place alongside public education about contemporary Tribal culture. These suggestions reflect a space for both internal facing cultural practices (community space) and outward-facing education (non-Indigenous awareness). For example:

- “In an ideal situation, we would have a center that houses all of these policies and provides classroom education on how to interact with the space, but also serves as a cultural heritage center explaining our practices. It would be a place where we can process seaweed, collect shells, and engage in other cultural activities. It should be a sanctuary for us to gather, sleep, and stay on the land. Additionally, there should be a boat for offshore monitoring because that observation is crucial.” (CR-N-REC-01)
- “Being able to have Tomol houses, where we can teach, where we can maintain our careers, where we can have a space to be ourselves... safe spaces for our canoes to be able to rest, and for our people to be able to come and learn, and for that space to be utilized by our community, so that it can be us and not just an exhibit for the public... [I realize] there's a dance that you have to do sometimes with that educational component. If there is a way for us to find funding to have a Tomol house for our community, and then also dedicate certain days throughout the year to educational workshops, or a pop up somewhere ... That way you can share who you are: the history [that] is tied to this area - and what we're doing today to continue those traditions. It is really important for us to be able to tell those [contemporary] stories, too.”(CH-REC-09)

- “The wisdom of the elders and the youth needs to be in the same spaces, from sharing stories to kids having fun with arts and crafts and learning to be of help. Imagine opportunities for these places to gather with inclusive opportunities. We need that overlap of interconnectivity. We need space and gathering opportunities... We need space to gather, pray, have fires, or camp out, and to have these kinds of classes...It could be focused on genealogy, sharing old pictures and photos, family stories, language, necklaces, and regalia opportunities... We need space to pray, space to gather, and resources to share cultural sensitivity training and empowerment opportunities. Having a place here where the tomols could be built, stored, and where teachings could take place would be ideal. A place for village shops to happen whenever the weather permits. It should be a teaching space, and a place where people could go to access the ocean.” (CH-N-AF-02)
- “Having signage around and being able to educate the public, and being able to section off our areas better, so that [the public has a] physical barrier. [That way the public can realize] there's actually real Indigenous communities practicing their traditions in real time today, and [they can] read this sign about how [they are expected to] give space and be respectful and use a QR code in case [they] want to learn more.” (CH-REC-09)

Based on the suggestions from respondents we recommend the following for cultural centers, education, and knowledge sharing:

1. Create a pathway to permit and fund a network of Tribal cultural centers in beach and coastal areas across the state where community building and cultural teachings could take place.
 - These sites should include, for example,
 - basic infrastructure (e.g., places to sleep, bathrooms)
 - community room for community gatherings and workshops
 - working space (e.g., Tomol maintenance and storage, seaweed and fish processing and drying, tying traditional nets)
 - Specific sites should be co-developed among local Tribes and be designed to meet local needs.
 - Sites should focus on regeneration of Tribal culture, places, relationships with human and non-human relatives.
 - Sites could also potentially have an outreach component for non-Tribal community members, which could focus on contemporary Tribal culture.
 - Outreach components should not interfere with private Tribal activities.

D. Co-Management and Tribal Stewardship

Several respondents described solutions that would increase Tribal authority and decision making over coastal areas through co-management and co-stewardship around management of ecosystems and natural resources. Tribal respondents offered pathways to better solutions.

