

mpa connections

Special Issue Focused on Recreation in MPAs



February 2013

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MPAs: Promoting Healthy Living and Prosperous Economies

Who doesn't love a morning paddle through a tidal wetland, an afternoon fishing in glistening waters, or a summer night camping on a seashore beneath the stars?

If you've ever been to a marine protected area (MPA), you know that enjoying the "Great Outdoors" is a favorite American pastime. MPAs protect our oceans, coasts, and marine resources, and provide space and resources to all for recreational activities. Whether it's canoeing down a tidal river, catching a great wave on the surf, snorkeling along a coral reef, or relaxing on the beach, we love taking advantage of nature's spectacularly diverse marine environments.

Congested cities and today's fast-paced life make protected areas more critical than ever to our national health and welfare. Today's children only spend half as much time outside as their parents did, and face an unprecedented epidemic of childhood obesity. To counter these growing problems, America's Great Outdoors Initiative inspires the nation's youth to revitalize our national parks, restore our public lands and waters, and instill a love of the outdoors by planting trees, recreating outdoors, and engaging in outdoor and climate education in state and federal parks. In 1909, Teddy Roosevelt remarked that "conservation of our resources is the fundamental question before this nation." Over a century later, our natural resources are at risk, and sustainable conservation practices are crucial to maintaining the health of our nation's protected areas. Healthy parks and other protected areas require the participation of private and public organizations, including partnerships among managing agencies of our nation's special places, as well as youth education for the next generation of leaders.

In concert with these efforts, the newly created National Travel and Tourism Strategy is a blueprint for expanding travel to and within the U.S. It lays out concrete steps to be taken to increase American jobs by attracting and welcoming 100 million international visitors annually by the end of 2021, more than a 50 percent increase over the number expected this year.

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MPAs: Promoting Healthy Living and Prosperous Economies (continued)



Acadia National Park is a destination for more than two million visitors each year. Photo credit: NPS

“Tens of millions of tourists from all over the world come and visit America every year. They stay in our hotels, they eat at our restaurants, they visit our attractions, and they help create jobs. At a time when too many Americans are still looking for work, we need to make it easier for more people to visit this country and keep our economy growing,” President Obama said.

MPAs boost national and local economies by providing jobs and offering recreational opportunities to residents and tourists alike. The outdoor industry generates \$289 billion annually in retail sales and services, and provides 6.5 million jobs. For example, the 84 coastal and marine National Parks received nearly 87 million visits in 2009, spending over \$3.4 billion and creating over 40,000 jobs. These figures demonstrate the importance that the outdoors contributes to the American economy, and the crucial role that it serves in sustaining healthy human populations.

The Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, a member of the National System of Marine Protected Areas, attracts three million visitors annually. These tourists flock to its world-class diving locations and marvel at its coral barrier reef, the third largest in the world. The Sanctuary helps protect these economically vital resources through regulations to minimize harmful impacts (such as requiring the use of mooring buoys instead of anchoring on fragile coral reefs), education, outreach and scientific studies to inform management decisions. The Sanctuary also supports commercial activities, such as fishing and recreational businesses, which depend on the vitality of the area’s coastal and marine resources to thrive. In 2007-2008, more than one million visitors and residents to the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary engaged in nearly five million person-days of recreational sport fishing and diving. These fishers and divers spent a combined total of \$744 million in Monroe County, Florida Keys.



The Florida Keys are teeming with recreational activities, including scuba diving. Photo credit: NOAA

In New England, one of the important ecotourism industries centers around Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary, an MPA that supports the vibrant whale-watching industry and hosts an estimated one million passengers a year. A study completed in 2000 demonstrated that Massachusetts alone generated \$31.3 million in whale-watching tours, with virtually all of the tours occurring in the Sanctuary itself. Fishing, diving, and shipwreck-exploring are also popular activities in the Sanctuary.

The long-term protection of these special places depends on public support - both from local communities and across the country. Find out what treasures lie along our shorelines and beyond and connect with the great outdoors!

Find an MPA near you

Visit the MPA Center’s Interactive MPA mapping tool to locate MPAs near you: <http://www.mpa.gov/dataanalysis/mpainventory/mpaviewer/>.



Millions of people visit Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary to go whale watching. Photo credit: Ari Friedlaender

Sanctuary Classic Fishing and Photo Contest Connects Youth to the Great Outdoors



Aidan Rose, winner of one of the \$1,000 scholarships, poses with his Lingcod caught in the Channel Islands.

This past summer, the inaugural "Sanctuary Classic," a free, summer-long fishing and photo contest sponsored by NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries and the Sportfishing Conservancy, provided a new opportunity for families to discover marine protected areas.

The Classic was developed to encourage families and youth to experience America's great outdoors, while promoting the conservation ethics and practices inspired by the Sportfishing Conservancy

and the National Marine Sanctuaries. All participants received information on the sanctuaries, safety, conservation and sustainable recreational fishing techniques.

Ten \$100 prizes were given out each week to the people submitting the photographs that got the most 'votes' online. At the end of the summer, \$1,000 in scholarships was awarded to each of the four photos judged to best demonstrate certain criteria.

