

2025

Annual Report

Celebrating 30 years of protecting
and restoring San Diego's waters



WWW.SDCOASTKEEPER.ORG

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ABOUT SAN DIEGO COASTKEEPER

Founded in 1995, San Diego Coastkeeper safeguards our region's coastal and inland waters through a strategic blend of community science, education, grassroots outreach, policy advocacy, and legal enforcement of environmental laws.

Our Mission

San Diego Coastkeeper protects and restores swimmable, drinkable, fishable waters in San Diego County.

Our Vision

San Diego Coastkeeper is a major force in transforming the San Diego region into a leader in sustainable water management, guided by engaged and informed communities, and protective of a healthy environment that supports high biodiversity, resilient ecosystems, and thriving neighborhoods.

Our Values

- Fundamental right to clean water
- Inherent value of waterways and ecosystems
- Diverse stakeholder engagement
- Fearless advocacy
- Strategic, multifaceted approach



LETTER FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Hello fellow Clean Water Champions,

As we reflect on another year of clean water advocacy in San Diego, I want to take us back to what our waterways were like in 1995 - San Diego Bay was fouled with industrial pollution, chronic sewer spills were closing beaches and threatening public health, and our coastal marine ecosystems were under threat from pollution and overuse. Thirty years later, our collective action has led to a cleaner Bay, huge reductions in sewer spills, and establishment of Marine Protected Areas (MPA) that are working to protect and restore our most biodiverse coastal habitats. Our decades of Clean Water Act enforcement are systematically reducing flows of pollution into our rivers and streams, showing that enforcing the law and holding polluters accountable is a highly effective strategy.

Big challenges remain - the Tijuana River sewage crisis continues, failing water infrastructure remains outrageously underfunded, and the Trump administration's relentless attacks on clean water laws threaten the progress we've made together. We took on these tough issues in 2025, and we're making headway - the U.S. is expanding its treatment of TJ sewage, our Watershed Watch community science program data directly supports increased infrastructure funding, and our enforcement team has notched key victories to address Seaworld's fireworks pollution and the profusion of plastic "nurdle" pellets contaminating our coastal lagoons.

Our integrated approach using community science, grassroots outreach, education, policy advocacy and enforcement of the law is the key to our effectiveness, at a critical time in our fight for clean water. Coastkeeper's dedicated and fearless staff did incredible work in 2025 that **would not have been possible without you** - our donors, volunteers, partners, and advocates. Your support powers every water sample collected, every legal victory secured, and every student educated about the importance of clean water. Thank you.

For Our Waters,
Phillip Musegaas
Executive Director



2025 HIGHLIGHTS: IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

WATER QUALITY SCIENCE

8,770

Water Quality
Measurements

127

Volunteers Trained

5

Waterways Monitored 

Mission Bay 

San Diego River 

Chollas Creek 

San Diego Bay 

Tijuana River 

LEGAL & POLICY ACTION

19

Clean Water
Act Lawsuits

9 Initiated

10 Settled

28

Public
Testimonies

21

Comment
Letters

Advocating for clean water with
local, state, & federal agencies

\$67,000

Environmental Project Funding

Money directed to local community
organizations for restoration projects
funded through lawsuit settlements

