

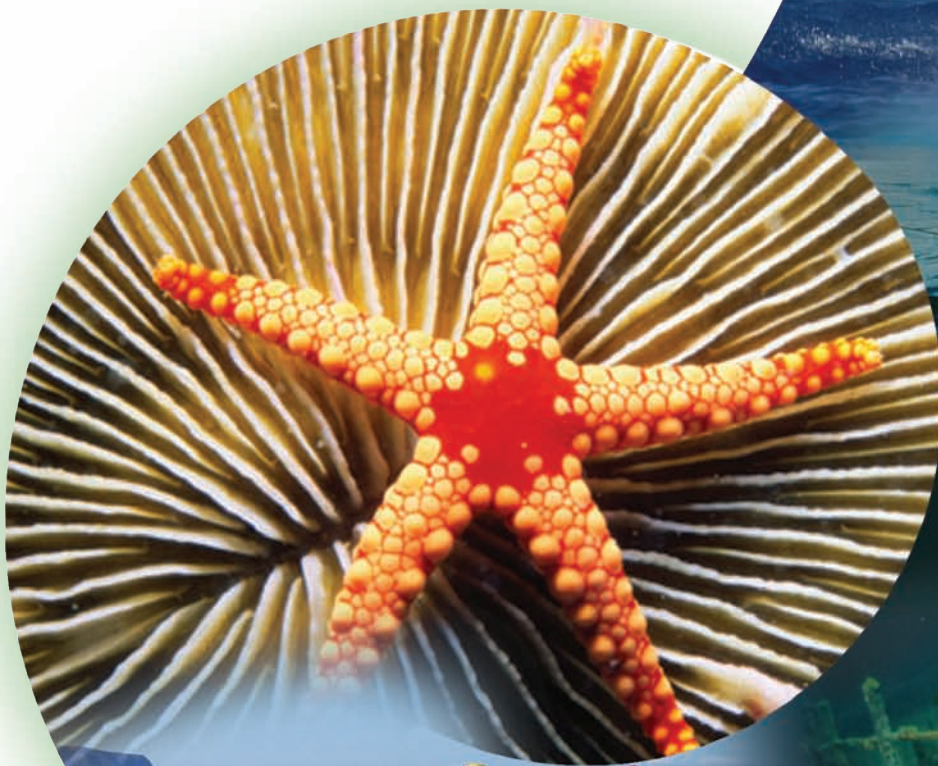
Revised Draft

Framework for Developing the National System of Marine Protected Areas

SUMMARY



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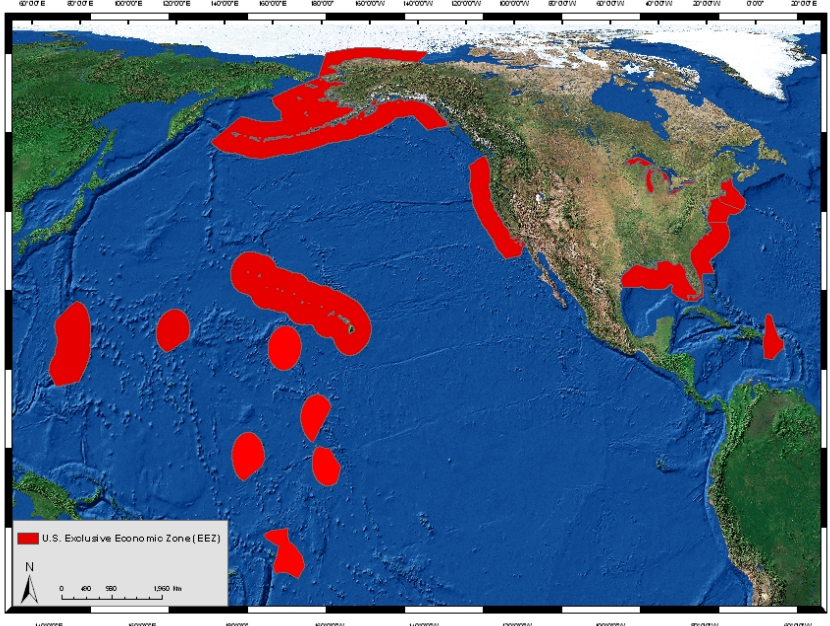
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Revised Draft Framework for Developing the National System of Marine Protected Areas

The process for developing a National System of Marine Protected Areas (MPA System) for the United States reached a critical phase with the publication on March 17, 2008, of the *Revised Draft Framework for Developing the National System of MPAs*. Incorporating revisions resulting from the first round of public comments in 2007, the revised draft was made available for public comment through April 16, 2008. (see www.mpa.gov for details). The final framework is planned for publication in Summer 2008.