- “We deserve the opportunity and the right to be involved in all decisions happening in our territories’ lands and waters. So that ‘stakeholder’ phrasing is not a great way to identify native peoples. However, in all things that do impact stakeholders, native peoples need to be in the room. (CO-REC-01).
- “Ideally, we promote conscious decision-making through a consensual dynamic, offering as much education as possible, infused with empathetic storytelling and connection to the data. We need Indigenous insights and consultation to provide such data. We can then share the narratives we've navigated. Ideally, people will ask, "What does that mean?" and we can explain it might mean a couple more rules or stopping certain practices. Perhaps a new rule will provide resources to be shared, allowing communal efforts. Awareness, training, and education can yield conscious decisions that the community feels invested in, especially since they often feel disenfranchised in the decision-making of larger issues.” (CO-REC-01).
- “I think one way to [create co-management or co-stewardship] is to create an advisory group or council of some kind that is representative of different Tribes. And I think because when we look at [National Marine] Sanctuaries, for instance, and this isn't the only Sanctuary, you have to create something that's going to work everywhere a Sanctuary might be. And so I think you're going to have to have in place some type of decision making that is heavier weighted in terms of the seats that are held for treaty tribes if the sanctuary happens to be in those locations. So, for instance, you could create a body of some kind that included federally recognized tribes, non-federally recognized tribes, treaty tribes and other co-managers.” (CH-N-REC-01)
- “I'm trying to create the Tribal monitoring program so that they can inform better management practices.” (CH-REC-09)
- “Part of that revitalization process is to bring it back to who we are and why we're here and what we're meant to be doing and how we're supposed to be helping everyone around us.” (CH-REC-09)

Based on the suggestions from respondents we recommend to following regarding co-management and co-stewardship:

1. Create funded positions for Tribal members to be involved in decisions around ocean management and ocean access that are happening in their territories' lands and waters.
 - The standard should be that this happens early in the process, for example in the first two months of a project.
2. Invite and fund Tribal members to be involved with working groups and advisory councils for state and local governments.
3. Create and implement management paradigms and standards that draw on concepts of braiding knowledge structures (also known as 'Two-Eyed Seeing' (Reid et al., 2021)).
4. Fund Tribal monitoring programs, including training for Tribal members to be involved in such programs.

E. Policy and Permits Reform

Tribal members described permits and policy processes as significant barriers that conflict with cultural practices. They highlighted frustration with enforcement that fails to recognize their rights and traditions. Solutions that respondents focused on changes to policy and recognition of Tribal sovereignty, and the needs to formalize and standardize Tribal exemptions.

- "I began to see just how much our grandfather had to go through to get the permits he needed to gather, and how hard it was to navigate all the regulations. I don't want it to be this difficult for us forever, though. We're doing this work now so that when we're gone, it's easier for the next generation." (CR-N-REC-02)
- "Tribal members have Tribal ID cards. So I think this would be a very easy thing to do to create access for community members so they don't have to pay to enter. There could be a policy around setting aside campsites so that people could stay overnight... I think at the state level, if you know who the Tribal liaison is in your area, they can really help you for gathering purposes and harvesting traditional materials and creating access that way as well." (CH-N-REC-01)

Based on the suggestions from respondents we recommend the following changes to policy:

1. Initializing a state-led process that creates a streamlined and integrated pathway for Tribal rights to access public ocean spaces across state and local levels of governance (e.g., state parks, municipal beaches). This pathway should include:

- a blanket permission for Tribal members to harvest, gather, fish, and have fires for cultural reasons.
 - Cultural reasons for gathering/ hunting/ harvesting/fire should be outlined/defined by the Tribal leadership as part of this process, but should not need to be justified to the state or local agencies or actors.
 - It would be appropriate for such definitions to remain internal to the Tribe rather than becoming public record.
 - An established pathway for Tribal members to have access to coastal spaces which are available with both short and long planning ranges.
2. We recommend that all Tribes registered with the California Native American Heritage Commission ([California Native American Heritage Commission website: https://nahc.ca.gov/](https://nahc.ca.gov/)) be included in this process. This list is much broader than Federally recognized Tribes. The state should coordinate this process with the Federal government where possible, but not be limited by Federal parameters.
 3. Expand Tribal exemptions in Tribal Take Areas to include all Tribes registered with the California Native American Heritage Commission.
 4. We recognize that not all Tribal members choose to formally affiliate with a Tribe and we recommend that the state identify a pathway for giving these non-affiliated Tribal individuals the same level of access as those formally affiliated with a Tribe.