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

248,326

Beach Advisory Web Users

1,667

Student Engagements

214

Cleanup Events

OUR TEAM

THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE MISSION



STAFF

Click on photos to learn more



Phillip Musegaas
Executive Director
Oct 2022



Patrick McDonough
Senior Attorney
Jan 2019



Melanie Croce
Development Director
Feb 2023



Laura Fuller
Community Science Director
May 2024



Marie Diaz
Marine Programs Manager
Feb 2019



Lesly Gallegos-Stearns
Volunteer & Outreach Manager
Jul 2023



Rio Caramello-Uyeji
Operations Manager
Sep 2023



Courtney Brown
Staff Attorney
Aug 2024



Elyse Farwell
Education Manager
Apr 2025



Nicky Rosenberg
Communications Manager
Oct 2025



Camila Ruiz
Community Science Coordinator
Aug 2025



Jackson Orlando
Beach Cleanup Coordinator
Aug 2025

BOARD MEMBERS

Chanté Coleman
Board President
Jan 2022

Katie Pettit
Board Vice President
Nov 2023

Lee Duran
Board Treasurer
Apr 2021

Diane Castaneda
Board Secretary
Feb 2020

Laura Marion
Board Member
Jan 2023

Lorena Roel
Board Member
Feb 2023

Matt O'Malley,
Board Member
Aug 2024

INTERNS

Nicole Nelli
Community Science Intern
Feb-Jun 2025

Dylan Berk
Beach Cleanup Intern
Mar-Sep 2025

LEGISLATION & POLICY ADVOCACY

28 TESTIMONIES · 21 COMMENT LETTERS

San Diego Coastkeeper supports strong, science-based environmental laws to protect our communities and ensure a sustainable future. We advocate for policies that prevent pollution and hold agencies accountable. When current laws fall short, we push for better solutions to ensure the environment has a voice wherever decisions are made. [Learn More](#)



Tijuana River Sewage Crisis

We provided detailed explanations of the status of binational wastewater infrastructure to State legislators, presented on challenges and solutions at conferences and forums, and advocated successfully before multiple public agencies to secure expanded treatment capacity, greater transparency, and long-term operations and maintenance funding.

Sustainable Water Supply

We successfully pushed the San Diego County Water Authority (SDCWA) to significantly reduce water rate increases and improve public transparency of its meetings. We continued to work closely with City officials on Pure Water San Diego, which is on track to meet 50% of the City's drinking water needs by 2035.

Climate Resilience

We opposed offshore oil drilling before the county, the state, and the federal government, and helped establish the Tijuana River Sewage Crisis as the key call to action for San Diego's inaugural Climate Week.

Coastal Access

We successfully opposed a City Council proposal that would have imposed inequitable permitting restrictions on nonprofit water-based instructional programs—protecting coastal access for organizations like Outdoor Outreach, Un Mar de Colores, and YMCA Camp Surf, and the kids and families who rely on these programs to safely enjoy San Diego's beaches and Mission Bay.

Clean Water Protection

We pushed CalRecycle to close industry loopholes in its draft SB 54 plastic pollution regulations, led a coalition supporting new science-based Biological Objectives to protect the ecological health of San Diego's waterways, and pushed back against federal efforts to rollback PFAS drinking water standards.

Protection of Coastal Resources

We advocated for better management of marine mammal habitat at La Jolla Cove, co-hosted field trips for state decision-makers at the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) 30x30 Summit, and helped persuade the City of San Diego to approve a plan restoring 260+ acres of tidal wetlands in Mission Bay.



LITIGATION & ENFORCEMENT

19 CLEAN WATER ACT LAWSUITS · \$67,000 FOR LOCAL RESTORATION PROJECTS

San Diego Coastkeeper, alongside our partners at [California Coastkeeper Alliance \(CCKA\)](#) and [Coastal Environmental Rights Foundation \(CERF\)](#), uses litigation as a powerful tool to hold polluters accountable for Clean Water Act violations and protect our local rivers, streams, estuaries, and coast. [Learn More](#)

Highlights:

Fireworks Pollution

Coastkeeper vs. SeaWorld

This [lawsuit](#) targets SeaWorld's repeated fireworks permit violations and unpermitted wastewater discharges into Mission Bay. Fireworks residue contains heavy metals and toxic compounds that contaminate the water and harm aquatic life — all within a bay that tens of thousands of San Diegans swim, paddle, and fish in every year.



Plastic Pellet Spills

Coastkeeper vs. BNSF Railway

This case addresses the chronic spillage of plastic pellets, or nurdles, from railway transport along the San Diego coast. [Nurdles](#) are a primary source of microplastic pollution in the ocean, and BNSF's failure to contain them has resulted in widespread contamination of coastal estuaries from Oceanside to the US-Mexico border.



