

NATIONAL MARINE PROTECTED AREAS CENTER



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STRATEGIC PLAN 2010 - 2015

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INTRODUCTION



Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) have long been used as a management tool for conserving marine resources. The United States (U.S.) has nearly 1,700 MPAs established by individual federal, state, territorial, tribal and local authorities for a wide range of purposes. However, there is a growing need to ensure that MPAs are coordinated within 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 develop and implement such a framework, facilitating the effective use of science, technology, training, and information in the planning, management and evaluation of the nation's system of MPAs. This mission has assumed even greater importance as the nation and the world continue planning for the potential effects of climate change. Work under Executive Order 13158 also has particular relevance to the Administration's developing ocean policy goals and a framework for coastal and marine spatial planning.

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," with the term 'marine environment' including: (a) ocean or coastal waters (note: coastal waters may include intertidal areas, bays, or estuaries); (b) an area of the Great Lakes or their connecting waters; (c)

an area of lands under ocean or coastal waters or the Great Lakes or their connecting waters; or (d) a combination of the above. Issued in May 2000, the Executive Order directs federal agencies to work together with states, territories, tribes, regional fishery management councils, 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 an office in Monterey, California. Staff in the headquarters office are responsible primarily for program management, planning, policy development, consultation, coordination, and outreach. The Monterey office focuses on 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.

The MPA Center Strategic Plan was revised in 2009 to more accurately reflect the organization's evolving structure and priorities, with a greater emphasis on further developing the national system of MPAs and its operational capabilities. The plan also includes special interest areas of importance to the design and implementation of the national system over the next five year planning cycle.

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:

Capacity Building – strengthening the knowledge, abilities, relationships and values that enable institutions, organizations, groups and individuals to more effectively address MPA use and management and make informed decisions in adapting to new challenges.

Communication – making objective information available and accessible to diverse audiences involved in or affected by MPA issues.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Technology Applications – disseminating tools and technologies for their broad use and application in designing, planning, managing, and evaluating MPAs and MPA networks.

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

SPECIAL INTEREST AREAS

Fostering Resilience to Climate Change through Enhanced MPA Management

Climate change is having a profound impact on the functioning of ocean ecosystems. Expected impacts, some of which are already being realized, include increased ocean temperatures, sea level rise, altered weather patterns, changes in ocean currents, melting sea ice, and the effects of ocean acidification. In addition, these impacts will be felt by ecosystems already affected by existing stressors on the marine environment such as overfishing, habitat loss and land-based sources of pollution. MPAs are increasingly recognized as a key tool for maintaining and restoring ecosystem resilience. The MPA Center is planning for climate change impacts in the design and implementation of the national system of MPAs and is establishing regional, national and international partnerships to better address these threats through an ecosystem-based, adaptive approach.

Coastal and Marine Spatial Planning

Demands for the use of ocean and coastal resources and space are increasing, and with them the potential for more conflicts among ocean users and other stakeholders. Historically, governance of the marine and coastal environment has occurred through a fragmented, sector-by-sector approach that fails to address the interactions among uses. The U.S. has recognized a need for a practical way to organize the use of marine resources and space through an integrated, dynamic and adaptive approach. Coastal and marine spatial planning (CMSP), which is gaining momentum in the U.S. and abroad, provides a more transparent and rational approach to the development, use and conservation of the marine and coastal environment to achieve social and economic objectives. The MPA Center will seek to participate in CMSP processes and provide tools and information to ensure that the important functions of MPAs are recognized within the context of multiple ocean uses.

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, regional, 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, National Estuarine Research Reserve and Coral Reef Conservation programs, and supports OCRM's strategic goals to protect and restore coastal and ocean resources, foster resilient coastal communities, and improve people's ability to take action to benefit coastal communities and ecosystems. The MPA Center also draws 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."

REVISED GOALS AND OBJECTIVES FOR MPA CENTER STRATEGIC PLAN



GOAL 1: BUILD AND MAINTAIN THE NATIONAL SYSTEM OF MPAS.

The MPA Center completed the Framework for the National System of Marine Protected Areas of the United State of America in November 2008 (Framework). This Framework outlines the goals and objectives, principles, and operating processes for the national system. Over the next five years the MPA Center will work on the initial implementation and continued development of the national system of MPAs, focusing on:

- Strengthening Marine Conservation through the National System Partnership
- Planning for the Future
- Engaging Stakeholders and the Public in Support of the National System and Marine Conservation

Objective 1. Implement the national system and maintain the List of MPAs.