Four sanctuaries were the focus of the Classic (Channel Islands and Monterey Bay, CA; Florida Keys, FL; and Gray's Reef, GA), although photos taken in any National Marine Sanctuary qualified. The National Marine Sanctuary system spans more than 150,000 square miles of ocean and Great Lakes waters from the Hawaiian Islands to the Florida Keys, and from Lake Huron to American Samoa. While the sanctuary program's primary mission is to protect the nation's critical marine ecosystems, 98 percent of the area of all National Marine Sanctuary waters are open to activities including recreational fishing, diving, surfing and swimming. Last year NOAA's National Marine Sanctuaries supported 50,000 jobs and more than \$4 billion in local economies.

Sanctuary Classic sponsors included the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation, National Marine Fisheries Service, Anglers for Conservation, Coastal Angler Magazine, Environmental Defense Fund, Hook, Line and Sinkers, Phil Friedman Outdoors, Guy Harvey, the Guy Harvey Ocean Foundation, the International Game Fish Association, Sea Landing, Stardust Sportfishing, the Snook & Gamefish Foundation, the Sportfishing Conservancy, United Anglers, Wallace Air Cargo Group, and West Marine.

The Sanctuary Classic is set to continue in 2013. For more information, visit: <http://www.sanctuaryclassic.org/>.

Connecting People to Nature: Keeping it Wild in an Urban Landscape

- By Anne Morkill, Wildlife Refuge Manager, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and Bret Wolfe, Marine Program Coordinator, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service



For many, the thought of visiting San Francisco conjures iconic images of the Golden Gate Bridge, cable cars, Fisherman's Wharf, or Chinatown. But many are unaware of the outstanding opportunities to connect to nature beyond the cityscape. San Francisco Bay is the nation's second largest estuary and perhaps the most biologically significant on the Pacific Coast, providing critical

habitat for a diversity of fish and wildlife.

When flying into the San Francisco Airport from the south, you will notice out your window an extensive network of wetlands along the southern portion of the Bay. Much of this area is protected as the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge, one of 560 sites that make up the National Wildlife Refuge System. The Refuge System is a unique network of lands and waters administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that are set aside for the conservation of fish, wildlife and plants, and their habitats, for the continuing benefit of the American people. Surrounded by dense development and some 7 million residents, the Don Edwards Refuge was the nation's first urban National Wildlife Refuge and was established with a specific mandate to provide nature education to the surrounding communities. The refuge is also one of 107 National Wildlife Refuges included within the National System of MPAs.

Historically, San Francisco Bay was fringed by vast tidal marshes teeming with wildlife. Beginning with the explosive growth of the 1849 Gold Rush, demand for land led to many of these wetlands being filled for development, or diked off and converted to evaporation ponds for the expanding commercial salt industry. By the middle of the 20th century, nearly 85% of the Bay's original marshes and shorelines had been altered, and many of the native bird species and other wildlife that depended on this natural habitat had disappeared from the region. This coincided with a drastic decline in the water quality and health of the entire Bay ecosystem. With the advent of the environmental movement of the 1960s, many locals began to reminisce about what the San Francisco Bay once was. In 1967, a small group of conservation-minded citizens with foresight and perseverance banded together to protect the Bay's remaining natural wetlands. The group, what would become the Citizens Committee to

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Connecting People to Nature: Keeping it Wild in an Urban Landscape (continued)



Complete the Refuge, believed that current and future residents of the region deserved a clean, healthy, sustainable and vibrant Bay. In 1972, thanks to significant public support and the essential leadership of Congressman Don Edwards, the U.S. Congress directed the Secretary of the Interior to establish the San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge. The refuge became a reality in 1974 with the purchase of the first 37-acre parcel of land from Bayshore Freight Lines, Inc. Subsequent boundary expansions and land purchases, most notably below market value purchases of 12,000 acres from the giant corporation Cargill, have enabled the refuge to expand to nearly 30,000 acres. In 1995, the refuge was renamed the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge, in recognition of the Congressman's efforts to save the Bay.

Today, the Don Edwards Refuge is an astonishing success, with acreage spanning tidal marsh, mudflats, salt ponds, and open bay waters. Located along the Pacific Flyway, it is a bird watching mecca hosting over 280 species, with millions of shorebirds and waterfowl passing through during annual spring and fall migrations. The refuge also provides essential habitat for threatened and endangered species like the California clapper rail, Western snowy plover, and salt marsh harvest mouse. What's more, it is the focal point of the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project, a federal-state-private collaboration to restore more than 15,000 acres of former salt ponds to natural tidal marsh and managed ponds. With the restoration of the natural functioning of thousands of acres of wetlands, the health of the San Francisco Bay—although far from its former self—has improved significantly.

