

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Natural Resource Program Center
Water Resources Division



Ocean Park Stewardship 2007–2008 Action Plan



Since establishment of Acadia National Park in 1916, marine resources in the National Park System have grown to include more than three million acres of ocean and Great Lakes waters and 5,000 miles of coast. More than 75 million people visit 74 ocean parks to experience our nation's heritage where the land meets the water, including beaches, coral reefs, kelp forests, wetlands, glaciers, historic shipwrecks and other places recognized for their beauty and national significance. Congress charged the National Park Service with conserving both natural and cultural resources unimpaired for the enjoyment of current and future generations. Their benefits to the nation as places for recreation, havens for ocean wildlife, and sources of local economic activity are unsurpassed.

**Red grouper at Dry Tortugas National Park, FL, where a new 46 square-mile Research Natural Area will provide full protection for fish, coral reefs and seagrass.
Photo: J. Luo**



Left: Tlingit tribal dancers at Glacier Bay National Park, AK, marine education program.



Right: Ten national parks are working to conserve valuable coral reef resources. In 2006, NOAA listed both elkhorn (shown here) and staghorn coral as threatened under the Endangered Species Act.

Below: Pacific ocean meets Klamath River at Redwood National Park, CA. NPS scientists are restoring aquatic habitats for salmon in Redwood Creek impacted by erosion and sedimentation from logging. Photo: C. McCreedy

The 2001 National Park System Advisory Board Report, *Rethinking the National Parks for the 21st Century*, raised concerns about “dramatic declines in the health of marine ecosystems” and called on the National Park Service to focus more attention on stewardship and protection of ocean resources in the National Park System. “The Service should pay special attention to the protection of aquatic and marine systems. It should be an active partner in a national and international dialogue to develop a strategy for marine resource protection and restoration.”

Park Superintendents actively manage parks to avoid degrading resources, depleting fisheries, and losing recreational opportunities for the public. Nevertheless, parks have experienced unsustainable fishing practices, pollution, and watershed degradation, which threaten ecological integrity and beauty in the parks, and reduce nature’s capacity for self-renewal.

Responding to these concerns, the National Park Service developed a strategy to increase its emphasis on ocean resource management and conservation. The Ocean Park Stewardship Action Plan identifies critical issues and ways to address them cooperatively with federal, state, tribal and private partners. In 2004, the President and the Department of Interior committed to the development of an Ocean Park Stewardship Action Plan in the U.S. Ocean Action Plan.

The strategy seeks to:

1. Establish a seamless system of ocean parks, sanctuaries, refuges and reserves
2. Discover, map, and protect ocean parks
3. Engage visitors in ocean park stewardship
4. Increase National Park Service technical capacity for ocean exploration and stewardship



Accomplishing these goals requires that the National Park Service grapple with complex issues and shared authorities that extend across park boundaries. The National Park Service recognizes that conservation and science-based management best result from collaboration among federal agencies, states, tribes, citizens, local communities, and academia, when all work to protect a shared ocean heritage. The National Park Service has begun to strengthen its science-based foundation for managing ocean resources, working with the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), universities and other partners.

In partnership with NOAA and USGS, the National Park Service is obtaining fine-scale maps of submerged habitats in ocean parks. The Park Service has also initiated joint efforts with the states, such as the cooperative fisheries management plan between Biscayne National Park and the Florida State Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and the collaborative monitoring of marine reserves with the California Department of Fish and Game and NOAA Sanctuaries in Channel Islands National Park. The NPS Coastal Watershed Condition Assessment Program documents coastal water resource conditions and reveals threats to watershed health in partnerships with university researchers.

However, the National Park Service must broaden and deepen these efforts to manage and conserve ocean resources in the National Park System. The Natural Resource Challenge provided the scientific capacity to coordinate ocean park programs. In addition, improving ocean park stewardship requires that park managers better understand ocean ecosystems and human roles in them. They need resource inventories, benthic habitat maps, marine monitoring programs, and more clearly defined ocean boundaries and jurisdictions. The National Park Service also needs to increase its capacity to explore and understand the ocean realms of parks and to revitalize its once robust and pioneering scientific and public safety diving program. The Action Plan also proposes an initiative to restore and protect ocean park resources that will address critical restoration issues and improve park conservation. Ocean parks need to assess performance of newly established marine recovery areas in parks, develop more joint science-based fishery management plans with states, prevent extirpation of native species, and establish ocean damage-assessment teams.

