

# DEVELOPING A NATIONAL SYSTEM OF MARINE PROTECTED AREAS

[www.mpa.gov](http://www.mpa.gov)

The U.S. is implementing a comprehensive, science-based and effective national system of marine protected areas (MPAs). The national system will include eligible existing MPAs across all levels of government to protect important habitats and resources. For more information, see the Framework for the National System of Marine Protected Areas of the United States of America at [www.mpa.gov](http://www.mpa.gov).

## 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 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 1,700 existing MPAs in the U.S. that have been established by federal, state, territorial, and local governments to achieve a wide range of conservation objectives. These objectives range from conserving biodiversity hotspots, to preserving sunken historic vessels, to protecting spawning aggregations important to commercial and recreational fisheries. Similarly, the level of protection provided by these MPAs ranges from no-take marine reserves to those allowing multiple uses, including fishing.

Recognizing the significant role that U.S. MPAs play in conserving marine heritage and sustainable use, and the need for 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 *Framework for the National System of Marine Protected Areas of the United States* describes this system.

## 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, benefit from, and care about our marine environments.

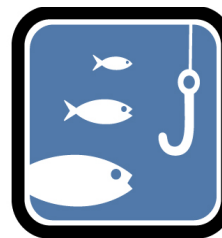
## NATIONAL SYSTEM GOALS



**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 present 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 present 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 by-catch of species) and the social, cultural and economic values and services they provide to present and future generations through ecosystem-based MPA approaches.

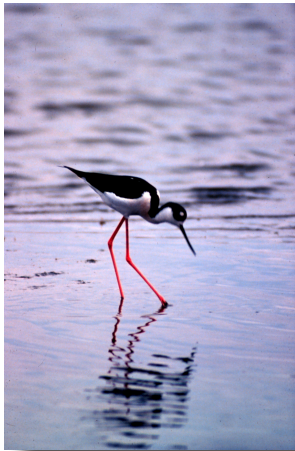
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NOAA's National Marine Protected Areas (MPA) Center's mission is to facilitate the effective use of science, technology, training, and information in the planning, management, and evaluation of the nation's system of marine protected areas. The MPA Center works in partnership with federal, state, tribal, and local governments and stakeholders to develop a science-based, comprehensive national system of MPAs. These collaborative efforts will lead to a more efficient, effective use of MPAs now and in the future to conserve and sustain the nation's vital marine resources.



## BENEFITS OF AN EFFECTIVE NATIONAL SYSTEM OF MPAs

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 boundaries
- **Social and Economic Benefits** - increased visitation; sustained fisheries; maintained coastal community identity; non-extractive uses (e.g. aesthetic appeal); and enhanced planning for ocean uses
- **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, regional, and international cooperation

## FUNCTIONS OF THE NATIONAL SYSTEM

As MPA sites, programs, and systems are added to the national system, implementation of the national system will evolve. 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 to advance MPA stewardship, science, and effectiveness.
- **National and International Coordination** - establishing and implementing a National System Management Committee to address resource conservation and MPA planning and management issues that span regional boundaries, and strengthening international MPA linkages to the national system.
- **Evaluating National System Effectiveness** - providing technical and scientific support to foster 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](http://www.mpa.gov) website, producing a biennial State of the National System report, and other mechanisms for communicating national system activities, progress and plans.

For more information on the National System of Marine Protected Areas, visit [www.mpa.gov](http://www.mpa.gov)

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