In addition to its primary mission of wildlife conservation, the refuge provides outstanding opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation—including hiking or biking on many miles of trails, wildlife observation, environmental education and interpretive programs, and hunting and fishing. Nearly a million people visit the refuge each year. Typically, their first stop is the Visitor Center located in Fremont, where you can find interpretative exhibits, trail maps, binoculars for loan, and a bookstore (the proceeds of which benefit the refuge's educational programs). Outside, self-guided trails will introduce you to the San Francisco Bay environment and local wildlife. The refuge's Environmental Education Center, located near Alviso, provides classroom and fieldtrip programs for school children, local residents, and tourists. But many visitors say that the ideal way to enjoy the refuge is to discover your own wildlife experience—through an early morning paddle by kayak or a trail hike.



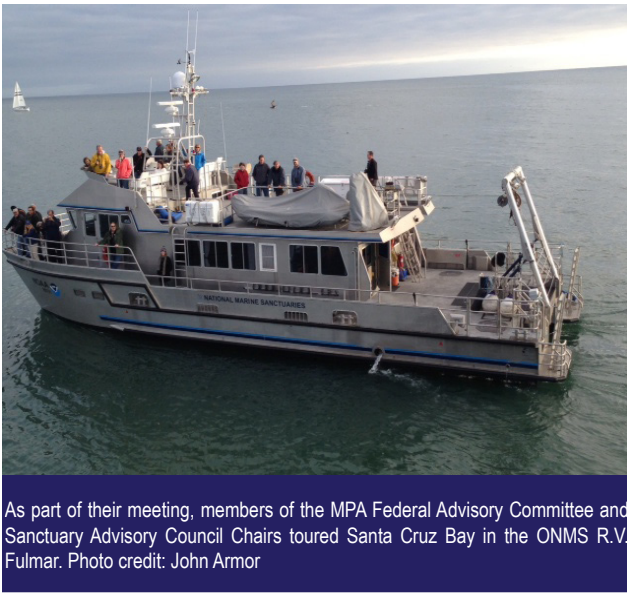
Keeping a National Wildlife Refuge wild in an urban landscape presents many challenges, including invasive species, garbage, pollution, trampled vegetation, and wildlife disturbance. But given the refuge's accessibility to such a large urban population, these challenges are often leveraged into opportunities. Hundreds of volunteers work directly with refuge employees to staff the Visitor Center, operate the book store, conduct interpretative tours, and accomplish numerous maintenance tasks. Qualified volunteers also work directly with refuge biologists to conduct wildlife surveys and restore habitat. Connection with nature, whether through hiking, fishing, hunting, or simply being outside, helps

people develop positive attitudes and behaviors towards the environment. This public interest in nature is crucial to the mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and to the continued success of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

The Don Edwards NWR is one of seven refuges in the San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge Complex, four of which are members of the National System of MPAs. For more information about the complex, visit our website at <http://www.fws.gov/sfbayrefuges/>, or contact anne_morkill@fws.gov.

MPA Federal Advisory Committee and Sanctuary Council Chairs Meet for Joint Session on Tourism and Recreation

Recognizing that marine protected areas are destinations and play an important role in local and regional economies, the Marine Protected Areas Federal Advisory Committee met with National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council representatives and associated staff from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Department of the Interior and other ocean



As part of their meeting, members of the MPA Federal Advisory Committee and Sanctuary Advisory Council Chairs toured Santa Cruz Bay in the ONMS R.V. Fulmar. Photo credit: John Armor

agencies, on Wednesday, December 5, 2012, to discuss how best to foster links between marine protected areas and the recreation, travel and tourism industries. This unprecedented joint meeting of over 70 participants represents a major step toward engaging two influential stakeholder groups with common goals but varied scales and perspectives. Meeting in small discussion groups, Federal Advisory Committee members and National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council representatives worked together to develop results-oriented plans that can be used to build engagement with the travel, tourism and recreation industries.

The results of the joint session are relevant to marine protected area managers, staff and their partners as we consider ways to connect people to ocean resources and experiences through sustainable recreation and tourism.

Target Audiences and Potential Actions for Promoting Recreation and Tourism

Eight breakout groups, each including both Federal Advisory Committee members and National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council representatives, met to identify practical actions that marine protected areas could pursue to build or enhance engagement with the travel, tourism and recreation industries.

Each group collectively identified a key recreation and tourism constituency (e.g., recreational users, coastal communities, foreign visitors) and specific strategies for better engaging this target audience through marine protected areas programs. The eight strategies and a synopsis of emerging recommendations are summarized briefly below. While some ideas are targeted at specific national marine sanctuaries, many are applicable to a wider range of marine protected area programs. Implementation of a number of these actions at individual marine protected areas, or within broader networks of special places, requires the support and guidance of both staff and external parties, and may only be successful through collaborative approaches between managers, programs, advisors and partners.

Charter Fishing Operators

- Sanctuary advisory councils to bring together charter sport-fishing operators and representatives from tourism and visitors bureaus to initiate discussions about marketing recreational fishing and the value of the sanctuary.
- Develop a certification program (similar to BlueSTAR or DolphinSMART) that promotes ethical angling.
- Federal Advisory Committee members analyze marine protected areas for their respective accessibility to fishing.
- Encourage Federal Advisory Committee, especially fishing and tourism representatives, to engage with this audience to clarify how marine protected areas are predominantly open to fishing and support local economies.
- Conduct a simply survey assessment of attitudes and perceptions of recreational fishermen, charter boat operators and customers to help inform outreach efforts and measure status and trends.
- Engage charter fishing operators early in any process developing or structuring (e.g., zoning) new and existing marine protected areas.

