

## Expanding the Reach of Marine Protected Areas through Recreation and Tourism: *Synopsis of Audiences and Actions Recommended by Members of the Marine Protected Areas Federal Advisory Committee and National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Councils*

*On December 5, 2012, representatives from the Marine Protected Areas Federal Advisory Committee and NOAA's National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Councils held a joint session to discuss how to best foster links between marine protected areas and the recreation, travel and tourism industries. This document summarizes that dialogue, and is intended to assist marine protected area programs and their partners sustain appropriate uses as they engage with the recreation, travel and tourism industries.*

### The Importance of Special Ocean Places to Recreation and Tourism

Like their familiar counterparts on land (e.g., Yellowstone or Shenandoah national parks), marine protected areas are ideal destinations for travelers who enjoy hiking, swimming, paddling, diving, fishing and other outdoor recreational activities. These special places attract millions of visitors each year and support healthy and vibrant coastal communities and economies. They also provide unique visitor experiences to both domestic and international travelers by protecting a wealth of marine resources from beaches and tide pools to kelp forests and coral reefs.

Given the importance of the travel and tourism industry to the U.S. economy, recent national initiatives have been established to promote this sector throughout the United States. Outdoor recreation supports millions of jobs, as well as healthier lifestyles for all ages. These initiatives, including the Administration's National Travel and Tourism Strategy, America's Great Outdoors Initiative and the Department of Commerce-led Tourism Policy Council, aim to increase American jobs by: attracting and welcoming 100 million visitors annually by the end of 2021; promoting community-based recreation and conservation; and advancing jobs and volunteer opportunities related to outdoor recreation.

Recognizing that marine protected areas are destinations and play an important role in local and regional economies, National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council representatives joined members of the Marine Protected Areas Federal Advisory Committee, and associated staff from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Department of the Interior and other ocean agencies, on Wednesday, December 5, 2012, to discuss how best to foster links between marine protected areas and the recreation, travel and tourism industries. This unprecedented joint meeting of over 70 participants represents a major step toward engaging two influential stakeholder groups with common goals but varied scales and perspectives. Meeting in small discussion groups, Federal Advisory Committee members and National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council representatives worked together to develop results-oriented plans that can be used to build engagement with the travel, tourism and recreation industries.

The results of the joint session, summarized below, are relevant to marine protected area managers, staff and their partners as we consider ways to connect people to ocean resources and experiences through sustainable recreation and tourism.

## Target Audiences and Potential Actions for Promoting Recreation and Tourism

Eight breakout groups, each including both Federal Advisory Committee members and National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council representatives, met to identify practical actions that marine protected areas could pursue to build or enhance engagement with the travel, tourism and recreation industries. Each group collectively identified a key recreation and tourism constituency (e.g., recreational users, coastal communities, foreign visitors) and specific strategies for better engaging this target audience through marine protected area programs. The eight strategies and a synopsis of emerging recommendations are summarized briefly below. While some ideas are targeted at specific national marine sanctuaries, many are applicable to a wide range of marine protected area programs.

Implementation of a number of these actions at individual marine protected areas, or within broader networks of special places, requires the support and guidance of both staff and external parties, and may only be successful through collaborative approaches between managers, programs, advisors and partners.

### I. Charter Fishing Operators

- Sanctuary advisory councils to bring together charter sportfishing operators and representatives from tourism and visitors bureaus to initiate discussions about marketing recreational fishing and the value of the sanctuary.
- Develop a certification program (similar to BlueSTAR or DolphinSMART) that promotes ethical angling.
- Federal Advisory Committee members analyze marine protected areas for their respective accessibility to fishing.
- Encourage Federal Advisory Committee, especially fishing and tourism representatives, to engage with this audience to clarify how marine protected areas are predominantly open to fishing and support local economies.
- Conduct a simple survey assessment of attitudes and perceptions of recreational fishermen, charter boat operators and customers to help inform outreach efforts and measure status and trends.
- Engage charter fishing operators early in any process developing or structuring (e.g., zoning) new and existing marine protected areas.

### II. Local and National-level Recreational Fishing Organizations

- Encourage marine protected area representatives to listen to angler concerns and perspectives, and identify individuals capable of facilitating discussions related to the benefits of marine protected areas to fishermen and local economies.
- Ensure that marine protected area representatives have a good understanding of the fishing conducted by recreational fishermen, and regulations affecting them.
- Create a website, or other outreach materials, to highlight value of recreational fishing at marine protected areas.
- Develop partnerships with recreational fishing celebrities (and television programs) to incorporate and encourage fishing and filming in marine protected areas.

- Engage recreational anglers to join in marine protected area research and invasive species eradication efforts.

### III. Travel Industry

- Provide tools to the travel industry to support the development of new or the revitalization of existing websites to foster greater visibility of marine protected areas via search engines. Tools could include a national-level template that is modified and tested to meet local needs.
- Create travel magazine and other source profiles for relevant marine protected areas that can be shared with travel associations and agents for their online media and promotions.

