Marine Protected Areas

Web Site: Social Science Methods for Marine Protected Areas

Purpose of MPA Social Science Methods Web Site

Marine protected areas (MPAs) can be a valuable tool in conserving the marine environment. In establishing an MPA, however, managers need to consider how these areas may impact the people who use them, and how users, in turn, impact those areas.

Recent studies have found that social aspects are equally as important as biological or physical factors in determining the success of a marine protected area. The Social Science Methods for Marine Protected Areas Web site profiles social science tools and methods and provides examples on how these are used by MPA managers.

Web Site Components

***Themes*:** This portion of the Web site helps managers understand how social science can help them, and directs them to related social science tools. The theme area titles are:

- use patterns
- attitudes, perceptions and beliefs
- governments, institutions and processes
- submerged cultural resources
- communities
- economics

Social Science Tools: This section contains information about several tools and methods including surveys, demographic analysis, nonmarket valuation, and social assessment. Each description includes information about the most common application to MPA issues, needed expertise, and advantages and limitations.

Case Studies: Real life examples can be found in this section, including background on the MPA being studied, the purpose of the project, information on how social science tools were used, and the outcome of the project.

Web Address

Social Science Methods for Marine Protected Areas:
www.csc.noaa.gov/mpass

The Web site was developed by the National Marine Protected Areas Center, in cooperation with the NOAA Coastal Services Center.

Potential Contributions of Social Science

Social science has the potential to support and improve MPA management across a wide variety of issues. Here are five ways social science can contribute to management:

Assessment: Managers must have an understanding of conditions before making decisions, by gathering baseline information. Incorporating social science into the assessment process can identify affected groups, as well as potential areas of conflict. Incorporating social science early in the decision-making process can be useful in predicting potentially avoidable problems and resistance.

Feedback: Regular feedback can be helpful in establishing the effectiveness of management techniques and tracking effectiveness over time. Social science research can be used to gauge public perceptions of management focus and effectiveness while also giving the public the opportunity to suggest management changes. Eventually the feedback process may lead to open dialogue between managers and stakeholders.

Prediction: A range of social science tools, including economic tools and case studies of similar communities, can predict the potential outcomes of management decisions and strategies. By developing models to predict the outcomes of specific management actions, considerable time and effort might be saved and potential problems identified.

Mitigation: Identifying stakeholder motivations and areas of concern may help reduce, or even avoid, conflicts among users.

Acceptance: Social science can be used to understand and address public concerns. Concerns can be addressed through targeted outreach and education programs, which may lead to increased support from the public and constituents.

For Additional Information, Contact:

Heidi Recksiek
National Marine Protected Areas Center
Training and Technical Assistance Institute
2234 South Hobson Avenue
Charleston, South Carolina
Heidi.Recksiek@noaa.gov
(843) 740-1194