Local and National-level Recreational Fishing Organizations

- Encourage marine protected area representatives to listen to angler concerns and perspectives, and identify individuals capable of facilitating discussions related to the benefits of marine protected areas to fishermen and local economies.
- Ensure that marine protected area representatives have a good understanding of the fishing conducted by recreational fishermen, and regulations affecting them.
- Create a website, or other outreach materials, to highlight value of recreational fishing at marine protected areas.
- Develop partnerships with recreational fishing celebrities (and television programs) to incorporate and encourage fishing and filming in marine protected areas.
- Engage recreational anglers to join in marine protected area research and invasive species eradication efforts.

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Joint MPA FAC and SAC Session, Continued

Travel Industry

- Provide tools to the travel industry to support the development of new or the revitalization of existing websites to foster greater visibility of marine protected areas via search engines. Tools could include a national-level template that is modified and tested to meet local needs.
- Create travel magazine and other source profiles for relevant marine protected areas that can be shared with travel associations and agents for their online media and promotions.

Concessionaires and Vendors

- Develop locally adaptable guidelines for marine protected area certification programs for that help vendors working within the MPA to ensure that ocean uses are both ecologically sustainable and economically profitable.
- Expand volunteer programs to include outreach to concessionaires and vendors.

Visitor Bureaus

- Invite local visitors bureau to attend and present at SAC/FAC meetings to determine how we can collaborate (this may lead to the development of SAC working groups).
- Encourage the Federal Advisory Committee to develop a guide for engaging with recreational and tourism entities.
- MPA managers join local chambers of commerce.

State and County Tourism Departments

- Encourage reciprocal [ex-officio] membership between Convention and Visitor Bureaus and Tourism Boards and advisory councils including, where appropriate, adding a tourism-related seat or developing a working group for advisory councils.
- Develop cross-marketing action plans specific to marine protected areas and government entities responsible for promoting recreation and tourism, and encourage the development of a working group for completing/compiling these action plans.
- Incorporate local, regional or state tourism representative on advisory councils.

Families

- Select a single, online platform to aggregate existing and new information and social media tools, including access to webcams, so that families may readily access information on what there is to do within and near a particular marine protected area.
- Incorporate “Plan your visit.” pages, activities and attractions on this online platform/website and evaluate its success in driving traffic.

- Encourage advisory councils to develop lists for “plan your visit” pages, and Federal Advisory Committee to create guidelines for responsible travel and tourism in marine protected areas.

Common Threads – Linking Marine Protected Areas to Recreation and Tourism

As demonstrated by the summary of breakout group discussions above, many groups had overlapping and complementary ideas about how to forge stronger links to recreation and tourism interests. The following ideas represent common themes that emerged in the breakout group discussions, and are relevant to diverse marine protected area programs. More specific ideas that will be pursued by individual national marine sanctuaries, their advisory councils, the Marine Protected Areas Federal Advisory Committee and member sites of the National System of MPAs, are provided in the meeting summaries for those bodies.

- Provide recreation and tourism representation on marine protected area Advisory Boards.
- Expand dialogue with the recreational fishing community, which often has misperceptions about marine protected areas.
- Engage with local and regional visitor bureaus to identify ways marine protected areas can become part of existing community tourism strategies or help develop new ones.
- Improve marine protected area websites and social media to enhance information for visitors (e.g., “plan your visit” pages).
- Develop certification programs for local businesses and vendors that include guidelines for sustainable operations and conservation messages.
- Promote visitors’ stewardship through pre-visit, visit and post-visit information and activities.
- Assess and strengthen marine protected areas capacity to support and manage visitation.
- Connect remote marine protected areas with the public through visitor centers, webcams, social media and other technology.
- Work with educators to engage and sustain youth and family visits to marine protected areas.

For more information on the MPA FAC and the joint session of the MPA FAC and the Sanctuary Advisory Council representatives, visit <http://www.mpa.gov/fac/meetings/>.

Engaging Visitors in Conserving Ocean Parks

- By Cliff McCreedy, National Park Service

In 2016 the nation will celebrate the centennial of the National Park Service (NPS) as the steward of special places that represent our natural and cultural heritage, including 85 parks on the ocean and Great Lakes. [Thirty-three units of the National Park System](#) are members of the National System of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). With more than 11,000 miles of coast and 2.5 million acres of marine waters, these parks attract more than 86 million visitors who come to snorkel on a coral reef, see dolphins or whales, cast for trophy-sized fish, or kayak to a remote island and camp under the stars with sand at their feet and blue waves on the horizon. All together, these national parks generate \$3.5 billion in economic benefits to local communities from visitor spending. Over 1,700 state and federal MPAs also generate economic benefits to the nation.



