

Staff Report 41

APPLICANT:

United States Geological Survey

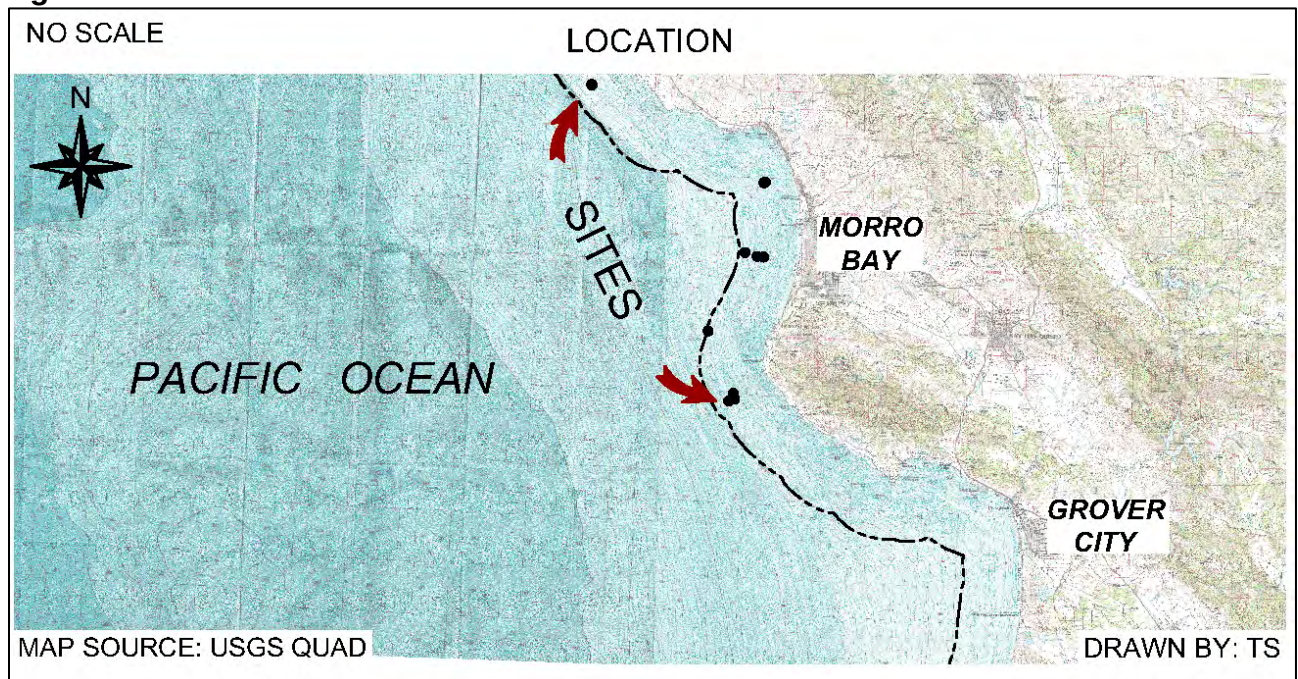
PROPOSED ACTION:

Issuance of a Non-Exclusive Geological Survey Permit.

AREA, LAND TYPE, AND LOCATION:

Ungranted sovereign land offshore Central California approximately ranging from the community of Harmony to Point Buchon State Marine Reserve, San Luis Obispo County (as shown in Figure 1).

