

National Marine Protected Areas Center

2004 - 2009

Strategic Plan

UPDATED FEBRUARY 2007



INTRODUCTION

Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) have long been used as a management tool for conserving marine resources. The United States (U.S.) currently has hundreds of MPAs established by individual federal, state, territorial, tribal and local authorities for a wide range of purposes. Joint planning and interaction, however, is generally localized and often superseded by more near-term site or program priorities. Moreover, only a few past efforts or ongoing initiatives are designed to ensure that MPAs are coordinated in a larger ecosystem framework to effectively protect the nation's natural and cultural resources, and represent the diversity of U.S. marine ecosystems. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) National Marine Protected Areas Center (MPA Center) was created to facilitate the effective use of science, technology, training, and information in the planning, management and evaluation of the nation's system of MPAs.

Presidential Executive Order 13158 defines the term "MPA" as "any area of the marine environment that has been reserved by federal, state, territorial, tribal or local laws or regulations to provide lasting protection for part or all of the natural and cultural resources therein." Issued in May 2000, the Executive Order directs federal agencies to work together with states, territories, tribes and nongovernmental partners to develop and maintain an effective national system

of MPAs in the U.S. and to accomplish a variety of related tasks working with public and private partners. The Executive Order also directed NOAA to establish the MPA Center to lead these activities in partnership with the Department of the Interior.

The MPA Center is headquartered in Silver Spring, Maryland, and has regionally-based staff in Boston, Massachusetts, and Monterey and Santa Cruz, California. The headquarters office is responsible for program management, planning, consultation, coordination, and outreach. The MPA Center's Science Institute, with offices in Santa Cruz and Monterey, California, fosters targeted scientific research, assessment and policy analysis on aspects of design, management and evaluation of MPAs to bring sound science into the MPA policy arena. Regional coordinators for the West Coast and Pacific Islands, and the Northeast are located in Monterey and Boston, respectively.

The MPA Center Strategic Plan was completed in October 2004 and updated in January 2007 to more accurately reflect the organization's evolving structure and priorities. A new Strategic Plan will be developed in 2009.

introduction

NATIONAL MPA CENTER VISION

An effective, science-based, and collaborative national system of marine protected areas conserving U.S. marine ecosystems and their associated natural and cultural resources.

NATIONAL MPA CENTER MISSION

To facilitate the effective use of science, technology, training, and information in the planning, management, and evaluation of the nation's system of marine protected areas.

NATIONAL MPA CENTER GOALS

The Center has three goals that all support the Executive Order's vision of a national system of MPAs that meets multiple conservation and management needs for current and future generations. They also support the Ecosystem Goal within NOAA's Strategic Plan.

1. Build and maintain the National System of MPAs.
2. Improve MPA stewardship and effectiveness.
3. Facilitate international, national and regional coordination of MPAs activities.

CROSS-CUTTING SUPPORT FUNCTIONS WITHIN THE NATIONAL MPA CENTER

The MPA Center works with state, territorial, tribal, federal, and nongovernmental partners to support key functional areas that cut across our goals. Principal among these functional areas are:

Science and Analysis – targeted research and analysis of natural and social science issues relevant to MPAs.

Policy Analysis - analyses of current and emerging issues and policies affecting MPAs at the national, regional, tribal, state, and territorial levels.

Synthesis – objective summaries of complex science and policy issues in a form that is useful to agencies and stakeholders engaged in the MPA arena.

Regional and National Coordination –facilitating dialogues and partnerships at the national and regional levels to elicit, understand, and support MPA priorities

International Coordination – transferring U.S. and international experiences and ensuring linkages to and participation in international MPA efforts, including MPA systems and networks.

MPA CENTER LINKS TO NOAA AND THE DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR

The National MPA Center is housed within NOAA's Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management (OCRM) and coordinates across NOAA programs, as well as with pertinent federal, state, territorial and tribal MPA and MPA-support programs. At the federal level the MPA Center works closely with the Department of the Interior (DOI), which manages many marine areas under the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's National Wildlife Refuges and National Park Service, as well as the Minerals Management Service, which is responsible for managing outer continental shelf leases for mineral, oil and gas exploration, and conducting supporting research.

