

# Staff Report 52

## APPLICANT:

Greater Farallones Association

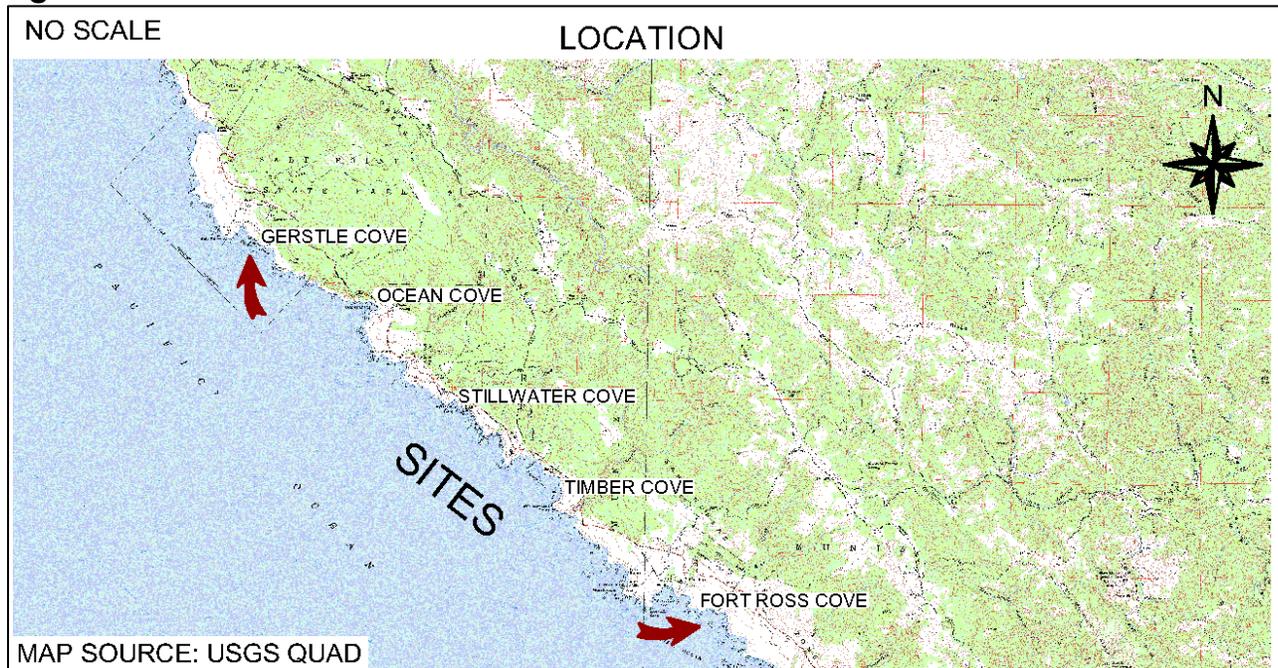
## PROPOSED ACTION:

Issuance of a General Lease – Other.

## AREA, LAND TYPE, AND LOCATION:

Sovereign land in the Pacific Ocean at Fort Ross Cove, Timber Cove, Ocean Cove, and Gerstle Cove, adjacent to 19005 Coast Highway, near Jenner, and Drakes Bay near Abalone Point and Double Point, Sonoma County (as shown in Figure 1).

