

Marine Protected Areas Federal Advisory Committee

Recommendations for Managing Recreational Use to Sustain the Natural and Cultural Assets of U.S. Marine Protected Areas June 4, 2014

The Department of Commerce and the Department of the Interior charged the Marine Protected Areas Federal Advisory Committee to consider the role of marine protected areas (MPAs) in recreation and tourism. To that end, we have developed the following recommendations for managing recreational use to sustain the natural and cultural assets of U.S. MPAs upon which it depends. Success depends on strong and consistent leadership and support from you and your agencies.

Preamble

The nation's marine protected areas include some of the country's most biologically rich and culturally important coastal and marine waters. Coastal and ocean recreation is expanding rapidly, particularly in our treasured and intensively used MPAs. Clearly, growing recreational uses in those areas hold tremendous promise for sustained human health, fitness and well-being, economic prosperity, and a deeper human connection to the natural world and our cultural heritage.

However, the expansion in recreational use can pose challenges and risks to these special places if not anticipated and managed appropriately. While MPAs vary in their purposes, the quality of recreational uses within virtually all of them depends on the quality and resilience of the natural environment. We therefore offer MPA managers the following suggestions for actively managing recreation to sustain the ecological integrity and cultural heritage of MPAs and their resources.

Recommendation:

Recognize that the quality of recreational use in an MPA is dependent on the health of the ecosystem and the preservation of cultural assets, and adopt strategies to actively manage suitable recreation to sustain the ecological integrity and cultural heritage of the area.

To that end, we provide the following suggestions to MPA managers:

1. Document patterns, trends and limits in existing and emerging recreational uses, including
 - a. Assess compatibility of recreational uses with the MPA's mandated purpose.
 - b. Determine carrying capacity (threshold at which adverse impacts may occur)
 - c. Evaluate if the MPA is at or exceeding this capacity
 - d. Consider compatibility and conflict between co-occurring uses
 - e. Consider the surrounding community's capacity to accommodate visitors

2. Ensure that MPA management plans and actions specifically address:
 - a. Monitoring and adaptive management
 - b. Origins and drivers of recreational use
 - c. Impacts of use (i.e., ecological, cultural, economic)
 - d. Compatibility of recreational use with MPA mandates
 - e. Carrying capacity (manage behavior and limit use when anticipating exceeding capacity)
 - f. Reduction of conflicts between visitor uses through zoning or other means
 - g. Implications of climate change (e.g., water level fluctuations and storm intensification) on natural and cultural assets, infrastructure and future recreational use
 - h. Periodic evaluation of management effectiveness
3. Strengthen compliance and enforcement, including
 - a. Add MPA boundaries to NOAA navigational products and work with private sector chart providers to disseminate MPA boundary information and regulations.
 - b. Communicate effectively with recreational users about purposes and allowable uses of MPAs to ensure visitor safety and enjoyment.
 - c. Create a culture of compliance by empowering recreational users to be stewards of the resources and ambassadors of the MPA.
 - d. Provide training to the network of enforcement personnel regarding MPA regulations.
 - e. Engage recreational businesses that operate in MPAs to use best practices and promote responsible recreation.
 - f. Analyze damaging activities and evaluate response to address those issues.
4. Forge and maintain public-private and interagency partnerships that leverage resources to support:
 - a. Implementation of monitoring and enforcement
 - b. Acquisition of technical assistance and data
 - c. Implementation of visitor best practices
 - d. Communication, education and public engagement to promote enjoyment, stewardship and responsible use of MPA resources
 - e. Examples of partners for the above include: academia, state, local and tribal agencies, Sea Grant Marine Advisory Program, friends groups, recreational industry groups, historical societies, and other non-governmental organizations.