The location of the MPA Center within OCRM offers opportunities for collaboration with the national coastal zone management and estuarine research reserve programs, and supports the achievement of OCRM's strategic goals to protect and restore coastal and ocean resources, foster resilient coastal communities, and improve people's ability to take action that benefit coastal communities and ecosystems. The MPA Center also is able to draw on NOAA's resources and expertise in ocean, ecosystem and fisheries science – critical components of effective MPA management. The Center is part of NOAA's Coastal and Marine Resources Program, within the National Ocean Service, which supports NOAA's Ecosystem Goal, "to protect, restore and manage the use of coastal and ocean resources through ecosystem-based management."

Communication – objective information distributed using various mechanisms to diverse and comprehensive audiences that are involved in or affected by MPA issues.

Education – information to teachers, students and targeted stakeholders to increase their understanding of MPA issues.

Technical Assistance – developing tools and technologies needed to design, plan, manage, and evaluate MPAs.

Training – providing specialized courses about MPA issues targeted to both practitioners and stakeholders.

GOAL 1. BUILD AND MAINTAIN THE NATIONAL SYSTEM OF MARINE PROTECTED AREAS

Currently, the U.S. lacks a cohesive and integrated national system of MPAs. Throughout U.S. waters, MPAs exist as a collection of individual sites and systems, created by a myriad of agencies with diverse objectives, authorities, management approach, and capacities. While many of these sites do well to serve local needs and meet the requirements of certain national programs, they do not constitute a comprehensive, systematic national MPA approach. The MPA Center is charged with working in partnership with these existing MPAs and programs to develop an effective, science-based National System of MPAs (National System) that will enhance the management of existing MPAs and identify new areas in need of additional protection, as appropriate.

The National System will include a variety of MPA sites representing diverse U.S. marine ecosystems and the nation's natural and cultural resources. Establishment and management of existing and new MPAs will continue to rest in the hands of the diverse federal, state, territorial, tribal, and local governments that have been given this authority. Through the National System, these sites and programs will benefit by working together to accomplish priorities that could not be achieved alone. These benefits include improved scientific information necessary for MPA management, enhanced communication and coordination, and the development of regional MPA networks. This coordination will ultimately enhance the management of the nation's natural and cultural marine resources, and facilitate the integration of MPAs within an ecosystem approach to management.

Objective 1. Provide a set of straightforward and objective terms to describe the variety of MPA types and uses in the U.S.

The national dialogue about whether, when, and how to use MPAs to conserve and manage key marine resources and habitats has been severely hindered by the lack of consistent terminology to describe the variety of MPAs in the U.S. In response, the MPA Center, with input from the MPA Federal Advisory Committee (MPA FAC), agencies, and stakeholders, has undertaken several efforts to facilitate the collective understanding of MPAs and other types of place-based management. First, the MPA Center has developed and is applying a new Classification System for MPAs that uses six objective and straightforward aspects of any site to describe its purpose, level of protection, and likely impacts on ecosystems and human users. Second, through the public process to develop the Framework for Developing the National System of MPAs (Framework), a definition and associated criteria are being established for the widely used but

poorly understood term “marine protected area.” This ‘common language’ for MPAs will inform and enable a more meaningful and constructive examination of this promising tool for ecosystem management in the U.S. Together, the criteria and Classification System provide key elements of the planning framework for the National System.

Objective 2. Inventory MMAs and assess existing capabilities.

Although the U.S. has long used MPAs to conserve and manage the most important and treasured ocean resources, the nation still lacks a rigorous understanding of the number and nature of existing MPAs in U.S. waters. To address this, the MPA Center has developed a comprehensive Inventory of Marine Managed Areas (MMAs) in U.S. waters, working closely with federal, state, territorial, and tribal agencies to acquire and verify data on key aspects of each site. “MMA” is an inclusive term that casts a broad net around nearly all place-based conservation efforts in the ocean, including the narrower subset of marine protected areas. This unprecedented compilation of information on place-based marine management in the U.S. provides information on the location, purpose, management approach, resources protected, and potential effects of existing MMAs of various types. The MMA Inventory and subsequent analyses derived from it are critical pieces of information for developing the MPA definition and associated criteria, as well as identifying potential MPA sites and programs for participation in the national system. When coupled with natural and cultural resource characterization, these data will be used to assist in the identification of gaps that must be filled in order to meet the priority goals of the National System of MPAs (see Objective 5). MMA Inventory data and analysis are available to the public on www.MPA.gov and through other MPA Center publications.