F. Training for Enforcement Officers and Agency Staff

Respondents described the need for training enforcement personnel and agency staff so they understand Tribal rights, cultural exemptions, and the significance of traditional practices. Without this, enforcement often becomes a barrier rather than a facilitator. One person explained:

- “I still will remain adamant that if there is going to be anyone who's making decisions or rules about access or not having access, or future impact, they need to have [training]. Sensitivity training and awareness training. Any decision maker, policy maker, interpreter of the history of the land. If they don't [possess] the knowledge, if they don't have that information, are the decisions they're making really honoring the past to shape the future? They don't know it. How good can their decision be? So making cultural sensitivity and cultural awareness training

mandatory for anybody who's going to have some sort of deep impact.”
(CO-REC-01)

- “So I guess changing [management] from the inside, I think management could acknowledge and respect our indigenous ocean practices on the same par as these other people that are whole agencies and stuff. Like a Chumash Coastal Commission... More like each agency needs to not just have a liaison, but a Chumash ocean expert who is on staff and on par with all these other people.”
(CH-N-REC-06)

Based on the suggestions from respondents we recommend that the state establish the following requirements:

1. Mandatory training for agency staff that is focused on distinctions between Tribal rights and non-Tribal rights.
 - This should include information about regionally specific Tribal culture, practices, and rights.
2. Training for agency staff including enforcement officers who may interact in spaces with both Tribal members and the general public about successful approaches for protecting Tribal members from gatekeepers and aggressively racist community members.
3. Funding to support public awareness about contemporary Tribal culture including Tribal take and harvesting, and Tribal ceremony.
 - This could include funding for kiosks and signs that provide information about Tribal rights and Tribal exemptions, particularly in areas where Tribal members have Tribal Take Exemptions.

G. Youth Engagement, Exchange, and Workforce Development

Respondents talked about the importance of training and job opportunities for Tribal members in conservation and resource stewardship, recognizing Indigenous knowledge as a qualification. They called for reciprocal investment—if agencies rely on Tribal knowledge, then Tribes should also receive financial support, training, and access to agency resources.

- “I hadn’t even realized my mom was training me for cultural resource management in this fun way because here I am collecting shells... She would take me to cultural sites, archaeologically sensitive sites on job training. I would be a monitor with her for cultural

resource management. So she's training me with harvesting, but also training me for cultural resource management to have a sharp eye." (CO-REC-01)

- "I don't qualify to be a park ranger because I don't have a bachelor's degree, and that's frustrating. Why shouldn't I qualify to be a steward of the land if I know what's right? Policies should take into account indigenous knowledge, because there's so much depth to that experience, especially in ceremonial spaces. Some natives who've never participated in the ceremony are speaking on policies in these spaces, and I wonder how they can speak to it if they don't know the land." (CR-N-REC-01)
- "I think one way we could strengthen ocean management is by creating more opportunities for our people so they can have stable jobs that help them live on the homeland while also allowing them to do ancestral work. It's so expensive to live in our homeland, and a lot of people are used to their nine-to-five jobs [in other locations], which can make them hesitant to go back and start over. But sometimes, you just have to take a leap of faith, trust in the creator, and do what's right. If there were more opportunities, especially jobs that allow people to work and stay connected to the land, that would make all the difference. It would ease their fears about making a change and support them in coming back to the homeland, while also helping to preserve our cultural practices and connections to the land." (CR-N-REC-02)
- "There's an opportunity to collaborate on these efforts [to strengthen intergenerational continuity] especially when it comes to restoration projects. It would be great if [agencies] could provide more support like offering resources such as transportation so we don't have to worry about logistics when we're going out to restore or care for the land. Also I think it's crucial to get our youth involved in these efforts because they will be the ones who carry the torch in the future. If we can open up job opportunities for them beyond the typical routes like working at fast food joints or in trades by showing them that they can get paid for protecting their landscapes and cultural resources it would help sustain this relationship with the land and the ocean. For example land surveying is a paid job and it would be great if we could make these opportunities more accessible to indigenous people. Additionally supporting heritage gatherings and cultural exchanges is essential. For example when we participated in the [second] inter-Tribal exchange with the [National] Marine Sanctuaries it was an incredible experience but it was also very expensive flying people in from places like Samoa and housing them in fancy hotels. It would be amazing to secure funding to make these kinds of exchanges more affordable and accessible for indigenous communities so we can gather and discuss the landscape as a collective. These kinds of exchanges help us see the common ground between different indigenous groups instead of allowing ourselves to be divided. Working together with park services and other agencies to protect and celebrate our cultural heritage could benefit both their goals and our Tribal needs." (CR-N-REC-01)

