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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Cal Poly Awarded $3.4 Million Grant to Monitor California Ocean Currents

Cal Poly has received a $3.4 million grant from UC San Diego's Scripps Institution of Oceanography and San Francisco State University to install a high-tech system to monitor California's near-shore currents.

The ocean currents monitoring system will help combat pollution, aid in response to natural hazards, and help understand the coastal ecosystem of California.

A total of $21 million was approved by the state Coastal Conservancy for the project. The funding will come from two statewide bond measures approved by voters in 2002 and will not add to California's budget deficit. Eight institutions, including Cal Poly, shared the funding and will install the system from the border of Mexico to the Oregon state line. They expect to have it up and running in two years.

The new system will collect hour-by-hour data, which will be available live on the Internet. The data will be valuable to a wide range of Californians, from fishermen to marine researchers to government agencies tracking pollution spills.

For mariners, ocean currents can be as important to navigation as air currents in the atmosphere are to aviators. The data will enable maritime shipping companies to figure out faster routes. For the U.S. Coast Guard, accurate information on currents will aid in the investigation and recovery of planes and vessels involved in accidents and allow for more effective responses to oil spills.

Long-term mapping of the current patterns will assist in the proper placement of outfalls for new power and sewer plants. The data will be of interest to scientists tracking toxic algal blooms and analyzing dispersal patterns of egg and larvae from marine life, including abalone, crab and sea urchins.

California's program will serve as a model for a coordinated coastal monitoring network envisioned by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration for each of the country's coastlines. The monitoring system will rely primarily on high-frequency radar readings, but also will blend in data from sub-surface current meters, open ocean drifters fitted with global positioning system devices, wave buoys and satellite data.

Scripps is taking the lead for the Southern California campuses, while San Francisco State University will oversee installation along the northern half of the state's 1,100-mile coastline. Because Cal Poly is strategically located in center of the state, it will be represented in both regions. Additional partners include the University of Southern California, UC Santa Barbara, the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, UC Davis, which operates the Bodega Marine Laboratory, and Humboldt State University.

Professor Mark Moline, from the Biological Sciences Department, will head up the effort for Cal Poly, with operations scheduled into 2009. For more information, visit the monitoring program’s Web site at: www.cocmp.org.

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