While National Parks provide some of the most amazing places for enjoying the oceans, with privilege comes responsibility to care for the resource. The National Park Service Organic Act charges the NPS to conserve park resources and values unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations. Meeting this challenge can be difficult for visitors and park managers in heavily used areas. For example, grounding a boat on a shallow seagrass bed or coral reef can result in a very bad day on the water, with damage or loss of the boat and a costly towing or salvage fee. The boater also may be liable for a civil claim under the National Park System Resource Protection Act to recover monetary damages for assessment and restoration of damaged habitats or aquatic life.

Some boaters may be deficient in basic boating or navigational skills, or lack knowledge of fragile marine areas in parks. However, when equipped with the right information, recreational boaters are typically eager to protect the resources they enjoy. The boating industry, states, Power Squadron and local clubs have programs to teach skills for responsible boating. Visitor-focused programs at MPAs also go a long way to help recreational users to steer clear of fragile marine habitats and wildlife. In Florida, where the number of licensed recreational boats exceeds 900,000 state-wide, park managers are doing just that. Florida Bay in Everglades National Park offers a case study in boater outreach and education and marine zoning. The Bay is a shallow, 1,000 square-mile estuary where trophy redfish, snook, and sea trout await the angler in a designated marine wilderness. But finding the fish requires navigating a complex patchwork of shallow basins to avoid running aground or scarring the seagrass with propellers. In a [recent study](#), park scientists detected over 12,000 individual seagrass scars throughout the bay with a combined length of 325 miles.

To reach boaters unfamiliar with the Bay, Everglades National Park worked with the Florida Keys Fishing Guides Association to develop the Florida Bay Map and Guide. This companion map to the NOAA chart has tips for navigating the maze and hints from the pros for reading the water, keeping out of trouble and, most of all, finding fish. In addition, a coalition of recreational fishing groups, agencies, and nongovernmental organizations launched a free, online boater education course called [Eco-Mariner](#). The goal of the Eco-Mariner course is to provide motor boaters the necessary knowledge to protect Florida Bay's sensitive environment, including its unique geography, wildlife, and regulations. Participants learn to identify key locations and routes using the [Florida Bay Map & Guide](#).

Zoning is another well-established tool used widely in outdoor recreation management on land, and on the water, to enhance visitor enjoyment and reduce impacts. In January 2011, after extensive outreach and public input, Everglades National Park established the Snake Bight Pole/Troll Zone in a small portion of the Florida Bay as a three-year pilot. The 8,700-acre zone is designed for shallow-water boating and protecting seagrass beds. The Pole/Troll zone is generally off limits to combustion motors to improve the quality of flats fishing, kayaking and wildlife viewing. Two designated channels and a low-speed access zone remain open to motors to allow boaters to access the Bight or traverse around it.

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Engaging Visitors in Conserving Ocean Parks (continued)



Dry Tortugas National Park, located 70 miles from Key West in the Gulf of Mexico, adopted four marine management zones, including the 46 square-mile [Research Natural Area \(RNA\)](#). The RNA is one of three no-take marine reserve zones comprising the larger Tortugas Ecological Reserve shared by Dry Tortugas National Park, the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary and state and federal fisheries authorities. Setting aside these areas as a place of refuge for juveniles and adult reef fish to live, grow, and reproduce is benefiting the marine ecosystem as well as multi-billion dollar recreational and commercial fisheries. The number and size of several fish species in the RNA have increased, and fish spawning in the reserves supply larvae that settle throughout the Keys and the southeast Florida reef tract.

In 1998, citizens from Santa Barbara and Ventura, California proposed establishment of [no-take marine reserves](#) at the Channel Islands, beginning a 4-year process of civic engagement and scientific analyses culminating in 2003 in designation of nine marine reserves and two marine conservation areas in Channel Islands National Park by the California Fish and Game Commission. Comparative monitoring of areas inside and outside of the reserves has demonstrated increases in size and abundance of several fish species, as well as higher kelp abundances in the reserves.

In 2006 and 2007, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) extended the zones into the National Marine Sanctuary's deeper, federal waters.

Marine zones can generate controversy if perceived as unreasonably limiting access for recreational boating and fishing. Greater acceptance of marine zoning decisions and valuable information on visitor uses can be gained through direct consultation and engagement with the local recreational community. Cooperative decision-making can yield a sense of shared purpose and stewardship of MPAs among state and federal managers, recreational users, conservation groups and other participants. However, cooperative or participatory planning processes require clearly defined goals, ground rules and agreement on the validity of data and information to be used.

On receiving results of the 5-year scientific study of the Research Natural Area at Dry Tortugas NP, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission Vice-Chairman Kathy Barco said: "I believe marine protected areas (no-take zones) should only be implemented as a last resort, but... this was the right place to close and this was the right place to do the research. They did it right. They talked with the fishermen and the other stakeholders."

For more information contact Cliff McCreedy, NPS Marine Resource Management Specialist, at 202-513-7164 or cliff_mccreedy@nps.gov.