Objective 3. Establish the Framework for Developing the National System of MPAs.

The MPA Center is producing the Framework for Developing the National System of Marine Protected Areas based on input from a wide array of MPA partners and stakeholders. The Framework will provide guidance for collaborative efforts among government partners and stakeholders to build a national system

goal 1

that aims to strengthen the effectiveness of existing MPAs and improve science-based decisions about their future use. When complete, the Framework will:

- (i) describe the origin, need and purpose for a national system of MPAs in the U.S.;
- (ii) list goals for the national system;
- (iii) provide the official definition of the term “MPA” and associated criteria;
- (iv) outline cooperative local, regional and national planning processes to improve the effectiveness of existing MPAs and identify priorities for future place-based conservation; and
- (v) describe mechanisms for improving stewardship of its component MPA sites and programs.

In developing the Framework the MPA Center will continue to seek and consider extensive input from the MPA FAC; federal, regional, state, and territorial marine management programs and agencies; specific user groups; and the wider stakeholder public through a series of workshops, regional public dialogue sessions, ongoing consultations, and a formal public review and comment process on the draft document.

Objective 4. Develop the Existing National System and List of MPAs

Executive Order 13158 directs NOAA and DOI, in consultation with other federal agencies to develop the National System and create and maintain a List of MPAs (MPA List) that meet the goals and criteria developed and finalized in the Framework. To develop the existing National System and MPA List, the goals and MPA criteria in the Framework will be applied to the sites listed in the growing MMA Inventory to identify those that are potentially eligible for inclusion in the National System of MPAs. NOAA and DOI will then work with the federal, state, and tribal agencies that have MPA programs with authority over eligible sites in order to develop the initial National System and MPA List from this nucleus.

The MPA List, which will grow as newly established sites that meet the criteria are added, will also provide critically needed data to assist federal agencies in avoiding harm to the natural and cultural resources within listed sites, as required under the Executive Order. Working closely with other federal agencies and interested parties, the MPA Center will develop practical guidance, to be included in the Framework, for Federal agencies to meet their responsibilities under the MPA Executive Order to avoid harming the marine resources protected by MPAs of the National System.

Objective 5. Identify regional and national opportunities, gaps and priorities for place-based conservation.

Using the guidance described in the Framework, the MPA Center will facilitate and support collaborative regional conservation planning processes to identify priority place-based conservation gaps in the National System. This effort will identify habitats and resources important for natural heritage, cultural heritage and sustainable production within U.S. regions that may be in need of additional protection either through improving the effectiveness of existing MPAs or establishing new sites.

Key components of this multi-year process include:

- (i) the development and maintenance of dialogues and partnerships with key agencies, academic institutions, and diverse stakeholders in U.S. regions;
- (ii) a synthesis of the purposes, types, resources protected, and levels of protection afforded by the existing National System of MPAs and all other relevant marine management efforts, relying heavily on the Inventory and MPA Classification System;
- (iii) an assessment of the existing legal and policy framework for MPAs in the U.S.;
- (iv) an assessment of contributions of the existing National System of MPAs to the overall goals of the National System;
- (v) national and regional synthesis of information on the distribution and status of key resources and habitats in U.S. marine ecosystems;
- (vi) an assessment of the patterns and potential impacts of human uses in marine ecosystems;
- (vii) an assessment of gaps in protection for important marine areas; and (viii) recommended priority areas for consideration in future MPA planning, including areas for inclusion in the national system.

These regional planning efforts will rely heavily on consistent, meaningful engagement of and input by diverse stakeholder interests, including the MPA FAC. This approach is being piloted on the West Coast (Washington, Oregon and California), and will then be expanded to other regions.

goal 1

Objective 6. Develop the Integrated Plan for a comprehensive and effective national system of MPAs.