- [My Tribal community has learned Indigenous knowledge and cultural practices related to the ocean and coasts though] Indigenous oral history, oral tradition, Chumash and other coastal. And also like other Pacific and Pacifica people, relatives visiting us, being in culture exchange with other Pacifica people. When we went to Washington [for Tribal Journeys 2011] (<https://paddletoswinomish.com>), that was very impactful for me. (CH-N-REC-06)
- “We’re doing this work now so that when we’re gone, it’s easier for the next generation. Right now, we have two nephews, and a whole group of youth who look up to us, and I hope they’ll be able to pick up where we left off without having to struggle the way we did.” (CR-N-REC-02)
- “[To strengthen the intergenerational continuity and regeneration of Tribal knowledge] I go back to official programs like a mentor apprentice program for ocean knowledge... Official ways that people can offset working time, working class folks to be able to say, ‘I know my bills are paid, I can participate in this 9 to 5 oral history project’ or something where not only the documentation, but the sharing and the telling of stories is encouraged. .. Something that's maybe more intangible is this idea of prestige building ... but that's how we change the hearts and minds of our people... It's like raising the prestige that being an ocean person is important and special. I see it happening right now. But not enough of a wide scale use that enough people are actively trying to learn and get better. And so what else? Yeah, maybe more jobs that were ocean steward associated jobs.” (CH-N-REC-06)
- “That would be valuable — creating young leaders and teaching useful skills. Imagine parks offering workshops like introduction to scuba diving or ecological water testing, where participants learn kayaking and how to use these tools to navigate. We need accessible workshops and an environment for Native peoples to explore professional development and share their insights, gaining access to things they may not have had before.” (CO-REC-01)
- “I know there are people working on revitalizing this cultural knowledge, like folks getting scuba dive certifications and others bringing back important practices.” (CH-N-AF-03)
- “So right now they're working with the with us, the Chumash and we also invited Tongva people to be a part of this dive program. And by the end of next year, we'll have about 20 scientific divers from both the Chumash Well, a culmination, but the total between divers that are from Chumash and Tongva territories, and then I am also a part of a nonprofit ... which we created to be able to continue to help build capacity in our community and other indigenous communities, you know, along the coast of California. And you know, we'd really like to be able to branch out past our coast. But for now, we really just wanted to focus on having a

nonprofit set up so that we can again contribute to that capacity building piece of Marine Stewardship and monitoring programs, and obviously diving is a huge part of it.” (CH-REC-09)

Based on the suggestions from respondents we recommend developing training, exchange, and job opportunities for Tribal members in conservation and resource management that creates pathways to cultural continuity, sovereignty, and stewardship of ocean spaces:

1. Train and employ Tribal members as stewards, rangers, conservation officers, educators, and knowledge holders, ensuring that financial support builds reciprocity and Indigenous leadership in ocean management.
2. Create pathways for Indigenous knowledge to help people qualify for jobs that usually require bachelors degrees.
3. Provide opportunities for learning and mentoring through intergenerational training about oceans, including in technical skills for ocean careers (e.g., scuba diving, water monitoring). This could be connected to existing programs such as the Tribal Marine Stewards Network.
4. Create a pathway for Tribal fisheries in California, including funds to support training and mentoring by existing fishermen.
5. Fund cultural exchanges and partnerships that help communities build solidarity and shared stewardship practices (e.g., ONMS 2023).

H. Funding and Grants

Creating funding streams to support the proposed solutions through state funding and tax-credits, particularly for non-Federally recognized tribes who do not have access to other funding sources such as Federal grants or gaming/casino money.

