



Marine Protected Areas Federal Advisory Committee

May 17, 2013

Rebecca Blank
Acting Secretary of Commerce
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave., NW
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Acting Secretary Blank:

I am writing to you about a critical issue of concern to the Marine Protected Areas Federal Advisory Committee (MPA FAC), a 20-member committee representing diverse ocean interests. Established in 2003, the Committee advises the Departments of Commerce and the Interior on ways to strengthen, connect and expand the nation's marine protected areas as effective tools for sustaining healthy oceans and the coastal communities that depend on them. Marine protected areas – like national parks, national wildlife refuges and national marine sanctuaries – have enormous value as economic engines as well as hotspots for travel and tourism, providing both commercial and environmental benefits to users and to the communities they serve. Given the critical role that these special places play in the fabric of our coastal economies now, and in the future, we are concerned about the impacts of recent budget decisions on the National Marine Protected Areas Center. The MPA Center serves both the Departments of Commerce and the Interior and is located within the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries.

The National Marine Protected Areas Center was established by Executive Order in 2000 to serve as the nation's hub for building innovative partnerships and tools to protect special ocean places. In 2013, the President's Budget called for the MPA Center to be combined with the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (ONMS) to achieve great efficiencies. While this is a sound move programmatically, the operating funds and separate budget line for the MPA Center, \$2 million in FY12, were eliminated during this consolidation. At the same time, ONMS has had to absorb cuts of \$3.5 million in operating funds and the elimination of \$4 million in construction funds even before calculating the impacts of sequestration and other cuts to its FY2013 budget.

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DESIGNATED FEDERAL OFFICIAL

Lauren Wenzel
National Marine Protected Areas Center

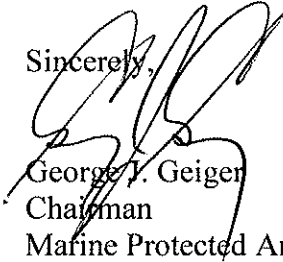
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As a result of these cuts, we are concerned about the ability of the MPA Center to advance and support the continued contribution of the nation's 1,700 federal, state and tribal marine protected areas in sustaining healthy coasts and economically vibrant coastal communities. These special places – many of which are iconic destinations for many Americans and foreign visitors - are a critical component of the Administration's Travel and Tourism Strategy and America's Great Outdoors initiative. The loss of this unique capability, borne from acknowledged national needs, would far outweigh the minor investment needed to sustain it. While mindful of the major budget shortfalls affecting all agencies, we nonetheless request that the \$2 million in MPA Center funds be restored within the NOAA/ONMS budget in the President's FY2015 budget request. This small resource request will have significant benefits for those who value and recreate on our coasts.

Protecting the special places along our coasts will pay dividends now and into the future by attracting recreation and tourism and the livelihoods they support. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



George J. Geiger
Chairman

Marine Protected Areas Federal Advisory Committee

cc. Kathryn Sullivan, Acting Under Secretary for Oceans and Atmosphere
Lauren Wenzel, Designated Federal Official, MPA Federal Advisory Committee, National
Marine Protected Areas Center