The MPA Center will manage the nomination process for existing federal, state, commonwealth, territorial, tribal and local MPA programs to join the national system. All national system MPAs will be included in an official “List of National System MPAs” that will guide federal agency requirements to avoid harm to the resources protected by these MPAs. The Center will work with member programs to enhance their effectiveness in meeting regional, national and international conservation goals.

Objective 2. Identify regional and national gaps, opportunities and priorities for place-based conservation within the context of ecosystem-based management.

The national system of MPAs will enhance the effectiveness of existing national system MPAs through coordination; science analysis and tools; and capacity building. The MPA Center will also work with other science and MPA management agencies, and non-governmental stakeholders to identify gaps in protection among ocean areas important to national system objectives whose current management does not adequately address existing or emerging threats. Both priorities will be addressed through a collaborative gap analysis process designed to guide the developing national system of MPAs, as well as to inform and support its partner MPA programs and sites across the U.S. Gap analysis has many applications and clients, and the MPA Center will create and disseminate natural and cultural resource data, map products, and planning tools that can inform and support many forms of ocean management.

Objective 3. Conserve representative examples of the nation’s natural and cultural heritage and ecologically significant places.

The MPA Center will work to ensure the national system is both representative (in terms of geography, ecology, culture and levels of government) and resilient (in the face of large-scale and long-term changes such as climate change). This will enhance the national system’s ability to maintain ecosystem functions and will ensure continued representation of the nation’s important natural and cultural resources.

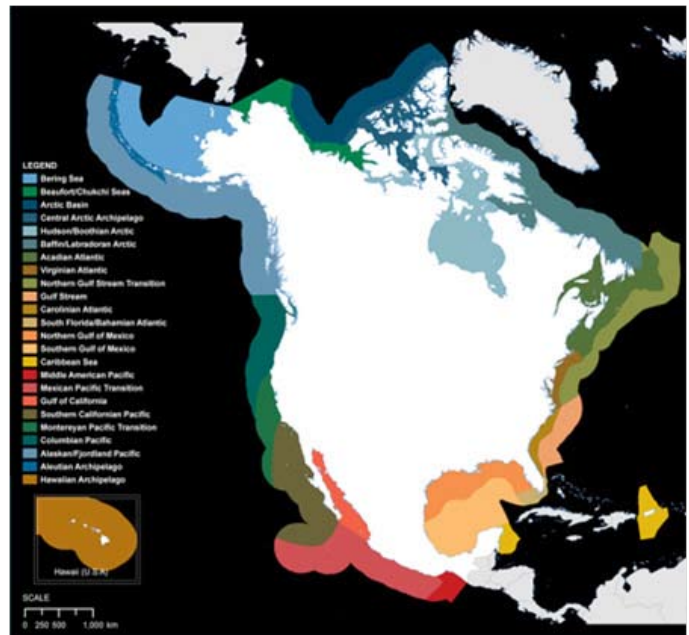
Objective 4. Foster the establishment of ecological and institutional networks to enhance the conservation of the nation’s natural and cultural heritage.

Recognizing the importance of ecological networks in sustaining many marine species, the national system aims to increase connectivity and to include

MPA network design as a component of the regional gap analysis process. Institutional networks are important for capacity building and sharing lessons learned. The MPA Center will work through MPA system partners and regional coordination mechanisms to enhance institutional networks through collaborative planning, projects, and information exchange.

Objective 5. Evaluate the effectiveness of the national system in meeting its goals and objectives.

The MPA Center will establish mechanisms, including periodic external evaluations and performance measures, to evaluate the effectiveness of the national system. Evaluation measures will focus on appropriate biological, cultural, social and economic indicators that measure the contribution of the national system and its member MPAs to national goals and objectives. Evaluation measures will be developed collaboratively with input from MPA system partners and the MPA Federal Advisory Committee (FAC).