- “Imagine if there was some sort of contract agreement such as instead of them paying a land tax, a gift tax to their property tax, have them just say, ‘we allocate 100 kayaks per month for native peoples for this opportunity.’ Or scuba access so we can watch and pay attention to our waterways. I don't even know where to go to access such places.” (CO-REC-01)
- “Funding is another issue. There’s funding for conservation, but there should also be funding for tribes to access cultural resources... Reporting should also be done not just by archaeologists but by native scholars, because they bring a crucial

perspective. It should be native scholars first, then archaeologists, then scientists. Right now, it's the other way around, and that needs to change. All the reporting and decision-making should consider how projects impact our cultural resources." (CR-N-REC-01)

- "It's hard to sustain who we are and still make time for these ceremonies, especially when it's a challenge to secure funding for them. If those obstacles could be eased, it would make a huge difference." (CR-N-REC-01)
- "Money to support ocean stewards. It's a law now—everyone, every program that does ocean economy has to pay a Chumash tax." (CH-N-REC-06)
- "If you can gather to fundraise, a part of that fundraising should also address this issue... These people who throw these big galas could just give that money directly instead of spending it on the gala, but it makes them feel better to be part of that event. They can also pitch in 100 dollars a month to give back to the first people whose land they're sitting on and denying access to." (CH-N-REC-04)

Based on the suggestions from respondents we recommend the following for funding Tribal access and participation:

1. Grants, subsidies, in-kind donations, and fee waivers that cover the costs of permits, fees, and use.
2. Grants that fund cultural activities, travel to coastal homeland areas, knowledge sharing, and job training.
3. Grants that fund job training, and a focus on hiring Tribal members for positions such as officers and rangers.
4. Raising funds through a state tax that benefits tribes.
5. A call for philanthropic support of Tribal cultural revitalization.



HOW CAN INDIGENOUS WAYS OF KNOWING, ROOTED IN ANCESTRAL TIES TO OCEANS AND MPA SITES, INFORM AND ENRICH CALIFORNIA MARINE SCIENCE AND POLICY?

The sacred responsibility, reciprocity, and gratitude highlighted throughout these interviews provide a treatise for regenerative management of California’s oceans. We focus on three aspects of these ways of knowing. First, the sense of responsibility and care for community and future generations deeply influenced respondent’s careful and attentive approaches to resource harvesting. Respondents spoke about a place-based attention that was built on spending time in ocean and coastal ecosystems, and harvesting in a manner that promotes “harmony, supporting a healthy ecosystem for everyone, especially future generations” (CH-N-AF-03). That description highlights a responsibility to maintain a healthy ecosystem for others - both today and in the future. This is diametrically opposed to many Western value systems (e.g., neo-liberal economics) which emphasize the value of individual gain and short-term profit over communal benefit or long-term sustainability. Second, the centrality of having a “direct relationship with the ocean, and a responsibility to it” (CH-N-REC-01) that is *the same* as the responsibility and love for our human family. In that sense respondents' described a care for the ocean that is holistic, steady, and uncompromising, without the sense of permissiveness for collateral damage that is common in western culture and management (e.g., the end justifies the means). Third, respondents described how their connection to nature and community infused activities ranging from making regalia to fishing. This centrality of this connection to the natural world supports practices and activities that prioritize the wellbeing of the local ecosystem without a sense that resources can (and will) come from elsewhere if local ones are damaged or depleted. The ocean management and ocean access challenges facing California, the US, and the world suggest that we need a foundation for management that centers sustainability and working with place-based and regenerative perspectives from California’s Indigenous communities may illuminate such a path.

CONCLUSION

Tribal communities across California have cared for coastal and marine environments since time immemorial. The findings of this report reaffirm that restoring ocean access is not merely about physical entry to the coast but about restoring relationships, responsibilities, and rights. Barriers faced by Tribal members today are rooted in a legacy of exclusion and misunderstanding that can only be repaired through policy change, education, and partnership grounded in respect.

