

BEST PRACTICES FOR CONSTITUENT COMMUNICATION

Recommendations to the Department of Commerce and
the Department of the Interior
from the
Marine Protected Areas Federal Advisory Committee

June 4, 2014

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Executive Summary

In 2013, the National Marine Protected Areas Center (MPA Center) charged its Federal Advisory Committee (MPA FAC) to recommend how the MPA Center could best connect with its key constituencies. This report was prepared to provide those recommendations.

Public perceptions of marine protected areas appear to be vague and confused. Much of the general public does not know that 47% of U.S. waters are designated as MPAs. Among those that do, many believe that fish and marine life in those areas are as protected as wildlife and forests are in national parks, while fishing communities largely believe that all marine protected areas prohibit fishing throughout their boundaries. Neither of these perceptions is correct. Fishing is allowed in 93% of U. S. waters and 92% of marine protected areas in the U. S. allow fishing within their boundaries. Clearly, improved communications about extant marine protected areas would help people understand the situation and make discussions of ocean policy less contentious and more productive for everyone.

The MPA FAC recommends that the MPA Center adopt a four-step communications process to strengthen connections and communication among key marine protected area constituencies and the MPA Center. The four steps in this process are to:

- Identify and define each issue to be addressed,
- Identify critical information and messages to be conveyed,
- Describe constituencies involved in the issue as key audiences, and
- Select and implement the best techniques to convey the messages to key audiences.

Issues

The MPA FAC defined two issues as examples of broad concerns for marine protected areas at the national level. The first issue is that **“the public largely neither knows nor cares what marine protected areas are or what their potential values may be, while many fishing communities feel threatened by additional regulations and loss of fishing areas.”** The second issue is that **“the marine protected areas community and the general public are largely apathetic or unaware of the National System of Marine Protected Areas.”**

Messages

Messages needed to address these issues fall into three categories: 1) general information about marine protected areas as designated in U. S. waters, 2) relationships among various kinds of marine protected areas and recreational activities, including fishing, and 3) knowledge and experience regarding the effects of climate change and marine protected areas. The report recommends three or four specific messages in each of these categories.

Audiences

The number of potential marine protected area constituency groups is virtually infinite, ranging from local gear-specific fisheries to the general public at large. The MPA FAC recommends that the MPA Center focus on no more than four general categories of audiences: 1) Marine protected area governance and resource management communities, 2) Communities dependent on the ocean for their livelihood, 3) Students, and 4) General public.

Delivery

As with potential audiences, the diversity of delivery techniques and communication media available for delivering messages to marine protected area audiences can be overwhelming. The MPA FAC recommends that the MPA Center focus its initial efforts on six categories of techniques: 1) Internet-based platforms (e.g. web sites, webinars, and social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram), 2) Citizen science programs (e.g. Great Annual Fish Count, Reef Check), 3) Public Service Announcements, 4) Citizen advisory committees, 5) Technical consultation, and 6) Professional development workshops and training.

Recommendations

The MPA FAC recommends that the Department of Commerce and the Department of the Interior, through the MPA Center:

1. Create a virtual community of marine protected area managers and stakeholders that will:
 - Increase the MPA Center's capacity to meet requirements of the Executive Order and support participating marine protected area programs
 - Increase the MPA Center's capacity to communicate and engage key constituencies
 - Help brand partner programs as part of marine protected area community
 - Create "Friends of the nation's marine protected areas" listserve (including private sector businesses, orgs, etc.) as part of branding strategy
 - Help differentiate marine protected area community from the MPA Center and the national system of marine protected areas MPAs
 - Guide the public to the "front door" for marine protected area information on-line
2. Craft messages that tell stories highlighting human dimensions
 - Illustrate with images and art, not data alone
 - Start with tweet-sized messages, and expand as time and space allow
3. Use *interactive* communications
 - Engage where it matters first, close to home
 - Make it personal; give people the opportunity to participate

4. Provide leadership to the broader marine protected area community
 - Improve cooperation, collaboration, and communication among marine protected areas stewards
 - Leverage partnerships to amplify marine protected areas messages

Introduction

Communicating complex concepts and information to multiple, diverse constituencies and audiences with highly variable knowledge and experiences, is always a challenge. This is especially difficult when people perceive that they are in competition for limited, valuable public resources. Place-based stewardship in the marine environment, e.g., marine protected areas, suffers from a serious perceptual disconnect with the public, including critical stakeholder groups and other key constituents. Public perceptions of marine protected areas appear to be vague and confused. Much of the general public does not know that 47% of U.S. waters are designated as marine protected areas. Among those that do, many believe that fish and marine life in those areas are as protected as wildlife and forests are in national parks, while fishing communities largely believe that all marine protected areas prohibit fishing throughout their boundaries. These misconceptions engender fear, mistrust, and anger among many affected groups making stewardship and governance contentious, at best. This situation has been developing and maturing for several decades. It is widespread, complex, deeply-seated, and passionately pursued by diverse communities, especially along the nation's coasts. There is no quick or easy solution, but with improved communication, progress can begin to reduce the difficulties by improving mutual knowledge and understanding.