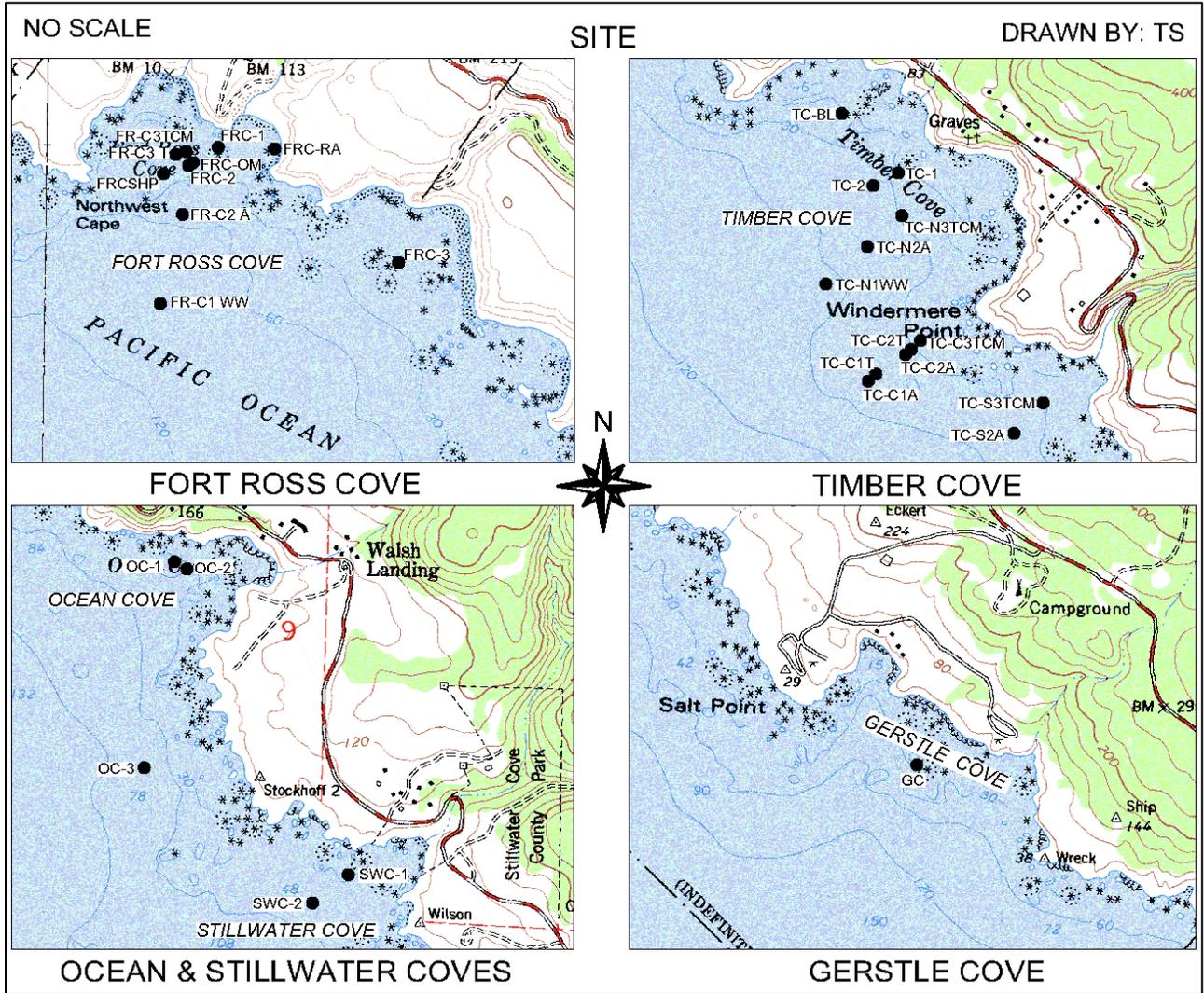
**Figure 1. Location**



**AUTHORIZED USE:**

Activities required to implement a kelp restoration project and hydrodynamics study with installation of seven data collection mooring buoys and installation of study grids (as shown in Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Site Map**



NOTE: This depiction of the lease premises is based on unverified information provided by the Applicant or other parties and is not a waiver or limitation of any State interest in the subject or any other property.

**TERM:**

5 years, beginning February 9, 2026.

**CONSIDERATION:**

The public use and benefit, with the State reserving the right to set a monetary rent if the Commission finds such an action to be in the State's best interests.

**SPECIFIC LEASE PROVISIONS:**

- Liability insurance in an amount no less than \$1,000,000.
- Surety bond in the amount of \$10,000.

**STAFF ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATION:**

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**AUTHORITY:**

Public Resources Code sections 6005, 6216, 6301, 6501.1, and 6503; California Code of Regulations, title 2, sections 2000 and 2003.

**PUBLIC TRUST AND STATE'S BEST INTERESTS:**

Kelp forest habitat in northern California has been widely lost due to repeated warm water events that lowered reproduction rates of kelp, as well as disease events that removed important predators of kelp forest grazers. Recreational red abalone (*Haliotis rufescens*) and commercial red sea urchin (*Strongylocentrotus franciscanus*) fisheries in the region have collapsed, and further effects for other nearshore groundfish fisheries are expected.