Recreation.gov Guides Viewers to Federal Lands

Recreation.gov is an interagency effort to engage visitors with enhanced interactive content and mobile, trip-planning tools on federal lands such as national parks, wildlife refuges, national marine sanctuaries, forests and recreation areas. It is a one-stop shop for trip planning, information sharing and reservations, offering advance reservations at 2,500 federal areas for over 60,000 facilities and activities. Visitors can use Recreation.gov to discover which parks, forests, lakes, museums, and areas managed by federal agencies offer recreation opportunities nearby. To use Recreation.gov, enter a U.S. state name to search for everything within a state. Or enter the name of a National Park, Forest or Landmark or even a city or address to find all the recreation areas, campsites, tours and permit locations nearby. The website also features "spotlight" adventures, such as the whale count at the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary. For more information, visit <http://www.recreation.gov/>.



Too Much of a Good Thing? Visitors in USVI Parks

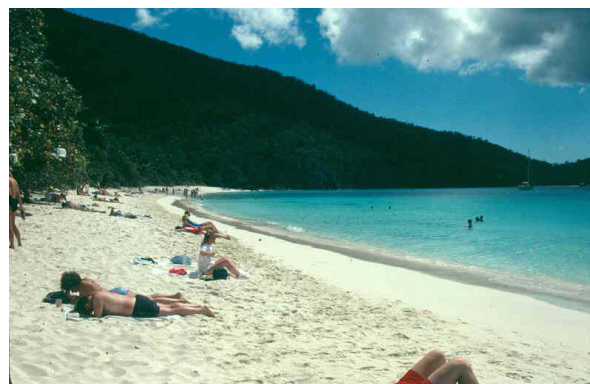
- By Paige Rothenberger, Coral Reef Initiative Coordinator, USVI Dept. of Planning & Natural Resources, Division of Coastal Zone Management (with input from members of VIMPAN - specifically Rafe Boulon, VINP Chief of Resource Management, retired; and C. Anna Toline from NPS Oceans Program)

The U.S. Virgin Islands is home to several marine protected areas (MPAs) including national monuments, national parks, wildlife reserves and marine parks. While there are important differences between the USVI MPAs, the managers of the respective areas all struggle with similar challenges, particularly with respect to recreational uses. Recreation within MPAs is critical to providing a first-hand experience with the marine environment and by extension sustaining existing and creating new stewards, champions and managers for these ecosystems. How do we balance conservation of the resource while maintaining and enhancing recreational access and use of it?

In the USVI, as in other popular tourism destinations, there is often a perception that MPAs are created for the benefit of tourists or visitors, at the expense and exclusion of local residents. This issue has influenced management actions and how managers frame communication and messaging about MPAs. The USVI has a long history of cultural and recreational ties to the marine environment. From island cuisine such as kallaloo (West Indian seafood gumbo), to coral block used to build historic structures, the iconic image of blowing the conch shell horn and family traditions of beach camping and bathing, the islands' marine and coastal ecosystems are part of the territory's cultural fabric. Many MPAs in the USVI have been created with the goal of protecting the marine resources that support these cultural ties and to ensure continued public access to and sustainable use of these resources. In addition, recreational opportunities for visitors are fostered and promoted as a mechanism to bring revenue into the MPA to support management activities. Most USVI MPAs do not have traditional entry fees, but have relationships with tour operators or concessionaires of recreational activities who operate within the MPAs. The concessionaires are permitted to operate within the MPAs and as part of that agreement pay a percentage of their revenues from activities within the MPAs to the managing agency. Some concessionaires offer a reduced rate for USVI residents, a practice that should be encouraged to allow more residents the opportunity to visit MPAs, to learn about coastal and marine habitats and to become stewards of them.

USVI residents and visitors fish, snorkel, dive, swim, bathe, kayak, kite surf, stand-up paddleboard (SUP), boat and more in our MPAs. With the variety of conservation mandates of the MPAs and the varying recreational activities occurring in them, use conflicts are inevitable. It's important for managers to acknowledge that there is no such thing as a non-consumptive recreational activity and to not pit users against each other. For example, while wind surfing or SUP does not typically involve resource extraction, these activities do 'consume' space on and in the water which can negatively impact other recreational pursuits. Bait fishing (an activity that is permitted within some USVI MPAs) can be negatively impacted by the presence of kayakers. Zoning is one strategy to proactively reduce use conflicts. MPA managers should actively include recreational users in the process to establish zones and to create areas where recreational activities are prioritized. Certain behaviors can also be regulated – the VI National Park is banning cigarette smoking on park beaches to reduce user conflicts and protect the quality of recreational experiences within the park. These strategies need to be regularly revisited as new recreational technologies develop to address potential conflicts before they occur.

MPAs are created because there is something special about them, such as a particular geological feature or an important ecological function. These same special characteristics often make them an attractive place for recreational activities and can result in large numbers of visitors and the potential for significant ecological impacts. The number of visitors to Trunk Bay in the VI National Park on St. John can swell during cruise ship visits in neighboring St. Thomas. The park has established limits of persons at one time (300 PAOT) to address the large numbers of visitors on tours from cruise ships. This is accomplished through scheduling of tours at staggered times.



Trunk Bay, St. John with a 'good' number of people



Trunk Bay on a cruise ship day with too many people. This scenario is what spurred the NPS to consider the persons at one time (PAOT) restrictions (Photos courtesy of Rafe Boulon, VINP).