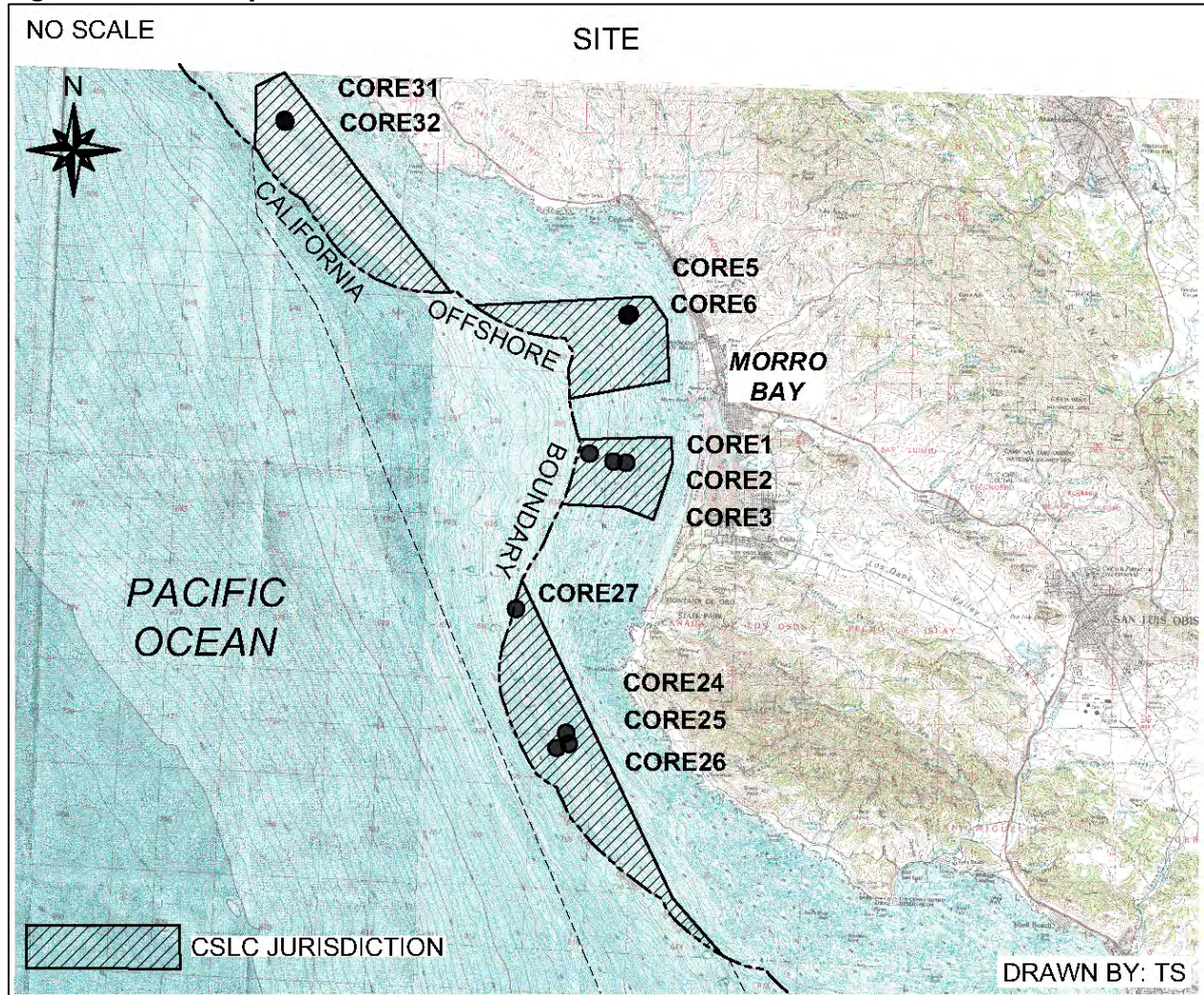
Figure 1. Location



AUTHORIZED USE:

Collection of geological data utilizing piston coring and vibracoring sampling drilling methods (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:

1 year, beginning August 25, 2026.

SPECIFIC PERMIT PROVISIONS:

The general terms of this Geological Survey Permit require the permittee to provide staff with advance notification of operations, including identification of the vessels deployed and locations and depth of the sampling, as well as a field operations report following any survey activities. The permit requires staff approval of sampling locations. The permittee must perform all work with due regard for the preservation of property and potential environmental impacts, and with due caution to minimize damages to third parties. The work must be completed within one year.

STAFF ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATION:

AUTHORITY:

Public Resources Code sections 6005, 6212.2, and 6301.