The regional MPA planning process outlined above will result in the identification of priority conservation areas needed to fill important natural heritage, cultural heritage and/or sustainable production gaps in the National System. To identify linkages across these thematic areas and encourage, where appropriate, multiple conservation benefits within a single site or network of sites, the National MPA Center and its partners in NOAA and elsewhere will develop tools for integrating these priority gaps. These user-friendly decision support tools can be used to facilitate a collaborative process within regions to identify a comprehensive suite of MPAs

that collectively meet multiple regional objectives while minimizing impacts to coastal users. The resulting Integrated Plan for a National System of MPAs in the United States will inform decisions by independent MPA authorities about whether, when, and how to use this tool to protect some of the nation's most valued resources.

Long-term performance measures:

- By 2010, complete 100% of the natural and cultural resource characterizations for U.S. biogeographic regions.
- Create an initial national system of MPAs from federal, state and tribal sites that meet criteria.

GOAL 2. IMPROVE MPA STEWARDSHIP AND EFFECTIVENESS

Executive Order 13158 calls for strengthening the management, protection and conservation of existing MPAs. Enhancing MPA stewardship and effectiveness is also a key component of the national system. The MPA Center aims to accomplish this by enhancing capacity for planning, management, and evaluation within the MPA community. Creating and implementing effective management strategies requires the awareness, understanding, and application of relevant best practices by management and affected stakeholder groups. The MPA Center partners with tribal, territorial, state and federal governmental agencies with MPA management authority. It also reaches out to those affected by MPA management decisions to provide an awareness of opportunities and the skills necessary for substantive involvement in decision-making.

Objective 1. Foster awareness and understanding of the national system of MPAs and MPA management.

Consistent communication with both the public and management entities to provide information about the National System and the nation's MPAs is essential. Through the MPA.gov website, informational workshops, a newsletter, and other communication mechanisms, the MPA Center conducts outreach to a wide range of stakeholders, including the general public. In order to ensure the most effective delivery of outreach material, the MPA Center regularly assesses its constituents and updates the scope of distribution efforts. Wherever possible the MPA Center will continue to take advantage of existing networks to share information and use a variety of communication mechanisms to conduct targeted inreach to government agencies, including states and tribes.

Objective 2. Support increased use of science and technology in decision making.

An important role of the MPA Center is to facilitate the development and application of natural and social science information and tools for sound decision-making in MPA design, management, and evaluation. As a first step the Center has identified priority natural and social science needs, gathering input from MPA managers and staff, scientists from a range of disciplines, and stakeholders. The Center is also helping managers acquire needed science information, providing tools and assistance for the collection of social and natural science data, and building partnerships that will foster data sharing. Once data are collected, additional analysis is often necessary to apply information to decision-making; the Center is developing decision-support tools to facilitate this

application. These capabilities are brought together through regional coordination efforts to enhance MPA management and planning.

Objective 3. Increase the capacity for meaningful, collaborative stakeholder participation in MPA processes.

Both MPA managers and stakeholders have expressed a desire for more extensive and meaningful stakeholder participation in MPA processes. In addition to having an inherent right to participate in the management of public resources, stakeholders also bring useful knowledge about the natural and cultural marine environment. Meaningful participation leads to decisions that are responsive to community interests and values, and also can help resolve user conflicts, build trust, and educate the public about marine resource issues. Finally, research suggests that participation leads to increased compliance with any resulting regulations. The MPA Center is working to build the capacity of managers to plan and implement effective participatory processes. As a first step the Center is documenting and sharing lessons learned from recent participatory processes. Looking forward, the MPA Center hopes to provide information, training, and assistance as new processes are initiated.

Objective 4. Foster the creation and application of tools and strategies to improve MPA management capabilities.

Enhancing MPA management capabilities through existing sites and programs is essential to helping them achieve their resource protection goals, and maintain their resiliency in a changing natural and human environment. These capabilities include, but are not limited to, monitoring, enforcement, education, restoration, management planning, and volunteer management. The MPA Center is working with its partners to document and understand key challenges and opportunities, and to identify creative ways to address them. The primary role of the MPA Center in this context is to facilitate the exchange of information on issues and best practices, and develop and apply tools and technologies to address these issues, such as mapping digital boundaries to facilitate enforcement.

goal 2

Objective 5. Build the capacity of the MPA community to evaluate MPA effectiveness.