The Applicant is applying for a General Lease – Other for a proposed kelp study and habitat restoration project (Project) that would explore factors that influence the spread and growth of kelp. The project would occur at multiple locations, including Fort Ross Cove, Timber Cove, Ocean Cove, and Gerstle Cove adjacent to 19005 Coast Highway, near Jenner, and at Drakes Bay near Abalone Point and Double Point, Sonoma County.

The goal of the Project is to restore resilient kelp habitat by establishing a network of kelp forest oases along California's north coast that can provide habitat for invertebrates and fishes and supply spores for surrounding areas, facilitating broad-scale recovery of kelp forests in the Greater Farallones National Marine Sanctuary. The project involves urchin removal, kelp out planting, and the placement of mooring buoys with attached monitoring sensors.

The Project plans to use three techniques to enhance growth of kelp throughout planting: (1) soral (reproductive tissue) bag outplants, (2) sporophytes grown on

pavers, and (3) sporophytes grown on twine. Soral bag outplants consist of mesh bags attached to the substrate, which have been inserted with high volumes of fresh bull kelp sori to allow for a high concentration of spores to be released within the restoration areas where urchins have been cleared. The second method involves growing sporophytes on 8 centimeter/squared pavers. The third method involves growing sporophytes on twine, which is then weaved around the lead lines placed within the Project restoration area.

Oceanographic sensor arrays will be attached to a mooring buoy at each restoration site in the soft bottom areas in each cove. A total of seven 300–500-pound moorings will be placed. Each mooring will use 3/8-inch double braided nylon anchor ropes with marine grade hooks and a 100-pound buoyancy buoy. All moorings and lines will be maintained regularly to prevent biofouling on the sensors, retrieve/replace sensors and collected data, ensure proper placement of the equipment, and prevent any part of the line or sensors from dragging on the seafloor. Maintenance is expected to occur no less frequently than twice per year and no more frequently than every 3-4 months. Each mooring will be equipped with a waterproof SPOT GPS location unit that will send notifications if the mooring location changes significantly (more than 5 meters) in any direction. Mooring and sensor arrays will be retrieved, serviced, and redeployed from boats.

The proposed Project provides both local and statewide public benefit, as the primary objectives are to improve fishery conditions and ecosystem function, build ecosystem and coastal resilience, and mitigate climate change impacts via carbon sequestration.

The proposed Project and its associated activities, including mechanical removal of sea urchins, establishment of study grids, installation and maintenance of physical data collection buoys/sensor arrays, scientific diver monitoring surveys, etc., can be expected to have some minor and short duration effects on marine habitats and associated biota currently present in the proposed restoration coves along the Sonoma County coast and within the Sanctuary.

The proposed lease does not alienate the State's fee simple interest or permanently impair public rights. In addition, the lease has a limited 5-year term and does not grant the lessee's exclusive rights to the lease premises. Furthermore, the lessee will be subject to lease terms and conditions which promote public use and safety. The proposed lease requires the lessee to indemnify the State for any liability incurred as a result of the lessee's activities thereon.

**CLIMATE CHANGE:**

**INTRODUCTION:**

The climate crisis and rising sea levels are impacting coastal California now. As underscored in the [State of California Sea Level Rise Guidance](#) (Ocean Protection Council, 2024), the combination of extreme weather events and the persistent and accelerating rise in sea levels will lead to increased coastal hazards, such as wave runup, storm surges, flooding, and erosion. Shorelines will move inland due to rising seas, exposing more of the natural and human-built environment to coastal hazards. The resulting damage will occur repeatedly and incrementally over years and, in extreme cases, over the span of a few large winter storms. These impacts may affect the newly installed mooring buoys and lines and bolts subject to the proposed lease, located in the Pacific Ocean in Sonoma County.

**DATA & PROJECTIONS:**

Sea levels along most of the California coast rose four to eight inches during the last century, and this trend will accelerate throughout this century. The current rate of sea level rise is triple the rate during the last century. There is growing confidence that by 2050 sea levels will be approximately ten inches higher than they were in 2000. The severity of sea level rise beyond 2050 is contingent on future levels of greenhouse gas emissions. The California Ocean Protection Council updated the State of California Sea Level Rise Guidance in 2024 to provide a synthesis of the best available science on sea level rise projections and rates for multiple emissions scenarios. To apply a precautionary approach, Commission staff evaluated the intermediate scenario due to the lower vulnerability and exposure of the lease location and the adaptability of the improvements. The Point Reyes tide gauge was used for the projected sea level rise scenario for the lease area, as listed in Table 1.