Tijuana River Sewage Crisis

Coastkeeper vs. US International Boundary & Water Commission

This lawsuit targets the failure of the USIBWC and its operator, the South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant, to capture and treat billions of gallons of raw sewage. Our litigation, combined with relentless advocacy, helped drive 3 major 2025 victories: a US-Mexico MOU in July setting infrastructure deadlines, USIBWC's expansion of the South Bay plant in August preventing 10 Million Gallons of sewage per day (MGD) from reaching the estuary, and Minute 333 in December establishing long-term Operations & Maintenance (O&M) funding and a path to doubling treatment capacity.



Environmentally Beneficial Project (EBP) Funding

Through litigation settlements, Coastkeeper directed **\$67,000 to local environmental groups** to conduct watershed restoration projects. Recipients in 2025 included:

- [Environmental Center of San Diego](#)
- [I Love a Clean San Diego](#)
- [Environmental Health Coalition](#)
- [Surfrider Foundation](#)
- [Earth Discovery Institute](#)
- [San Diego River Park Foundation](#)
- [San Diego Habitat Conservancy](#)

"SDCK not only holds polluters accountable but also actively supports local partners through collaboration to protect and preserve San Diego's wild spaces. We are incredibly grateful for their support and for the important work they do across the region."

~ Ida Kaller-Vincent, Executive Director at Earth Discovery Institute (EBP Recipient)

MARINE PROGRAM

Marine Debris

Coastkeeper and our partners at [Surfrider Foundation San Diego Chapter](#) and [Ocean Connectors](#) host inland and coastal cleanups throughout the year to remove harmful litter while identifying and quantifying trash to help understand the origins and composition. This important data inform our collective advocacy work to stop plastic pollution at its source.

Read our [2025 Marine Debris Report](#).

Highlights

516,665	Debris Items Removed
19,880	Pounds of Trash Removed
8,179	Total Cleanup Volunteers
214	Total Cleanup Events

“For the past 19 years, we have partnered on our joint Marine Debris Report to reach and engage a broader audience. Witnessing the collective impact of our organizations alongside thousands of dedicated San Diegans makes our mission easy to champion.”
~ Joana Guerra, Chapter Manager at Surfrider Foundation San Diego

Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)

- In 2025, Coastkeeper conducted regular boat patrols of San Diego Bay and the Cabrillo MPA, reporting violations to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. We engaged with the MPA Collaborative, Ocean Protection Council, and California Coastal Commission to advocate for stronger enforcement and protection, and brought MPA education into UCSD’s Intro to Policy course.
- We also advocated alongside our allies at [Sierra Club Seal Society](#) to the City Attorney and City Council for better management of the La Jolla Cove sea lion rookery within the Matlahuayl State Marine Reserve, to promote wildlife protection and public safety.



EDUCATION PROGRAM

Coastkeeper connects San Diego students to the water issues shaping their communities, building the next generation of environmental stewards through place-based learning and hands-on science at no cost to schools.



Highlights

1,467 K-8 Student Engagements

200 High School Student Engagements



“After a month of lessons with SDCK, I realized that what I do in this world makes a difference.”
~ 6th Grade Student

Programs & Partnerships

Project SWELL: K-8 Education

Connects K-8 students to climate science and local water issues within San Diego Unified School District Title 1 schools, in partnership with [Think Blue San Diego](#) and the [Elementary Institute of Science \(EIS\)](#).

[Learn More](#)



Science to Stewardship: High School Education

Place-based education for high school students within the San Diego Bay watershed, in partnership with the [Port of San Diego](#), building change-makers through community water quality projects.