### IV. Concessionaires and Vendors

- Develop locally adaptable guidelines for marine protected area certification programs that help vendors working within the marine protected area to ensure that ocean uses are both ecologically sustainable and economically profitable.
- Expand volunteer programs to include outreach to concessionaires and vendors.

### V. Visitor Bureaus

- Invite local visitors bureau to attend and present at SAC/FAC meetings to determine how we can collaborate (this may lead to the development of SAC working groups).
- Encourage the Federal Advisory Committee to develop a guide for engaging with recreational and tourism entities.
- MPA managers join local chambers of commerce.

### VI. State and County Tourism Departments

- Encourage reciprocal [ex-officio] membership between Convention and Visitor Bureaus and Tourism Boards and advisory councils including, where appropriate, adding a tourism-related seat or developing a working group for advisory councils.
- Develop cross-marketing action plans specific to marine protected areas and government entities responsible for promoting recreation and tourism, and encourage the development of a working group for completing/compiling these action plans.
- Incorporate local, regional or state tourism representative on advisory councils.

### VII. Travelers and Local Visitors

- Develop partnerships with chambers of commerce/CVBs to reach this audience through existing channels.

- SAC/FAC to address individual constituent groups to conduct needs assessment based on how various groups get their information (market study) and why they visit special places.

### VIII. Families

- Select a single, online platform to aggregate existing and new information and social media tools, including access to webcams, so that families may readily access information on what there is to do within and near a particular marine protected area.
- Incorporate “Plan your visit.” pages, activities and attractions on this online platform/website and evaluate its success in driving traffic.
- Encourage advisory councils to develop lists for “plan your visit” pages, and Federal Advisory Committee to create guidelines for responsible travel and tourism in marine protected areas.

## Common Threads – Linking Marine Protected Areas to Recreation and Tourism

As demonstrated by the summary of breakout group discussions above, many groups had overlapping and complementary ideas about how to forge stronger links to recreation and tourism interests. The following ideas represent common themes that emerged in the breakout group discussions, and are relevant to diverse marine protected area programs. More specific ideas that will be pursued by individual national marine sanctuaries, their advisory councils, the Marine Protected Areas Federal Advisory Committee and member sites of the National System of Marine Protected Areas are provided in the meeting summaries for those bodies.

- Provide recreation and tourism representation on marine protected area Advisory Boards.
- Expand dialogue with the recreational fishing community, which often has misperceptions about marine protected areas.
- Engage with local and regional visitor bureaus to identify ways marine protected areas can become part of existing community tourism strategies or help develop new ones.
- Improve marine protected area websites and social media to enhance information for visitors (e.g., “plan your visit” pages).
- Develop certification programs for local businesses and vendors that include guidelines for sustainable operations and conservation messages.
- Promote visitors’ stewardship through pre-visit, visit and post-visit information and activities.
- Assess and strengthen marine protected areas capacity to support and manage visitation.
- Connect remote marine protected areas with the public through visitor centers, webcams, social media and other technology.
- Work with educators to engage and sustain youth and family visits to marine protected areas.

## Expanding Your Reach through Recreation and Tourism

This broad-based dialogue and the recommendations it produced are intended to catalyze a new way of thinking about the importance of marine protected areas to coastal communities and the economies upon which they depend. As marine protected area practitioners reflect on these recommendations, they might consider how these proposed actions may be addressed sequentially or in tandem. For one marine protected area, particular recommendations may be best suited or need to be addressed before others; whereas other marine protected areas may be more equipped – either through their own resources or leveraging public/private partnerships – to address more sophisticated or multiple ways of engaging the recreation, travel and tourism industries. Selection and prioritization of actions will vary with the vision for a marine protected area, but all should reflect and leverage the institutions and organizations that can make this happen and strive to ensure the greatest return on investment. Figure 1 shows how elements of the common themes developed may be selected to create a strategy for a particular marine protected area or purpose. Regardless of the financial circumstances, it's important to remember that building a larger coalition of support requires dedication, perseverance and mutually beneficial strategies for protecting resources and supporting strong, local economies. Most importantly, it is increasingly crucial that we find ways to strengthen and sustain the bond between special places in the ocean and the people who use and value them.

# Figure 1. Example of How Elements of the Common Themes Developed May Be Combined

## A Mutually Beneficial Approach for Protecting Resources and Supporting Strong, Local Economies

Representatives from the Marine Protected Areas Federal Advisory Committee and NOAA's National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Councils identified a suite of practical actions that marine protected areas could pursue to build or enhance engagement with the travel, tourism and recreation industries. Common threads from these actions, relevant to diverse marine protected area programs, are illustrated to highlight the various institutions, organizations, enterprises and communities that can work together to support and protect special marine places while simultaneously building stronger communities and economies. While one example is highlighted in yellow, many coalitions and focal areas could be pursued.