Tribal voices in this study, representing a range of experiences in central California, envision a future where Indigenous stewardship is recognized as essential to the health of California's oceans. By embedding Indigenous Knowledge in coastal governance, providing sustained funding, and establishing co-management and co-stewardship agreements, the state can help regenerate both ecosystems and cultural continuity. Restoring Tribal ocean access is an act of justice and care—one that strengthens the social and ecological fabric of California's coast for generations to come. Our future work in this area will expand to the Phase II counties (San Diego, Los Angeles, Sonoma, Humboldt, and Del Norte) and include the perspectives of Tribal Councils as well as individual cultural bearers and resource users from those areas.



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PHOTO CREDITS

- [Cover photo](#): In the fall, Chumash crews paddle 23 miles across the channel to the island of Santa Cruz (Limuw). Credit: Robert Schwemmer, NOAA.
- [Page 4](#). Cultural exchange between Chumash Tribal Members from California and Maori People from New Zealand at Wishtoyo Chumash Village, Malibu California. 2021. Credit: Teresa Romero.
- [Page 11](#). Tomol 'Elye'wun (Swordfish). Credit: Robert Schwemmer/NOAA
- [Page 13](#). Channel Islands, California. Credit: Jennifer Selgrath.
- [Page 15](#). Channel Islands, California. Credit: Jennifer Selgrath.
- [Page 18](#). Tribal members paddle a Chumash tomol canoe. Credit: Teresa Romero.
- [Page 34](#). Intertidal marine life, Monterey Bay, California. Credit: Jennifer Selgrath.
- [Page 50](#). Dolphin dorsal fin and whale tail visible in the Santa Barbara Channel. Credit: Jennifer Selgrath.
- [Page 52](#). Close-up photograph of wooden tomol paddles from the Village of Swaxil. Credit: Robert Schwemmer, NOAA.

APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

IDENTIFYING PATHWAYS TO DISTRIBUTIVE EQUITY IN MPA MANAGEMENT IN A CHANGING CLIMATE

Tribal Members

PIs: Jennifer Selgrath, Tim Frawley
UCSB IRB PROTOCOL NUMBER 1-23-0470
ID: _____

Permissions

Good morning/afternoon, my name is [NAME] and I am a [TITLE] at [INSTITUTION] (e.g., California Marine Sanctuary Foundation).

Project Overview

We would like to invite you to participate in a research study about peoples' relationship with the ocean, marine protected areas, and climate change. MPAs are places that are managed to protect and sustain marine seascapes, species, cultures, and/or habitats. Our hope is that by getting a better sense of the experiences of different communities and individuals, we can help guide policies that increase effectiveness and equity in the management of coastal spaces.

After collecting some general background and demographic information, I am going to ask you a series of questions including: 1) how you are able to access the ocean - or what prevents you from accessing the ocean; 2) what ocean and coastal activities that you are interested in, participate in, or aspire to participate in, including traditional practices and harvesting; 3) what you care about and value related to ocean and coasts; and 4) your experience with MPAs and climate change. There are no right or wrong answers.

With your permission, during the interview I would like to audio and/or video record our conversation so that we might review its contents at a later date. The recording will be encrypted and stored in a password and firewall protected device and will only be shared with individuals who are transcribing the interview.

The recording will be deleted after it is transcribed, and the transcript will be anonymized. I would also like to record your contact information so that I can reach out to you with any follow up questions. I will maintain your confidentiality. Any personal information that you

provide will be protected, and your responses will be anonymized. No significant risks are thought to be associated with this type of study. However, you are permitted to skip any question that makes you feel uncomfortable, or end our discussion at any point. Your participation is voluntary, and you will be compensated for your time with a

\$50 gift card, regardless of what information you share and when you choose to end the interview.

Following the interview, you can contact me with questions at ca.ocean.access.and.mpas@gmail.com. If you have any concerns, complaints, or general questions about the research or your rights as a participant, please contact the University of California Santa Barbara's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to speak to someone independent of the research team at 805-893-3807. You can also contact the Office of Research at hsc@research.ucsb.edu or write to them at Human Subjects Coordinator, Office of Research, 3227 Cheadle Hall, University of California, Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara, CA 93106-2050.

Consent

Would you like to participate in this research project?

- Yes
- No

Do I have your permission to record our conversation?