[Learn More](#)



“It made me realize how much we take water for granted. What surprised me is how little water we have for so many people on this earth.”
~ 6th Grade Student



Schools Engaged

- Longfellow K-8
- High Tech High Media Arts
- Coronado High School
- The Bishop's School
- Rosa Parks Elementary
- Johnson Elementary
- Webster Elementary
- Chollas-Mead Elementary
- Bethune K-8

“Thank you for bringing these issues to light for my students and showing them what role they can play in being part of the solution.”
~ Longfellow K-8 Teacher



WATERSHED WATCH: WATER QUALITY MONITORING



8,770 MEASUREMENTS · 127 VOLUNTEERS TRAINED · 5 WATERSHEDS SAMPLED

Our Watershed Watch program brings together trained community volunteers and scientific rigor to monitor water quality across five of San Diego County's most critical watersheds. Each month, volunteers collect samples and test for dozens of parameters, from fecal bacteria and heavy metals to nutrients, PFAS, and emerging contaminants, generating a comprehensive, real-time picture of the health of our local waters. This data directly informs our advocacy and legal work, helping us hold polluters accountable and push for the infrastructure investments our waterways need.

5 Program Locations:

Mission Bay

10 sites

Tested Monthly

1,947 measurements in 2025

Key Findings:

- Fecal bacteria were chronically elevated at Tecolote Creek and Rose Creek even in dry weather, and spiked system-wide after storms.
- Phosphorus exceeded water quality objectives at those sites roughly 75% of the time.
- PFAS testing found up to 31 compounds in a single sampling event, with the highest detections at Rose Creek and Tecolote Creek.

[Full Mission Bay Report Here](#)



San Diego River

4 sites

Tested Bimonthly

*Report
Coming
Soon*

456 measurements in 2025

Key Findings:

- E. coli and Enterococci concentrations remained elevated throughout the year, frequently exceeding applicable water quality objectives and posing a sustained risk to recreational users.
- Phosphorus levels were consistently elevated throughout the year, with concentrations frequently exceeding applicable water quality objectives.
- PFAS were widespread, with 104 total detections across all sites in both sampling seasons.



Chollas Creek

4 sites

Tested Bimonthly

*Report
Coming
Soon*

456 measurements in 2025

Key Findings:

- Nitrogen and phosphorus levels frequently exceeded water quality objectives.
- E. coli concentrations surpassed standards more than half the time, indicating ongoing nutrient and fecal contamination in the watershed.
- PFAS testing found 41 compounds across all sites in April



WATERSHED WATCH: WATER QUALITY MONITORING

San Diego Bay

4 Sites

Tested Bimonthly

Full San Diego Bay Report
Coming Soon

384 measurements in 2025

Key Findings:

- Bacteria and metals were consistently low throughout the year
- Nutrients remained persistently elevated, but did not surpass water quality objectives.
- PFAS, while low-level, were detected at all sites in both sampling seasons.

Tijuana River

2-4 Sites

Tested Monthly

Full Tijuana River Report
Coming Soon

5,527 measurements in 2025

Key Findings:

- E. coli levels were extreme throughout the year, consistently exceeding laboratory measurement limits at all sites.
- Numerous semivolatile and volatile organic compounds were detected, with consistent occurrence of many of the same analytes across sampling events.
- Metals, pyrethroid pesticides, and PFAS were detected throughout the year, with concentrations spiking sharply during wet weather.



"When you volunteer you're getting to experience San Diego in a different light and it opens your mind up to how we affect our environment and how our environment affects us."
~ Nolan, Volunteer



Scientific Partnerships

- **Dr. Matt Verbyla's [SDSU Safe WaTER Lab](#)** analyzes select samples for HF183, a human-specific DNA marker that helps pinpoint sources of human fecal contamination in our waterways. The lab is also conducting pathogen testing on Tijuana River Valley samples.
- **Dr. Elinne Becket's [Lab at CSU San Marcos](#)** analyzes microbial communities in Mission Bay to better understand how human activities affect ecosystem health over time.

PARTNERSHIPS & COALITIONS

San Diego Coastkeeper's work is powered by a network of partners who share our commitment to clean water, healthy ecosystems, and engaged communities. Together we monitor, restore, advocate, and educate across San Diego County and beyond.