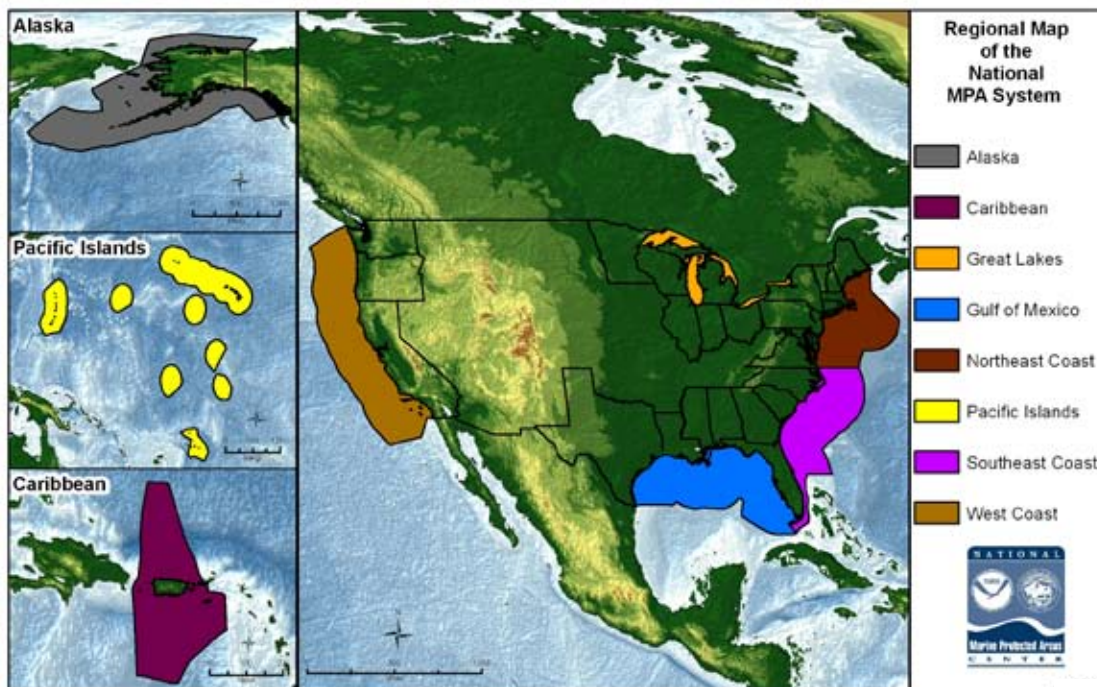
Commission for Environmental Cooperation - Marine Ecoregions of North America (classification of 24 marine ecoregions according to oceanographic features and geographically distinct assemblages of species: www.cec.org/marine)



GOAL 2: FACILITATE INTERNATIONAL, NATIONAL AND REGIONAL COORDINATION OF MPA ACTIVITIES.

Objective 1. Coordinate nationally among federal, state, commonwealth, territorial, regional, 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, commonwealth, territorial, tribal and local governments and regions on MPA system activities. The Center will work with partner MPA programs to coordinate, support and strengthen program initiatives important to many MPAs, thus enabling the national system to meet its broader stewardship goals. The National System MPA Programs Workgroup will facilitate coordination at the national level, and provide operational guidance to the national system from the perspective of MPA programs and managers. The Center will also continue to work with the federal Interagency MPA Working Group on the design and implementation of federal aspects of the national system of MPAs.

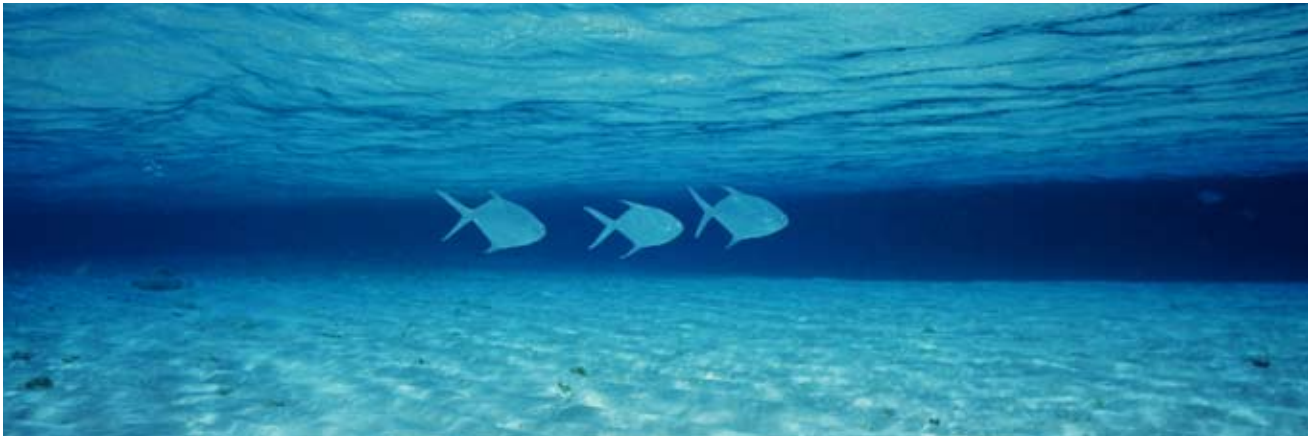


Objective 2. Foster regional coordination of agencies and stakeholders to support the national system of MPAs and its stewardship goals.