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Surface sunscreen slick down-current from concessionaire snorkel tour boats at Buck Island Reef National Monument, St. Croix (Photo credit: Tony Pernas, NPS)

Beyond the traditional MPA management issues of capacity and user conflict, managers must also contend with emerging issues associated with recreation. In the USVI, MPA managers are working to identify, quantify and begin to address such impacts as sunscreens, hormones and pharmaceuticals introduced into the marine environment from swimmers and snorkelers. Certain UV-filtering compounds in sunscreens have been found to induce viral infections that result in coral bleaching (the expulsion of the symbiotic algae within coral tissue) (Danovero et. al., 2008). Sunscreen formulations of zinc and titanium dioxide seem to be the most reef-friendly; the VINP has worked with the concessionaires and retailers of sunscreen products within its boundaries to switch to offering these formulations to their customers in an effort to reduce impacts to the reef ecosystem. The NPS has also developed a site bulletin (2012) and visitor's center banners to educate park goers about the issue.

Another emerging issue is the listing of species of coral under the Endangered Species Act. Currently two Caribbean framework coral species (*Acropora palmata* and *A. cervicornis*) are listed as threatened, five new coral species have been proposed for listing under either threatened or endangered status, and *A. palmata* and *A. cervicornis* have been proposed to be upgraded to endangered status. Interpretation of these listings and the regulatory mandate placed upon MPA management agencies has, and will continue to affect the public's access to our MPAs for recreational opportunities. Increased education and outreach about the ways we impact corals has been a first step for USVI MPAs and these efforts to raise awareness of both tourists and residents will continue. Additional closures to exclude visitors or certain types of recreational activities are being considered in some MPAs, and will continue to be management options if the condition of the species under protection warrant.

Communication is an important tool for MPA managers to address both traditional and emerging management issues related to recreation. Most people want to do the right thing; they just may not know what that is. One strategy USVI MPA managers are pursuing to more effectively communicate with the public is organizing into a network – the VI Marine Protected Areas Network (VIMPAN). A shared priority for VIMPAN members is to simplify, homogenize and expand education and outreach efforts across our MPAs. Currently, VIMPAN is working to create outreach content that is easily understandable by both VI residents and visitors and that is culturally relevant to the USVI community. Next steps for VIMPAN include further developing action plans for a collaborative education and outreach strategy for the network and developing strategies to address other shared priority issues such as research, monitoring and enforcement.

For more information, contact paige.rothenberger@dpr.gov.vi.

Upcoming Events and Conferences

February

14-18: 2013 AAAS Annual Meeting; Boston, MA; <http://www.aaas.org/meetings/>

17-22: Association for the Sciences of Limnology and Oceanography (ASLO) 2013 Aquatic Sciences Meeting; New Orleans, LA; <http://www.aslo.org/neworleans2013/>

27-March 1: State of the California Central Coast Symposium; Monterey, CA; <http://www.stateofthecoast.org/>

March

25-28: Coastal GeoTools 2013; Myrtle Beach, SC; <http://geotools.csc.noaa.gov/default.aspx>

Surfing and MPAs: Putting the Stoke in Conservation

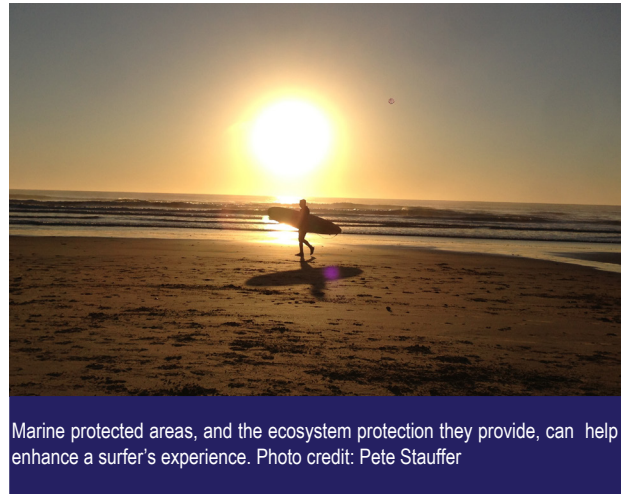
- By Pete Stauffer, Surfrider Foundation

Surfing is one of the most popular and enjoyable ways to experience the ocean, so it should come as no surprise that the sport is a growing use of our nation's marine protected areas (MPAs).

Every year, millions of Americans go surfing in national marine sanctuaries, state marine reserves, marine parks and wildlife areas, and other designations that offer surfing opportunities. From the California coast to the Hawaiian Islands; from Washington's Olympic Coast to Rincón, Puerto Rico; from the Florida Keys to Oregon, MPAs are home to some of the best surfing spots in the country.

These quality wave resources attract surfers from both near and far who bring their enthusiasm - as well as economic benefits - to the local community.

Moreover, surfers are among the most dedicated of oceans users, which means they visit regularly, and often during otherwise unpopular times such as early mornings and the winter months. As ocean users who depend on the protection of the marine environment, surfers are both beneficiaries and stewards of MPAs.