One Coastal Community

Our cross-border partnership with fellow Waterkeeper group, **Tijuana Waterkeeper/Proyecto Fronterizo de Educación Ambiental (PFEA)**, is the foundation of our Binational Resilience Initiative project to collaboratively address the ongoing Tijuana River Sewage Crisis. Together we collect and share water quality data through our **One Coastal Community** web platform, co-lead community events and focus groups, and bring together researchers and advocates from both the US and Mexico to advocate for solutions to cross-border issues.



ReWild Mission Bay Coalition

We work alongside 100+ community groups, led by **San Diego Bird Alliance**, advocating for the enhancement and restoration of the natural wetlands in the northeast corner of Mission Bay. We co-host field trips, cleanups and restoration events, to help engage the community, while our water quality data, and litigation support the work of the coalition.



Port of San Diego Committees

Coastkeeper sits on a number of committees led by the Port of San Diego that meet regularly to advise on environmental issues within the San Diego Bay, including:



- Port and Navy's Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan Technical Advisory Committee (NRMP TAC)
- Environmental Advisory Committee (EAC)
- Chula Vista Wildlife Advisory Group (WAG)

Tijuana River Coalition

Coastkeeper is an active member of the **Tijuana River Coalition**, attending monthly meetings and signing onto coalition letters to raise awareness and impact policy at all levels of government on the sewage, trash, and industrial waste crisis plaguing the U.S./Mexico border region.



In addition to the coalitions above, Coastkeeper frequently partners with these individual organizations year around throughout our active watersheds to collaborate on community outreach, habitat restoration, water quality sampling and cleanup events as well as advocacy efforts:



These are just some of the partners powering our work. Each month, our newsletter spotlights a partner making a difference. [Sign up here!](#)

OUTREACH

In 2025, our team co-led major regional campaigns, showed up at 62 events across the county, and shared our science with decision-makers and researchers — growing a network of clean water advocates along the way.



San Diego Climate Week

Coastkeeper served as Community Partner for San Diego's Inaugural Climate Week, which drew over 120 climate events across the region. We co-led the South Bay Anchor Event at the Tijuana Estuary, helping to elevate the Tijuana River Crisis as the unifying call to action across all events.



Tijuana River Action Month (TRAM)

Coastkeeper participated in the 16th annual TRAM, a binational campaign dedicated to raising awareness and inspiring action to protect the Tijuana River Watershed. We co-lead a watershed walk with community partners and co-hosted a film screening and panel during the campaign.

30 x 30 Partnership Summit

Coastkeeper took an active role in the California Natural Resources Agency's 2025 30x30 Statewide Partnership Summit. We co-hosted three field trips for agency representatives and the public, highlighting local projects that protect biodiversity, expand access to nature, and build climate resilience alongside our community partners.



Latino Conservation Week (LCW)

We participated in the 12th annual LCW, an initiative created by the Hispanic Access Foundation to support the Latino community getting into the outdoors and participating in activities to protect our natural resources. We partnered to engage in a bilingual water quality demonstration, a restoration event, and ended the week with a celebration event.



Science Communication

We presented Mission Bay water quality findings to the Mission Bay Park Committee, Friends of Rose Creek, and the Working Wetlands Group, and shared our monitoring work at the National Water Quality Monitoring Conference. We also guest lectured for graduate students in SDSU's School of Public Health and presented to the USD San Diego Regional Climate Collaborative.



Community Engagement

Our team tabled, demonstrated, and engaged at dozens of events throughout the year — field trips, kayak cleanups, family STEAM Days, community gatherings and conversations, guided walks, themed festivals and fairs, restoration and native planting opportunities— bringing hands-on water quality and watershed education to communities across the county.