**Table 1. Projected Sea Level Rise for Point Reyes**

Year	Intermediate (feet)
2040	0.6
2060	1.1
2080	1.9
2100	3.1

Source: Table 5, State of California Sea Level Rise Guidance: 2024 Update

Note: Projections are with respect to a 2000 baseline.

**ANALYSIS:**

Commission staff used the online sea level rise mapping tool, [Our Coast Our Future](#), to evaluate risks to the lease premises and structures from sea level rise. At present sea levels, the lease premises are already regularly flooded and subjected to wave impacts and erosion, which could potentially damage any structures or improvements on the lease premises. Episodic or short-term events, such as extreme storms, very high or King tides, and El Niño events, alone or in combination, will increase the vulnerability of the lease premises and expose it to higher water levels and stronger wave runup, overtopping, and erosion.

As a result, the mooring buoys may sustain substantial damage and degradation over the lease term, requiring more frequent repairs and maintenance to retain their function. Stronger coastal erosion can wash away the soil and sediment supporting the mooring buoys, causing structural instabilities. Additionally, the mooring buoys may experience increased damage from waves breaking closer and stronger to shore.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Regular maintenance, as referenced in the terms of the lease, may reduce the likelihood of severe structural degradation or dislodgement. Pursuant to the proposed lease, the Lessee acknowledges that the lease premises and adjacent upland (not within the lease area) are located in an area that may be subject to the effects of climate change, including sea level rise.

**CONCLUSION:**

For all the reasons above, staff believe approval of this lease will not substantially interfere with Public Trust needs at this location, at this time, and for the term of the lease; is consistent with the common law Public Trust doctrine; and is in the best interests of the State.

**OTHER PERTINENT INFORMATION:**

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1. Approval or denial of the application is a discretionary action by the Commission. Each time the Commission approves or rejects a use of sovereign land, it exercises legislatively delegated authority and responsibility as trustee of the State's Public Trust lands as authorized by law. If the Commission denies the application, the Applicant will be unable to implement the proposed Project. The lessee has no right to a new lease or to renewal of any previous lease

2. This action is consistent with the “Leading Climate Activism” and “Meeting Evolving Public Trust Needs” Strategic Focus Areas of the Commission’s 2021-2025 Strategic Plan.
3. **New Installation:** Staff recommends that the Commission find that this activity is exempt from the requirements of CEQA as a categorically exempt project. The project is exempt under Class 3, New Construction or Conversion of Small Structures; California Code of Regulations, title 14, section 15303.

**Information Collection/Sampling:** Staff recommends that the Commission find that this activity is exempt from the requirements of CEQA as a categorically exempt project. The project is exempt under Class 6, Information Collection; California Code of Regulations, title 14, section 15306.

Authority: Public Resources Code section 21084 and California Code of Regulations, title 14, section 15061.

### **APPROVAL OBTAINED:**

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- California Department of Fish and Wildlife

### **APPROVAL REQUIRED:**

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- California Coastal Commission

### **RECOMMENDED ACTION:**

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It is recommended that the Commission:

#### **CEQA FINDING:**

Find that the activity is exempt from the requirements of CEQA pursuant to California Code of Regulations, title 14, section 15061 as a categorically exempt project through the combination of the following exemptions: Class 3, New Construction or Conversion of Small Structures; California Code of Regulations, title 14, section 15303; and Class 6, Information Collection; California Code of Regulations, title 14, section 15306.

**PUBLIC TRUST AND STATE'S BEST INTERESTS:**

Find that the proposed lease will not substantially interfere with Public Trust needs and values at this location, at this time, and for the term of the lease; is consistent with the common law Public Trust doctrine; and is in the best interests of the State.

**AUTHORIZATION:**

Authorize issuance of a General Lease – Other to the Applicant beginning February 9, 2026, for a term of 5 years, for activities required to implement a kelp habitat restoration project and hydrodynamics study with installation of seven data collection mooring buoys; consideration being the public use and benefit, with the State reserving the right to set a monetary rent if the Commission finds such an action to be in the State's best interests; liability insurance in an amount no less than \$1,000,000 per occurrence; and a bond or other security instrument in the amount of \$10,000.