Background

In the United States and around the world, marine protected areas (MPAs) are increasingly recognized as an important and promising management tool for conserving vital marine habitats and natural and cultural resources. When used effectively and as part of a broader ecosystem-based approach to management, MPAs can help stem the impacts of coastal development, overfishing, a changing climate and natural events, and offer social and economic opportunities for current and future generations.



There are nearly 1,800 existing MPAs in the U.S. that have been established by federal, state, territorial, and local governments using approximately 200 different laws. These MPAs have been designated to achieve a myriad of conservation objectives, ranging from conservation of biodiversity hotspots, to preservation of sunken historic vessels, to protection of spawning aggregations important to commercial and recreational fisheries. Similarly, the level of protection provided by these MPAs ranges from no-take marine reserves to allowing multiple uses, including fishing.

Recognizing the significant role that U.S. MPAs play in conserving marine heritage and sustainable use, and the lack of a national framework for comprehensive MPA planning, coordination and support, Presidential Executive Order 13158 of May 26, 2000 calls for the development of a national system of MPAs. The *Revised Draft Framework for Developing the National System of MPAs* describes this system.

The Revised Draft Framework outlines the following key components of the national system:

- A set of overarching national system goals and priority conservation objectives.
- MPA eligibility criteria and other key definitions.
- A nomination process to include eligible existing MPAs in the national system.
- A science-based, public process for identifying conservation gaps in the national system.
- A process for improving regional and ecosystem-based coordination of MPAs.
- Mechanisms for national and international coordination.
- Implementation guidance regarding federal agency responsibilities to avoid harm to resources protected by national system MPAs.
- Mechanisms for monitoring, evaluating, and reporting on national system progress and priorities.

Benefits of an Effective National System

A national system offers numerous benefits above and beyond the benefits realized by participating MPA sites and programs. These include, but are not limited to:

- ***Enhanced Conservation*** - representativeness; connectivity; enhanced stewardship; and a framework in which MPAs and programs can address conservation issues beyond their individual scopes of authority
- ***Social and Economic Benefits*** - increased tourism; sustained fisheries; maintained coastal community identity; and non-extractive uses (e.g. aesthetic appeal)
- ***Public Awareness, Understanding and Education*** - increased support for marine conservation; more effective and efficient outreach; promotion of cultural heritage; and enhanced educational and research opportunities
- ***Enhanced Coordination and Strategic Direction*** - shared national system conservation objectives; improved gap analysis and planning; and enhanced interagency cooperation

National System Purpose

The purpose of the national system is to support the effective stewardship, conservation, restoration, sustainable use and public understanding and appreciation of the nation's significant natural and cultural marine heritage and sustainable production marine resources with due consideration of the interests of and implications for all who use and care about our marine environments.

National System Goals and Priority Conservation Objectives

The national system's goals and objectives are designed to address the requirements of the Order to develop a comprehensive national system of MPAs representing diverse U.S. marine ecosystems, and the Nation's natural and cultural resources. The national system as a whole will work collectively to achieve these goals, which are all of equal

importance. It is not expected that any individual MPA, MPA program or system should address all goals or objectives.

Natural Heritage: Advance comprehensive conservation and management of the nation’s biological communities, habitats, ecosystems, and processes, and the ecological services, uses, and values they provide to this and future generations through ecosystem-based MPA approaches

Cultural Heritage: Advance comprehensive conservation and management of cultural resources that reflect the nation’s maritime history and traditional cultural connections to the sea, as well as the uses and values they provide to this and future generations through ecosystem-based MPA approaches

Sustainable Production: Advance comprehensive conservation and management of the nation’s renewable living resources and their habitats, including, but not limited to, spawning, mating, and nursery grounds, and areas established to minimize incidental by-catch of species that are important to the nation’s social, economic, and cultural well-being through ecosystem-based MPA approaches.

Prioritization of Conservation Objectives

Given the magnitude of the task of building a comprehensive national system, the MPA Center will follow a gradual implementation process based on the iterative achievement of the prioritized conservation objectives as outlined in the table below. In this way, building the national system will begin focused on a subset of the highest priority (near-term) objectives for each goal, and as completed move on to the next highest priority conservation objectives for each goal.