The MPA Center will continue to align with regional ocean governance initiatives in the development and implementation of the national system. The national system, through its regional science and stewardship plans, and databases and analyses (see Goal 3, Objective 2), can help strengthen and link the conservation components of diverse regional initiatives around the nation. The MPA Center also will coordinate among MPA stakeholders to enhance the effectiveness of the national system, both regionally and at the national level.

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

Numerous international MPA efforts and linkages can contribute to and benefit from the national system. To strengthen international coordination, the MPA Center will enhance existing linkages or establish new ones with efforts in other countries, with a focus on countries that share boundaries and resources within the United States. The MPA Center will continue to help lead U.S. participation in the North American Marine Protected Areas Network (NAMPAN) to address common challenges inherent in the protection of marine biodiversity and jointly prioritize conservation actions. The MPA Center will also work toward enhancing U.S. commitments under the Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPA Protocol) in the Wider Caribbean Region, with Pacific Islands' partnerships, and with place-based management initiatives in the Arctic to provide greater protection to rare and fragile ecosystems and habitats through data sharing, initiating new data gathering efforts and capacity building efforts.



GOAL 3: IMPROVE CAPACITY FOR EFFECTIVE MPA STEWARDSHIP THROUGH THE NATIONAL SYSTEM.

Objective 1. Foster awareness and understanding of the national system and place-based ecosystem-based management.

Consistent communication with both the public and management entities to provide information about the national system and place-based ecosystem-based management is essential. Through the www.mpa.gov website, newsletters, a virtual library, educational resources, audio and video media, presentations and other communication mechanisms, the MPA Center conducts outreach to a wide range of stakeholders. The MPA Center will expand its use of existing networks to share and improve access to information, relying on a variety of communication mechanisms to conduct targeted outreach to government agencies, including states and tribes.

Objective 2. Develop, enhance and disseminate the science, tools and strategies for the design, evaluation and adaptive management of MPAs within the context of coastal and marine spatial planning.

The MPA Center will maintain and enhance databases on place-based management and ocean governance and provide access to essential information for MPA and other ocean planning. These databases contain natural and cultural resource information, as well as geospatial data from the MPA Inventory, DeFacto MPAs, the Ocean Uses Atlas project, and cultural and natural resource gap analyses efforts. These data resources will serve as the backbone for the spatial analysis of existing MPAs and the identification of conservation gaps. Databases will be made accessible in various formats through the www.mpa.gov website for use by MPA partners, stakeholders and resource managers.

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

Meaningful stakeholder 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. The MPA Center works closely with the MPA Federal Advisory Committee (FAC), made up of 30 individuals of diverse backgrounds and experience, to effectively solicit the views and advice of the broader stakeholder community. In addition, the MPA Center will continue to work directly with stakeholder groups to address their interests and concerns. The MPA Center also works to build the capacity of MPA programs to plan and implement their own effective outreach and engagement strategies.

Objective 4. Address cross-cutting technical and management priorities of member MPAs through collaborative initiatives and demonstration projects.

The national system provides a venue for coordinated regional planning about place-based conservation priorities, as well as an opportunity to engage stakeholders on MPA issues. It will leverage scarce resources toward cross-cutting management needs, and initiate collaborative science and technical projects and targeted research to support conservation priorities.



THE FUTURE

The MPA Center recognizes that the ongoing development and implementation of the national system of MPAs is a dynamic process requiring adaptive management. As the national system of MPAs matures, this Plan also will evolve in recognition of accomplishments and future requirements.

As of the date of the publication of this plan the Administration is continuing development of its ocean policy and the framework for coastal and marine spatial planning. The MPA Center's strategic plan will be adjusted, as appropriate, to pursue strategies linked to Administration priorities once the final report of the Task Force is released. When compared with the recommendations of the Interim Report of the Interagency Ocean Policy Task Force (September 2009), the MPA Center already is pursuing a number of complementary strategies including: ecosystem-based management; coastal and marine spatial planning; inform decisions and improve understanding; coordinate and support; resiliency and adaptation to climate change and ocean acidification; and regional ecosystem protection and restoration.

Throughout its work, the MPA Center will adopt ecosystem-based management as a foundational principle for comprehensive management. Along with other objectives, the MPA Center and the national system of MPAs will work toward balanced, productive, efficient, sustainable, and informed ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes use, management, and conservation within the global community, recognizing that America's stewardship of the ocean, our coasts, and the Great Lakes is intrinsically and intimately linked to environmental sustainability, human health and well-being, national prosperity, adaptation to climate and other environmental change, social justice, foreign policy, and national and homeland security.