- Yes - audio and video
- Yes - audio only
- No - no recordings

Introduction

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this interview. I'm going to start by asking you questions about your relationship and your Tribal community's relationship with the ocean and coastal areas. I'll end by asking you several demographic questions that are important for the study.

When I ask you about places or traditions in the questions, feel free to describe them generally if you prefer to not name specific information, such as place names.

Community

1. How would you describe your role within your community?

Ocean Access and Locations

1. How often do you spend time on or near the ocean and coastal areas? Would you like to spend more time by the ocean and coastal areas than you do currently? What are some of the reasons that you don't spend time at the ocean and coastal areas? How has this changed throughout your life?
2. What are the most important ways that you or your Tribal community spend time at the ocean?
3. Are there places in the ocean and coastal areas that hold significance for you or your Tribal community? If so, could you please describe the places and why they are important? Do these places have particular attributes?
4. What is your usual mode of transportation to the ocean and coastal areas?
5. Are there things that make it difficult for you to access and/or use the ocean and coastal areas?
 - *[Do not read, but can use as prompts: paid parking or permits, Tribal fishing permits only for Federally recognized Tribes, need to pay for fishing permits, not allowed to build fires, access is treated like general public, not able to harvest or access specific places, places not protected or private when conducting ceremony, availability of boats]*
6. Do you have suggestions of changes such as policies, actions, cultural shifts, or infrastructure that could support your access, or access of your Tribal community?

Benefits and Uses

7. Could you talk about your or your Tribal community's relationship with the ocean, and about how the ocean is connected to your culture and to your cultural practices?

Traditional Harvesting

8. Do you use the ocean and coasts for gathering, harvesting, or fishing? If you feel safe sharing, could you talk about some of the purposes that you gather and/or fish?
 - *[Do not read, but can use as prompts: food, regalia, fun, maintaining traditional knowledge]*
9. Could you describe the methods that you use to gather, harvest or catch things from the ocean or coasts, including any traditional methods?

10. On a scale of 1-5 where 1 is no self-determination and 5 is unlimited self determination, do you feel that you have the self-determination to practice traditional harvesting or fishing methods?
- No self-determination
 - Limited self-determination
 - Self-determination (neither limited, nor a lot)
 - A lot of self-determination
 - Unlimited self-determination
 - I don't know
 - Prefer not to answer
11. Are there reasons why you do not use traditional harvesting or fishing methods?
- *[Do not read, but can use as prompts: license requirements, overharvesting by recreational fishers, loss of knowledge, cost, fear]*

Indigenous Knowledges

12. What are the mechanisms through which you or your Tribal community have learned Indigenous Knowledge and cultural practices related to the ocean and coasts?
- *[Do not read, but can use as prompts: Elders, personal experience, historical record, practice, spending time in places, multi-generational learning]*
13. At various points in your life, how has your access or your Tribal community's access to the ocean influenced your ability to learn, maintain, and/or pass on your Indigenous Knowledge?
14. Do you have suggestions about how to strengthen the intergenerational continuity and regeneration of your Tribe's knowledge?
- How do you envision that management could support this continuity?
15. How do you envision that the Indigenous Knowledge of you or your Tribe could strengthen management?
16. Do you or your Tribal community participate in ceremonies that relate to the ocean? What could improve your ability to participate in, learn, or teach these practices?
17. Do you or your Tribal community feel a sense of responsibility for the ocean? If yes, in what way? How do you think this influences you?

ID: _____

18. Do people in your Tribal community see the ocean, or the plants and animals that live in the ocean, as something that they are connected to or that they relate to?
- If yes, could you describe these connections?
 - Are there any species that are particularly important or that people feel strongly connected to?
19. Are there other ways that we have not talked about yet which the ocean benefits you and/or people in your Tribal community?