THE SEASIDE SOIRÉE

THURSDAY, SEPT 11, 2025 AT THE BIRCH AQUARIUM

Each year, over 150 of our closest partners, supporters, and clean water advocates gather for Coastkeeper’s annual gala, the **Seaside Soirée!** The evening includes inspirational speakers, live entertainment, dinner, drinks, and learning about Coastkeeper’s recent clean water victories and challenges, with remarks from our featured guest speakers:

- **Mario Ordoñez-Calderon**, Executive Director and Co-Founder at Un Mar de Colores
- **Joe LaCava**, City Council President of City of San Diego

Thank you to all who attended, and to the sponsors who made the evening possible!

2025 Sponsors

Presenting Sponsor

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NextLeft
Beneficial State Bank
Santee Lakes Recreation Preserve
La Jolla Sea Cave Kayaks
Metropolitan Water District of So. Cal
The Thorwirth Family
Beeworthy Farms



“San Diego Coastkeeper consistently punches (metaphorically) above its weight on all San Diego clean and safe water issues. Its staff thinks big and acts with determination in delivering wins for the region. Keith and I are so proud to be longtime SDCK supporters.”

~ Cathy Stiefel, Loyal Supporter & Presenting Sponsor



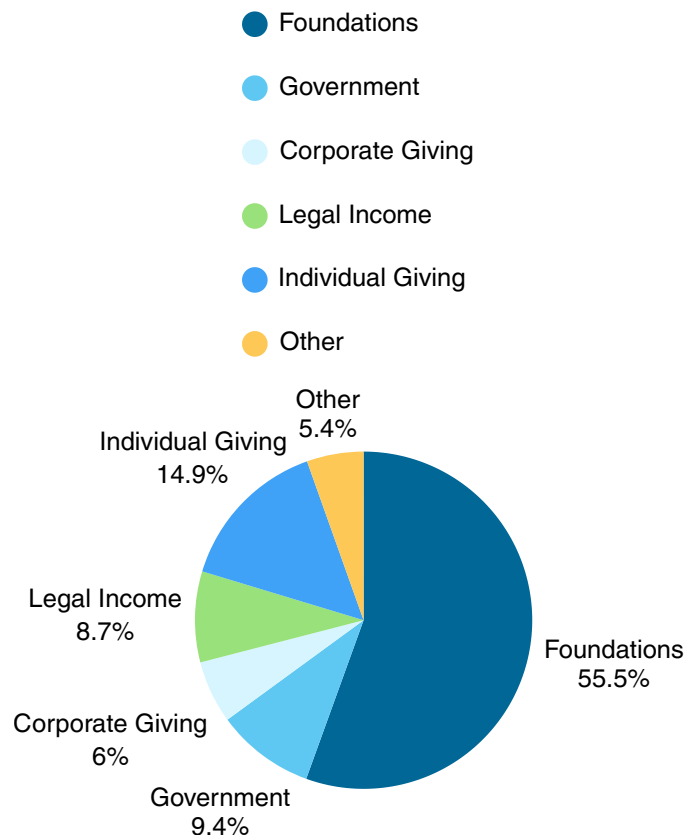
2025 FINANCIALS



This financial report reflects our commitment to transparency, accountability, and responsible stewardship of the resources entrusted to us. Together, we are advancing clean water, healthier watersheds, and more resilient coastal communities for future generations. Thank you for your continued partnership and belief in our mission.