Performance measure:

Under development.

Monitoring management effectiveness and conducting informed program evaluations are integral to the long-term success of MPAs. Managers are grappling with the development of meaningful, practical performance measures and outcome indicators that will both facilitate adaptive management and provide accountability to stakeholders. The MPA Center is working with the MPA community to build the capacity to evaluate the efficacy of management actions and progress toward MPA goals.

goal 2

GOAL 3. FACILITATE INTERNATIONAL, NATIONAL AND REGIONAL COORDINATION OF MPA ACTIVITIES

Coordination of international, national, and regional MPA activities is critical to achieving the goals of the National System of MPAs, as well as to ensuring the effective stewardship of existing MPA sites. MPA coordination includes enhancing communication among diverse MPA sites and agencies, as well as identifying areas for inter-agency and inter-governmental cooperation and partnerships. Another key initiative will be working across all levels of government to identify and implement governance and coordination mechanisms to support an effective National System of MPAs.

Objective 1. Coordinate among federal, state, tribal and local agencies to support the National System of MPAs and its stewardship goals.

A key responsibility of the MPA Center is to coordinate with federal agencies and state, territorial and tribal governments on MPA activities. NOAA and DOI, through the Center, work jointly to implement the conservation objectives outlined in Executive Order 13158. Over the next few years, the Center will partner with federal agencies and state, territorial and tribal governments on the design and implementation of the National System of MPAs. A key component of the national system entails working with federal agencies to develop a process for ensuring that MPAs in the National System are not harmed by federal actions. In addition, the MPA Center will work with National Marine Sanctuaries, National Estuarine Research Reserves, National Parks, and National Wildlife Refuges to ensure coordination between the “Seamless Network” initiative led by these four federal MPA Programs and the National System.

The MPA Center is also responsible for the administration of the MPA FAC, which includes representatives from nongovernmental organizations, industry, and state, territorial, and tribal governments. The MPA FAC, established pursuant to the Executive Order, provides recommendations to NOAA and the Department of the Interior on a wide range of issues relating to the National System of MPAs, stewardship and effectiveness, and intergovernmental coordination.

Objective 2. Foster regional coordination of agencies and stakeholders to support the National System of MPAs, as well as NOAA’s Ecosystem goal.

The MPA Center supports NOAA’s commitment to an ecosystem approach to management, as well as state and federally led regional ocean governance initiatives. MPA management is a key component of an ecosystem approach to management, providing a mechanism to protect and manage ecosystem resources in a particular place. Regional coordination offers an important opportunity to link management efforts at individual sites into a larger, more effective network to address issues of regional importance, and integrate with related issues at the regional scale. The MPA Center is building regional coordination capacity, aligned with NOAA’s regional coordination efforts, to link MPAs at the regional level, identify opportunities for collaboration, strengthen natural and social science to support regional MPA management efforts, and support the development of the National System. This regional coordination is currently focused on the West Coast of the U.S. (California, Washington, and Oregon) and, to a lesser extent, New England, and will ultimately be expanded to other regions as the National System is established.