Marine protected areas, and the ecosystem protection they provide, can help enhance a surfer's experience. Photo credit: Pete Stauffer

Protecting Surfing

MPAs can play an important role in protecting surfing opportunities through conservation of the natural environment. This includes the preservation of reefs that form surf breaks, kelp beds that reduce chop in the water, and sedimentation flows that create sand bars, channels, and beaches. By providing holistic protection, MPAs can preserve the structure and function of the nearshore environment, which produces wave riding opportunities. MPAs may also protect water quality - both through encouragement and regulation - which can be a limiting factor for surfing, particularly near urban and agricultural areas.

MPAs also enhance the overall experience of surfing through protecting biodiversity, wildlife abundance, and scenic viewsheds. While such factors may seem secondary to the activity of wave riding, they undoubtedly enrich the quality of experience for surfers who value recreating in a natural setting. Meanwhile, facilities such as bathrooms, showers, signs, and parking provide valued amenities, which may not be available in other surfing locations.

Benefits of Surfers

The relationship between MPAs and surfers is reciprocal. Surfers also provide important benefits to MPAs and local communities. Foremost among these are the economic impacts from entrance and parking fees, as well as trip-related expenditures such as local shopping, hotel visits, dining, and equipment rentals. This economic stimulus can provide important revenue for MPAs and local communities, particularly during the "off-season" (e.g., winter months), when other forms of visitation and recreation are down.

Surfers can also contribute to the stewardship and public outreach of MPAs. Many surfers feel a strong connection to their local break and participate in volunteer activities such as beach cleanups, scientific monitoring, and outreach events. The Surfrider Foundation and other groups and clubs representing surfers can also foster participation in stewardship efforts and serve as valuable partners for public outreach. Finally, as regular users of MPAs, surfers can help promote understanding and compliance with rules among the broader population of visitors. Given the limited budget and staff of many MPAs, such citizen involvement can play an important role in advancing the lasting protection of MPA designations.

Potential Conflicts

While surfing is generally recognized as a low-impact use that is fully compatible with resource protection, there are some cases where MPA designations include restrictions on surfing or other forms of human access. These restrictions are usually triggered by highly sensitive or protected species such as marine mammals and seabirds. For example, California has established "special closures" within some northern California marine reserves to limit disturbance of nesting seabirds. Such restrictions are rare and may be necessary for

continued on next page

Surfing and MPAs (continued)

MPAs to meet ecological goals and compliance with federal statutes such as the Endangered Species Act. As a key stakeholder group, surfers should be consulted and included in any discussions regarding potential restrictions on surfing access in MPAs.



Surfers exit the water at the newly designated Cape Falcon Marine Reserve in Oregon Photo credit: Pete Stauffer

Looking to the Future

As surfing continues to grow in popularity, MPA managers should consider the needs and benefits of surfers, as well as the role that surfing can play in advancing MPA goals. As discussed above, surfing is compatible - if not synergistic - with resource protection, and can also provide major economic and social benefits. Embracing surfing as a beneficial use of MPAs can produce a range of positive outcomes for both the designation and the surrounding community.

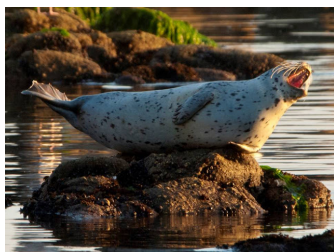
It is also notable that several iconic surfing locations around the world, including Malibu's Surfrider Beach, have been designated as World Surfing Reserves. An initiative of the Save the Waves Coalition, the World Surfing Reserves program is designed to identify and protect outstanding waves, surf zones and their surrounding environments. While these designations do not confer formal (i.e., regulatory) protection, they can help build recognition and political will to protect the resource from future threats. Such designations suggest that there is opportunity for further alignment between MPAs and surfing protection.

For more information, contact pstauffer@surfrider.org or visit <http://www.surfrider.org/>.

Speaking the Same Language About Ocean Uses



America is an ocean nation. Most Americans live near the coast and we use the ocean routinely for recreation, commerce, national security, sustenance, education, and cultural and spiritual renewal. But the human footprint on the ocean is growing, and the expansion of existing and emerging ocean uses requires new and forward-looking approaches to comprehensive ocean planning. To meet this challenge, NOAA's National Marine Protected Areas Center (MPA Center) is developing a portfolio of place-based ocean planning tools designed to help coastal communities better understand the drivers, patterns, conflicts and benefits of ocean uses along their shores. The first tool in this kit, A Common Language of Ocean Uses, provides practical, intuitive, and regionally flexible definitions of a wide range of typical human uses. Based on five years of ocean use mapping experience, the Common Language organizes 35 distinct Use Categories into four familiar Sectors to help planners, managers and stakeholders map and understand the drivers, impacts and benefits of ocean uses across multiple scales. For more information, visit www.mpa.gov/dataanalysis/ocean_uses/.



(Photo credit: Gary Davis)

Calling All MPA Managers and Staff!

The MPA Center and the MPA Federal Advisory Committee needs your input via a short (10 min) survey about professional networks and recreational uses at MPAs. For a copy of the survey, email mpainfo@noaa.gov.

www.mpa.gov