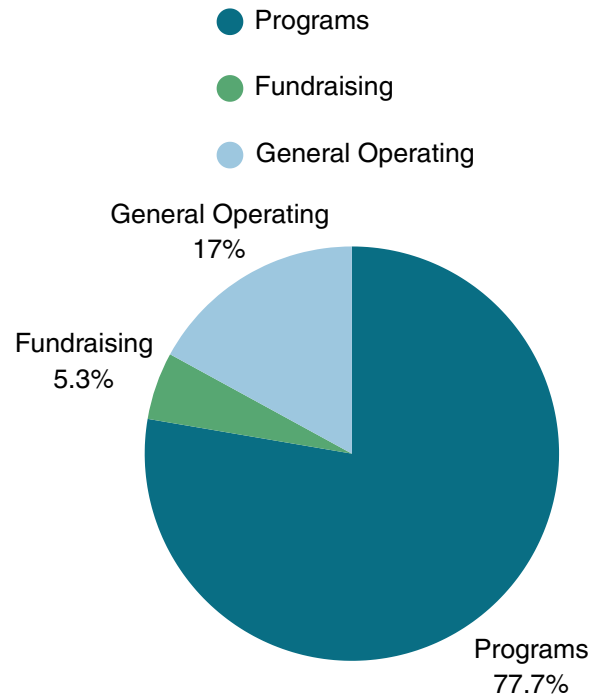
2025 REVENUE

Foundation Grants	\$1,098,203
Government Grants	\$186,593
Legal Income	\$172,182
Individual Giving	\$294,214
Corporate Giving	\$59,451
Other	\$107,698
TOTAL REVENUE	\$1,918,341



2025 EXPENSES

Programs	\$1,347,884
Fundraising	\$112,390
General Operating	\$290,740
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$1,751,015



These figures may differ slightly from the 2025 Audited Financials Statements, which were not available at the time this report was published.

FUNDERS & DONORS



We are deeply grateful to our funders, donors, and community partners whose generosity and continued support make our work possible. Your contributions have enabled us to expand our impact, strengthen our programs, and focus our efforts on the water issues impacting our region most.

\$150,000+

- Page Family Foundation
- Prebys Foundation
- The Stiefel Behner Charitable Fund
- City of San Diego
- The Dorrance Family Foundation

\$25k - \$149,999

- Hervey Family Non-endowment Fund at The San Diego Foundation
- RLF, made possible by the Keith Campbell Foundation for the Environment
- San Diego Foundation
- Marisla Foundation
- David Welborn and Ann Hunter-Welborn
- Environment Now

\$10k - \$24,999

- Port of San Diego
- Accelerate Resilience L.A., a sponsored project of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors
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\$5k - \$9,999

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\$2k - \$4,999

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\$500 - \$1,999

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*2025 Beach Cleanup Sponsors

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- Linda Ridenour
- Robert Gershowitz
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- Place Tegland
- Owen Kerslake

Up to \$100

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- Aiyana Reissman
- Sempra Energy Foundation
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- Charles Rilli
- Melissa Languren
- Joana Guerra
- Natalia Worman
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- Paula Stigler
- Daniel Carrillo
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- William Davidson
- Amy Nadolski
- Green Echo Movers
- Roberto Kochert

All supporters who donate over \$20 are considered San Diego Coastkeeper Members indefinitely. Thank you to all of our past and continued supporters!

OUR VISION FOR 2026

From securing federal funding for the Tijuana River to expanding our community science network, 2025 was a year of real progress. In 2026, we will build on that momentum — deepening our binational partnerships, strengthening our legal and advocacy work, and growing the coalition of San Diegans fighting for clean water for all.

Protect Clean Water

We will continue to hold polluters accountable, from the Tijuana River to Oceanside, from our inland rivers to our coastal waters, through direct legal action in federal court.

Advance Climate-Smart Water Supply for San Diego

We will ensure Pure Water stays on track to start providing clean, sustainable drinking water by 2027, reducing our reliance on the Colorado River for our regional water needs.

Engage and Activate the Public to Protect Clean Water

Our diverse coalition will galvanize public support for increased stormwater infrastructure funding for San Diego to reduce flooding, improve water quality, increase local supplies, create sustainable green jobs, and provide community benefits like green spaces and parks.

Be the Voice for Clean Water for San Diego

We will continue to speak truth to power in support of equitable, safe, & clean access to our public waterways and clean drinking water for all San Diegans.

Make Equity, Inclusion & Justice a Core Part of San Diego Coastkeeper

Through our advocacy, education, litigation and targeted community outreach efforts, we will work tirelessly to dismantle and reverse decades of environmental & social injustice in historically disenfranchised communities of our region.



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