

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Dan Ashe  
Statement on Gabon's New Marine Protected Areas  
November 17, 2014

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Dan Ashe issued the following statement today:

"On behalf of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, I commend President Ali Bongo Ondimba of Gabon on his country's decision to create a marine protected area network covering more than 18,000 square miles. This action underscores Gabon's commitment to conserving wildlife on both land and sea, and further establishes its leadership among Central African nations on this vital issue.

Gabon is home to one of the world's most productive marine ecosystems, providing habitat for 20 species of whales and dolphins, the world's largest breeding populations of leatherback and olive ridley sea turtles and important fish species. Protecting Gabon's interconnected marine and coastal resources is also critical to conserving the biodiversity of Central Africa's tropical rainforest – the second largest on Earth.

The Service is proud to provide key support for Gabon's conservation efforts. As part of a five-year cooperative agreement, the two nations are working to strengthen the capacity of Gabon's national park system. The Service has supported collaborative efforts to protect marine habitat and improve fisheries management through the Gabon Bleu program, and also funded other efforts to protect Gabon's marine wildlife from overfishing and habitat destruction. Gabon is well positioned to serve as a strong example of vision and leadership in wildlife conservation and sustainable development. We will continue to work closely with the Gabonese government and other partners to further these efforts."