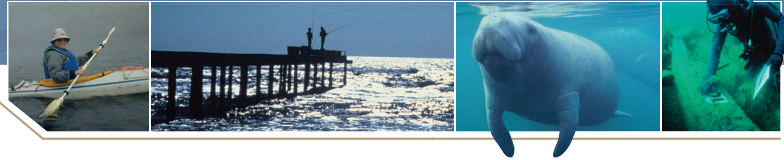


Inventory of De Facto Marine Protected Areas of the United States of America



Building an Effective National System of Marine Protected Areas

Presidential Executive Order 13158 identified the need to develop a national system of marine protected areas (MPAs) that uses sound science, meaningful stakeholder input, and existing MPA authorities to sustain the long-term conservation, management, and use of the ocean. Central to this effort is the inventory of marine managed areas in the U.S. being conducted by NOAA's National MPA Center (<http://mpa.gov/inventory/inventory.html>). This growing compilation of over 2,000 sites will form the foundation for a comprehensive assessment of existing site types and levels of protection in relation to human uses. The parallel inventory of de facto sites completes the picture of how, and to what degree, specific ocean areas are accessible to human uses. The MPA Center Science Institute has collected data on de facto MPAs, classified these sites, and created electronic spatial boundaries for those areas where they did not exist.

De Facto MPAs: What Are They and Why Are They Important?

De facto MPAs are areas of the ocean where access is restricted or where specific activities or uses are regulated by law for reasons other than conservation or natural resource management. Familiar examples of de facto MPAs include safety, security, and danger zones (e.g., Cape Canaveral), and regulated navigation areas and restricted areas (Table 1). Though established for other purposes, de facto MPAs may play a significant role in the overall conservation and management of the nation's ocean ecosystems through their potential ecological benefits to protected habitats and their potential influence on human uses.

What are the Criteria for a De Facto MPA?

A de facto marine protected area is defined by five criteria:

1. It must represent a discrete *area* of any size, with legally defined geographical boundaries.
2. The area must be *marine*, which is defined as an area of the ocean or submerged coastal waters (including intertidal areas, bays, or estuaries) or an area of the Great Lakes or their connecting waters.
3. The area must be legally *reserved*, and thus established by and currently subject to federal, state, commonwealth, territorial, local or tribal law or regulation.
4. The area must be *lasting*, with restrictions spanning a minimum of ten years duration from date of establishment. With any given year, there must be a minimum of 3 days restriction at the same location.
5. Finally, the de facto MPA must have *restrictions*, whereby site access and/or human uses or activities are more controlled within the area than surrounding waters.

Areas for which human access is impeded by logistical or prevailing sea conditions are not de facto MPAs and were not analyzed in this study.

Table 1. The types, purposes and number of de facto MPAs in the United States.

Type of de facto MPA	Purpose for Establishment	Number in U.S. Waters*
Areas that Limit Access or Restrict Specific Activities (527 sites)		
Restricted Area	To provide security for government operations and protection of the public from the risks of damage or injury arising from government activity by prohibiting or limiting public access.	145
Danger Zone	To protect the public from target practice, bombing, rocket firing or other especially hazardous operations	127
Security Zone	To safeguard public or private infrastructure from destruction, loss, or injury from sabotage	107
Shipping Safety Fairway	To control the erection of structures in highly trafficked areas	53
Safety Zone	To limit access for safety and environmental purposes	51
Anchorage Ground	To protect government vessels or vessels carrying explosives from injury or sabotage	41
Prohibited Area	To prevent oil and hazardous materials transfer at sea	3
Areas that Allow Access but that Specify How Certain Uses Must be Conducted (708 sites)		
Anchorage Ground	To provide safe navigation in navigable waters	305
Special Anchorage Area	To provide safe navigation in navigable waters	236
Traffic Separation Scheme	To provide access routes for vessels to and from ports	65
Regulated Navigation Area	To control vessel traffic around ports and harbors	49
Shipping Safety Anchorage	To provide for safe vessel routes	23
Vessel Traffic Service Area	To promote safe vessel movement by reducing the potential for collisions, and the loss of lives and property associated with these incidents	26
Lightering Zone	To confine and control oil and hazardous materials transfer	4
Total Number of De Facto MPAs in U.S. Waters		1235

*Total number of de facto MPAs as of 1/10/06

What Will We Learn From An Inventory of De Facto MPAs?

The de facto inventory documents restricted areas established for reasons other than conservation, providing a missing piece of the human use puzzle for U.S. waters. A detailed analysis of the de facto inventory will allow the nation to quantify the number, location, types of restrictions, purposes, and spatial boundaries of de facto MPAs in U.S. waters (Figure 1). Reliable information on these and other characteristics is crucial for assessing patterns of human access to ocean areas, and for evaluating the role of existing MPAs (both conservation-based and de facto) in protecting important ocean areas. The de facto inventory will include a GIS database, and will be made available to the public via the U.S. website on MPAs: <http://www.mpa.gov>.

Future national level analyses will assess the:

- extent to which public access to marine areas or resources is limited for non-conservation reasons;
- potential ecological and fisheries benefits of de facto MPAs; and
- potential contribution of de facto MPAs to the overall goals of a national system of MPAs.

A comprehensive database of restricted areas in the ocean will be of substantial value to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security through the dissemination of information on the regulations and boundaries of restricted areas.

For More Information

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