PUBLIC TRUST AND STATE'S BEST INTERESTS:

The United States Geological Survey applied for a 1-year Geological Survey Permit to collect geological and geotechnical data from sovereign land offshore Central California approximately ranging from the community of Harmony to Point Buchon State Marine Reserve, San Luis Obispo County. The permit will authorize the collection of up to ~~twentyfive~~ cores within the defined survey areas using gravity-driven piston coring and vibracoring ~~drilling~~ methods. Cores will be collected with a 3.5-inch diameter barrel and cores ranging from 1 to 8 meters deep.

The geological sampling covered under this permit supports the collection of geotechnical data to characterize earthquake-related stratigraphic records to improve the understanding of earthquake recurrence, intervals, rupture behavior, and seismic hazards affecting coastal California. The study will focus on the Hosgri Fault Zone.

The proposed core locations are the current operational targets, and not all locations may be sampled. Targets were planned from existing chirp, multibeam bathymetry, and seafloor backscatter datasets in unconsolidated soft-sediment environments.

Sampling is planned to occur from September 23 through October 4, 2026, but exact dates may shift due to weather, sea state, vessel operations, and sediment recovery conditions.

The Permittee has submitted a permit application with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife for up to five vibracore deployments within Point Buchon State Marine Conservation Area. There are currently three targets within this area, but additional deployments up to five may be necessary if initial deployments produce insufficient penetration or poor sediment recovery. The Permittee will also coordinate with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration or any other appropriate permitting agencies to sample within Point Buchon State Marine Reserve.

The State Historic Preservation Officer has had the opportunity to review and comment pursuant to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and its implementing regulations found at 36 CFR Part 800. The Applicant attempted to identify and consider historic properties from a records search at the Southern San Joaquin Valley Information Center, existing geophysical survey datasets, and tribal consultation. The State Historic Preservation Officer does not object to the Applicant's proposed finding of *No Historic Properties Affected* for the proposed project.

California courts have recognized the collection of data for scientific study on lands subject to the Public Trust as a use consistent with the common law Public Trust Doctrine. (See, e.g., *Marks v. Whitney* (1971) 6 Cal.3d 251, 259-260.) Additionally, California Public Resources Code section 6212.2 expressly authorizes the Commission to issue permits for the taking of cores or other samples for the purpose of obtaining geological information so long as the activity is not for the purpose of commercial exploration or exploitation.

The proposed permit contains restrictions such that the Permittee shall perform all work with due regard for the preservation of property covered under this permit, potential environmental impacts, and with due caution to minimize damages to third parties. In addition, the permit grants non-exclusive use of the permit area to the permittee, and the defined work must be completed within one year.

For all the reasons above, staff believes that approving the permit application does not substantially interfere with Public Trust needs and values; is consistent with the common law Public Trust Doctrine; and is in the best interests of the State. Staff recommends approval of this Non-Exclusive Geological Survey Permit application.

OTHER PERTINENT INFORMATION:

1. Approval or denial of the application is a discretionary action by the Commission. Each time the Commission approves or rejects the 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 not be authorized to conduct geological surveys on sovereign land. Upon expiration or prior termination of the permit, the applicant has no right to a new permit or to renewal of any previous permit.
2. This action is consistent with the "Meeting Evolving Public Trust Needs" Strategic Focus Area of the Commission's 2021-2025 Strategic Plan.
3. Staff recommends that the Commission find that this activity is exempt from the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (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.

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

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, Class 6, Information Collection; California Code of Regulations, title 14, section 15306.

PUBLIC TRUST AND STATE'S BEST INTERESTS:

Find that the proposed Permit will not substantially interfere with Public Trust needs and values; and is in the best interests of the State.

AUTHORIZATION:

Authorize issuance of a Non-Exclusive Geological Survey Permit to the Applicant to conduct geological surveys for one year, beginning August 25, 2026, to gather

geological data utilizing piston coring and vibracoring ~~sampling~~drilling methods as described in the Permit.