Table 1. Priority Conservation Objectives

Goal 1: Advance comprehensive conservation and management of the nation’s biological communities, habitats, ecosystems, and processes, and the ecological services, uses, and values they provide to this and future generations through ecosystem-based MPA approaches.	
Priority Conservation Objectives for Goal 1	
Conserve and manage key reproduction areas and nursery grounds	Near Term
Conserve key biogenic habitats	
Conserve areas of high species and/or habitat diversity	
Conserve ecologically important geological features + enduring/recurring oceanographic features	
Conserve and manage critical habitat of threatened and endangered species	
Conserve and manage unique or rare species, habitats and associated communities	Mid Term
Conserve and manage key areas for migratory species	
Conserve linked areas important to life histories	Long Term
Conserve key areas that provide compatible opportunities for education and research	

Goal 2: Advance comprehensive conservation and management of cultural resources that reflect the nation's maritime history and traditional cultural connections to the sea, as well as the uses and values they provide to this and future generations through ecosystem-based MPA approaches.	
Priority Conservation Objectives for Goal 2	
Conserve key cultural and historic resources listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP)	Near Term
Conserve key cultural historic resources determined eligible for the NRHP or listed on a State Register	
Conserve key cultural sites that are paramount to a culture's identity and/or survival	
Conserve key cultural and historic sites that may be threatened	Mid Term
Conserve key cultural and historic sites that can be utilized for heritage tourism	
Conserve key cultural and historic sites that are under-represented	Long Term

Goal 3: Advance comprehensive conservation and management of the nation's renewable living resources and their habitats, including, but not limited to, spawning, mating, and nursery grounds, and areas established to minimize incidental by-catch of species, that are important to the nation's social, economic, and cultural well-being through ecosystem-based MPA approaches.	
Priority Conservation Objectives for Goal 3	
Conserve and manage key reproduction areas, including larval sources and nursery grounds	Near Term
Conserve key areas that sustain or restore high priority fishing grounds	
Conserve and manage key areas for maintaining natural age/sex structure of important harvestable species	Mid Term
Conserve key foraging grounds	
Conserve and manage key areas that mitigate the impacts of bycatch	
Conserve key areas that provide compatible opportunities for education and research	Long Term

Achievement or completion of each conservation objective will include the following activities:

- 1) identification of existing MPAs that contribute to that objective and nomination of those MPAs to the national system, and
- 2) identification of associated conservation gaps in the national system.

Functions of the National System

Implementation of the national system, both regionally and nationally, will evolve over time as MPA sites, programs, and systems are added to the national system. A major emphasis of the MPA Center will be to facilitate and support collaborative implementation efforts with participating MPA sites and programs, pending available resources. National system implementation components include:

- **Enhancing Regional Coordination and Collaboration** - formalizing new and/or supporting existing regional mechanisms to provide for effective, efficient coordination and collaboration among participating MPA sites, systems, and programs
 - Improving MPA stewardship and effectiveness
 - Regional MPA planning
- **National and International Coordination** - establishing and implementing a National System Steering Committee to link across regions where resource conservation and MPA planning and management issues span regional boundaries, and identifying and pursuing international MPA linkages to the national system
- **Evaluating National System Effectiveness** - providing technical and scientific support for fostering sound monitoring and evaluation programs at the participating MPA site or system level, as well as development of a set of standards and protocols for assessing broader national system effectiveness
- **Federal Agency Responsibilities to Avoid Harm** - providing guidance regarding Section 5 of the Executive Order, which requires federal agencies to “avoid harm” to the natural and cultural resources protected by MPAs that become part of the national system
- **Tracking and Reporting** - maintaining the www.mpa.gov website, and producing a biennial State of the National System report, and other mechanisms for communicating national system activities, progress and plans

For More Information and to Submit Comments

Comments on the Revised Draft Framework for Developing the National System of Marine Protected Areas and the corresponding draft Environmental Assessment found in Appendix D of the document will be accepted if received by 11:59 p.m. EDT, 30 calendar days from the date of publication in the *Federal Register*.

An electronic copy of the Revised Draft Framework is available for download at <http://www.mpa.gov>. Please direct all questions concerning the Revised Draft Framework, as well as any requests for paper copies of the document to: Lauren Wenzel, NOAA, at 301-713-3100 x136, or via e-mail at mpa.comments@noaa.gov. E-mail requests should state either “Question” or “Paper Copy Request” in the subject line.

All comments regarding the Revised Draft Framework should be submitted to Joseph A. Uravitch, National MPA Center, N/ORM, NOAA, 1305 East-West Highway, Silver Spring,

Maryland 20910. Comments submitted by e-mail are preferred; however, those submitted by mail and fax will also be accepted. Comments sent via e-mail should be sent to <mpa.comments@noaa.gov>, and all comments sent by fax should be sent to 301-713-3110. E-mail and fax comments should state "Revised Draft Framework Comments" in the subject line.



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