

National Marine Protected Areas Center West Coast Pilot: Existing Governance Framework Project



About the West Coast Pilot

Because the west coast—California, Oregon, and Washington—is currently at the forefront of federal, state, and tribal MPA activity, the National Marine Protected Areas Center is leading a collaborative initiative there to pilot key methods and approaches for developing regional systems of MPAs. This project involves developing, testing, and applying analytical tools, and gathering the best information, including science-based data and traditional ecological knowledge, to better understand how to more effectively use MPAs to sustain healthy marine environments. The products and lessons offered by this pilot will serve as a foundation for other regional MPA planning, as part of a larger effort to develop a U.S. national system of MPAs. The data collected will also be useful for numerous other ecosystem approaches to management that require the same comprehensive information.

Pilot Partners

The West Coast Pilot is an unprecedented effort that requires core partnerships among the region's federal, state, and tribal government agencies. Key NOAA partners include the National Marine Sanctuary Program, National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science, and the National Marine Fisheries Service. In addition, the participation of the following regional partners is instrumental to the effort's success: the Department of the Interior's National Park Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; the National Estuarine Research Reserves System; the Pacific Fishery Management Council; academic institutions, and other non-governmental organizations.

Existing Governance Framework Project Description

As the National Marine Protected Areas Center proceeds with the west coast pilot, understanding the existing legal framework through which marine natural and cultural resources in the region are managed is increasingly important. The goal of this governance project is to develop a comprehensive overview of marine protected area (MPA) policy authorities at the international, federal, state, and tribal levels.

Each jurisdiction has distinct, and sometimes overlapping, authorities governing marine conservation. Understanding which agencies have authority over different activities in a given geographic area is essential for successful place-based planning and management. This component of the west coast pilot is initially focused on developing a comprehensive inventory of MPA policy at the federal, state, and tribal levels of government, as well as any relevant international laws. When available, information on the geographic coverage of key authorities will also be collected in order to illustrate spatially where the various authorities apply. In addition to MPA governance, an understanding of all non-MPA related marine resource management authorities that surround existing west coast MPAs is essential for a more comprehensive approach to decision-making. While this information will not be collected in this first phase of the project, it is a critical component of more detailed regional MPA analysis and any ecosystem-based MPA planning that may happen in the future. As such, these more general marine resource management authorities are likely to be inventoried in later phases of this project.

Products

- **Searchable database of existing legislation.** A searchable database encompassing authorities and policies pertaining to MPAs on the U.S. west coast. will be developed and made available to government agencies and the public. The database will include information on: management agencies, policies, and links to the full text of these policies.
- **Geographic Information System (GIS) for west coast MPA jurisdictions.** A GIS will be built that houses boundary information on MPA governance from the high tide line to 200 nautical miles. The GIS will also include data layers describing the level of protection for adjacent uplands.

For More Information

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