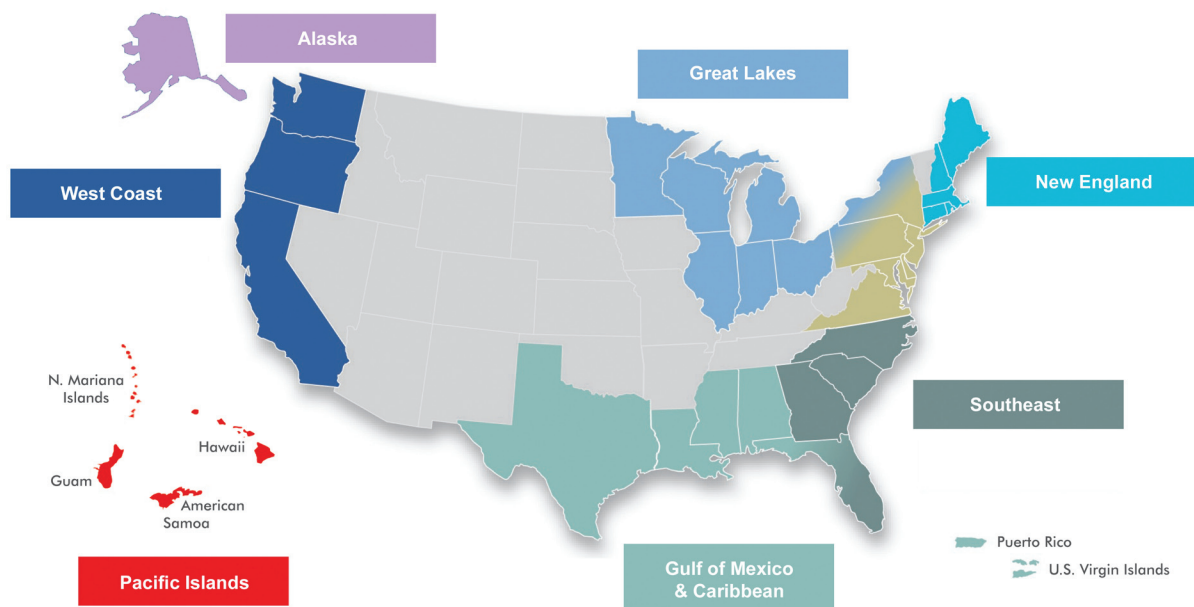
In any region, the MPA Center will be able to characterize its involvement by one of the following three stages: communication, engagement, and integration. These three stages describe a continuum of involvement from:

- the most basic levels of clear, consistent communication on local, regional and national issues among and across partners at those levels;
- the engagement with those partners on these issues; and
- the integration of MPA Center staff in local and regional activities in support of joint efforts at multiple levels.

With many different agencies involved in area-based management processes, their ultimate success will depend largely upon strategic coordination among agencies and meaningful engagement in MPA planning by stakeholders.

goal 3

MPA Center Functional Regions



West Coast Pilot

The West Coast region – California, Oregon, and Washington – is at the forefront of federal, state and tribal MPA activity and has a growing interest in using these place-based conservation tools as a core component of marine ecosystem management. For these reasons, the MPA Center is working closely with state and federal MPA programs, tribes and stakeholder groups in the region to pilot an ecosystem-based approach for designing and managing an effective regional system of MPAs on the West Coast. This pilot effort is developing, testing and applying analytical tools and the best information to more effectively use MPAs as a means to maintain healthy, sustainable marine ecosystems and protect elements of the nation’s maritime heritage. This multi-year endeavor, and the lessons it offers for other regions, will serve as a basis for planning and building a comprehensive national system that addresses regional management goals. Key components of the West Coast Pilot include:

- Ecological characterization
- Cultural resource characterization
- Characterization of human use patterns
- Assessment of human use impacts
- Governance of MPAs
- Contribution of existing MPAs to conservation goals

Expected results include:

- A suite of tools, methods, and information for regional MPA planning and adaptive management that may be transferred to other regions
- An ongoing regional forum for west coast state, federal and tribal programs to efficiently coordinate their management of existing MPAs and collaboratively plan future conservation efforts

Objective 3. Improve linkages with international MPA programs to advance US conservation goals.

MPAs are a tool used globally to conserve natural and cultural marine heritage resources. The MPA Center works closely with both NOAA’s Office of International Affairs and the National Ocean Service’s International Programs Office to support technical assistance to other nations on MPA issues, collaborate with other nations on shared conservation goals, learn from other nations that are working to improve MPA effectiveness and develop national systems and MPA networks, and integrate elements of the developing U.S. National System with those of other nations. Key priorities for international activities are those that include partner nations with resources that share U.S. waters; support U.S. treaties, interests, or other legal obligations; and advance management, educational, technical or scientific knowledge or practices.

Performance Measure:

By 2010, seven regionally based coordination and support structures will link MPAs within the National System and the local level to ecosystem-based management initiatives.

goal 3

The Future

The MPA Center recognizes that development, support, and implementation of a National System of MPAs is a dynamic process requiring adaptive management. As the National System of MPAs moves from its conceptual to implementation stage, this Plan also will adapt/evolve in recognition of accomplishments and future requirements

future