Climate

20. On a scale of 1-5 where 1 is not at all familiar and 5 is extremely familiar, how familiar are you with climate change?
- 1. Not at all familiar
 - 2. Slightly familiar
 - 3. Moderately familiar
 - 4. Very familiar
 - 5. Extremely familiar
21. Have you or your Tribal community experienced changes in the ocean and marine life due to climate change or other stressors?
- Yes - due to climate change
 - Yes - due to other stressor. Please specify: _____
 - No
 - I don't know
22. What are your, or your Tribal community's, biggest concerns about how climate change impacts your local coast and marine protected areas (MPAs)? Are these based on experience, concerns about the future, or both?
23. Does your Tribal community discuss the current or future effects of climate change on the ocean, or generally?
24. What would you consider to be your Tribal community's primary sources of information about climate change?

ID: _____

MPAs

25. On a scale of 1-5 where 1 is not at all familiar and 5 is extremely familiar, how familiar are you with state marine protected areas (MPAs)?
- 1. Not at all familiar (never heard of)
 - 2. Slightly familiar
 - 3. Familiar
 - 4. Very familiar
 - 5. Extremely familiar
26. On a scale of 1-5 where 1 is not at all familiar and 5 is extremely familiar, how familiar are you with national marine sanctuaries?
- 1. Not at all familiar (never heard of)
 - 2. Slightly familiar
 - 3. Familiar
 - 4. Very familiar
 - 5. Extremely familiar
27. On a scale of 1-5 where 1 is no one and 5 is everyone, how many people in your Tribal community are aware of MPAs in California, including the state marine protected area network and national marine sanctuaries?
- 1. No one
 - 2. Very few people
 - 3. Some people
 - 4. Most people
 - 5. Everyone
 - I don't know
28. If you are aware of state MPAs or National Marine Sanctuaries, have you or your Tribe been influenced by them locally, or across California? If so, how?
- Are there specific state MPAs or Sanctuaries that have had the largest influence on you?
29. Are you familiar with the proposed Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary?
- Yes
 - No

ID: _____

30. On a scale of 1-5 where 1 is strongly oppose, and 5 is strongly support, how supportive are you of the proposed chumash heritage national marine sanctuary?

- 1. Strongly oppose
- 2. Oppose
- 3. Neutral
- 4. Support
- 5. Strongly support
- Unsure

31. If you or your Tribe were making law and policies about the ocean or protecting marine areas - including state reserves or sanctuaries - what would your priorities be?

Wrap up

32. In an ideal future, how do you envision the relationship between your Tribe, the ocean, and other coastal spaces?

33. Do you have any additional comments or concerns about these topics that you would like to communicate? Is there anything important that we should know about?

ID: _____

Demographic Questions

34. Do you know how to swim?

- No
- Yes

35. What is your race or ethnicity? Check ALL that apply [For Asian, Hispanic or Latino, ask [Demographic Roster](#)].

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Hispanic or Latino
- Middle Eastern or North African
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- White

36. Are you affiliated with a Tribe?

- Yes - federally recognized Tribe
- Yes - non-federalized Tribe
- Yes, but not formally affiliated with any band
- No

If yes, Would you share which Tribe you are affiliated with? _____

37. Are you: [Mark all that apply]?

- Female
- Male
- Transgender, non-binary, or another gender
- Choose not to answer

38. What is your year of birth? _____

39. What is the zip code or country of your primary residence? _____

40. How long have you lived in the area where you currently reside? _____ years

41. What was your annual household income (before taxes) in 2023? (note: we obtained additional information to supplement this question for low incomes).

- Less than \$49,999
- \$50,000 to \$79,999
- \$80,000 to \$119,999
- \$120,000 to \$179,999
- \$180,000 to \$239,999
- \$240,000 or more
- Prefer not to say

42. Do you speak a Tribal language?

- Yes
- No

43. What are your preferred language(s) for speaking:

- English
- Spanish
- Tagalog (or other Filipino language)
- Vietnamese
- Chinese
- Korean
- Other, please specify: _____

44. What is the highest level of education you have completed? (check one)

- Some high school or high school graduate (includes GED)
- Some college (less than or equal to 2 year associate's degree)
- College graduate (bachelor degree)
- Graduate degree (professional, Masters, PhD, etc)
- Vocational degree
- Other (fill in the blank) _____