The critical keys to improved ocean conservation in the National Park System are partnerships with other ocean-concerned agencies and communities to facilitate cooperation, collaboration, and communication. Connecting people to ocean parks may be one of the most important tasks ahead to build awareness and support with park stakeholders and the public.

The National Park Service will work with partners under existing funding levels to implement this Action Plan. In doing so, the Park Service has prioritized the following action items in a multi-year implementation plan under these four major topics:

1. Create a seamless network of ocean national parks, national marine sanctuaries, national wildlife refuges, and national estuarine research reserves

- Implement a Memorandum of Understanding among the National Park System, NOAA Sanctuaries, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service Refuge System and the NOAA National Estuarine Research Reserves System
- Implement a cooperative law enforcement agreement with NOAA National Marine Sanctuaries Program
- Evaluate and monitor the Dry Tortugas National Park Research Natural Area marine reserve with the State of Florida
- Maintain current park data in the national marine managed area inventory in cooperation with the joint Department of the Interior and NOAA Marine Protected Area Center

2. Discover, map and protect ocean parks

- Complete benthic habitat maps for ocean parks (equivalent to terrestrial vegetation maps) in cooperation with NOAA National Ocean Service, USGS, and university researchers
- Assess conditions of 52 coastal park watersheds and water resources
- Propose a joint fishery management plan for Biscayne National Park with the State of Florida
- Enhance compliance with new marine reserves by providing education and outreach programs at Buck Island Reef National Monument, Channel Islands National Park, Dry Tortugas National Park, and Virgin Islands Coral Reef National Monument
- Initiate cooperative studies to evaluate performance of new marine reserves at Buck Island



Top: All five sea turtle species are listed as threatened or endangered. Park biologists and volunteers monitor sea turtle nests and protect hatchlings.

Bottom: Recreational fishing is an important and valued tradition to national park visitors. Biscayne National Park is developing a joint fisheries management plan with the State of Florida to restore fish stocks in and around the park.

Improving ocean park stewardship requires that park managers better understand ocean ecosystems and human roles in them.



- Reef National Monument, Channel Islands National Park, Dry Tortugas National Park, and Virgin Islands Coral Reef National Monument
- Ensure vital signs monitoring in parks includes marine, estuarine, and Great Lakes resources
 - Work with NOAA and USGS to get digital boundaries of ocean parks on charts and maps

3. Engage visitors in ocean park stewardship

- Develop interpretive materials on ocean parks for educators and non-governmental organizations, including National Science Teachers Association, Professional Association of Dive Instructors, National Association of Underwater Instructors, and National Marine Educators Association
- Include general educational materials as outputs for all large National Park Service funded stewardship projects in ocean parks
- Create a communication strategy to better inform the public about ocean parks
- Involve more wildlife-dependent recreation users in ocean park stewardship at Biscayne National Park, Virgin Islands National Park, Dry Tortugas National Park, Channel Islands National Park, and Kaloko-Honokohau National Historic Park via the Great Annual Fish Count
- Launch a Green Marina Initiative to encourage marinas in national parks to adopt sustainable operations and maintenance practices
- Improve visitor awareness and resource protection by incorporating ocean park boundaries on NOAA navigational charts

4. Increase NPS technical capacity for ocean exploration and stewardship

- Develop an agreement with NOAA's National Ocean Service to help explore ocean parks
- Combine efforts of the National Park Service Natural Resources Stewardship and Science, Visitor and Resource Protection, and Cultural Resources Programs to reinvigorate NPS Dive Program to ensure

compliance with OSHA and AAUS standards for reciprocity

- Develop a "Restore and Protect Ocean Park Resources Initiative"
- Describe and analyze ocean park jurisdictions, boundaries, authorities, and remedies

The Ocean Park Stewardship Action Plan offers a call to action for National Park Service to fulfill its leadership role as an ocean conservation agency. Working with all the communities and partners who share our ocean heritage, the National Park Service can restore and conserve the grandeur of America's ocean resources in the National Park System for future generations.

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Harbor seal at Point Reyes National Seashore, CA where NPS scientists monitor breeding populations of elephant seals and harbor seal haul-outs.
Photo: C. McCreedy