Charge to Marine Protected Areas Federal Advisory Committee

In late 2013, the National Marine Protected Areas Center (MPA Center) charged its Federal Advisory Committee (MPA FAC) to recommend "How can the National Marine Protected Areas Center best connect with its key constituencies?"

These recommendations are not meant to be a strategic plan to resolve the problems identified above, but rather an annotated outline of an approach to improve communication with examples of the best ways to initiate improvements for marine resources and the human communities that rely on them. By way of example, this report recommends a 4-step process for strengthening connections and communication among key marine protected area constituencies and the MPA Center by:

1. identifying and defining two important issues as examples,
2. identifying critical messages to be conveyed,
3. describing key constituencies as audiences for selected messages, and
4. recommending the best techniques for conveying the selected messages to key audiences

This process has been used successfully for some 20 years in other, similar settings involving protected areas on land in national parks, wildlife refuges, and sanctuaries.

The MPA FAC formed a Stakeholder Engagement Subcommittee to fully consider these issues and develop these recommendations for the full committee. Products developed by the subcommittee that have contributed to the recommendations include:

- a report on the MPA Center website, with specific suggestions for enhancements;
- a report on the use of social media with detailed examples of best practices (see Appendix 1); and
- a survey of subcommittee members regarding messages, audiences and delivery techniques that have informed these recommendations.

Issues

Issue 1: *The public largely neither knows nor cares what marine protected areas are or what their potential values may be, while many fishing communities feel threatened by additional regulations and loss of fishing areas.*

Problem

The public is apathetic or unaware of marine protected areas, they will not engage with marine protected area programs and may be reluctant to support changes in ocean stewardship to include marine protected areas, especially when fishing interests express concern over declining catches and reduced fishing grounds.

So What?

Without public engagement, marine protected areas will be irrelevant for society and lack public support. Ocean health will continue to decline in many areas with consequent losses of productivity, economic and spiritual opportunities, and other values afforded by healthy oceans.

Solutions

- 1) Increase MPA Center capacity to provide leadership for broader MPA community.
- 2) Increase outreach and education efforts catalyzed or coordinated by the MPA Center to introduce knowledge and experiences with marine protected areas and concepts from other areas to larger audiences.
- 3) Develop messages about marine protected areas, their values, and potential for public good crafted to resonate with key constituencies concerned with ocean health and stewardship.
- 4) Identify the most appropriate techniques to deliver and evaluate the efficacy of the messages about marine protected areas (#2 above).

Benefits

- 1) Changing ocean stewardship to include marine protected areas will improve ocean ecological integrity through improved resilience, biodiversity, and general health.
- 2) Marine protected areas improve opportunities for recreation, fishing, environmental research, sustainable human communities, and economic growth.
- 3) Through healthier, resilient ecosystems, marine protected areas mitigate negative effects of climate change.

Issue II: *The marine protected areas community and the general public are largely apathetic or unaware of the National System of Marine Protected Areas.*

Problem

Lack of communication among marine protected area managers hampers development of effective education and outreach programs, encourages redundancy, and increases costs of stewardship. Because the public is apathetic or unaware of marine protected areas, they will not engage with marine protected area programs.

So What?

Without public engagement, marine protected areas will not be considered as tools to augment historic stewardship. Ocean health will continue to decline in many areas with consequent losses of productivity, economic and spiritual opportunities, and other values afforded by healthy oceans.

Solutions

- 1) Increase outreach and education efforts catalyzed or coordinated by the MPA Center to introduce marine protected areas and concepts to marine protected area managers and to larger more diverse audiences.
- 2) Develop messages about marine protected areas, their values, and potential for public good crafted to resonate with key constituencies of ocean health and stewardship.
- 3) Identify the most appropriate techniques to deliver and evaluate the efficacy of the messages about marine protected areas (#2 above).
- 4) Increase MPA Center capacity to provide leadership for broader MPA community.

Benefits

- 1) Better coordination among marine protected areas and systems of marine protected areas will improve ocean stewardship and health, accelerate recovery of ocean health, and reduce costs for program delivery.
- 2) Marine protected areas in the national system derive increased dignity and recognition through their inclusion jointly with each other in one national system.
- 3) Changing ocean stewardship to include marine protected areas will improve ocean ecological integrity through improved resilience, biodiversity, and general health.
- 4) Marine protected areas improve opportunities for recreation, fishing, environmental research, sustainable human communities, and economic growth.
- 5) Through healthier, resilient ecosystems, marine protected areas mitigate negative effects of climate change.

Messages

The following list of 10 priority messages about marine protected areas is organized into three broad categories: general information about spatial management, recreational activities, and climate change. Within each category, we identify 3-4 specific messages to disseminate to target audiences using the identified delivery techniques. These messages are listed in priority order, within each major category below.

*1. Key Messages about Marine Protected Areas in **General***

- A. Marine protected areas are special places in the oceans or Great Lakes that are protected to conserve important habitats, ecological communities, threatened species or cultural resources and the services and value they provide to the nation. They can include areas from the shoreline to the high seas.
- B. Marine protected areas help sustain coastal communities by supporting recreation, tourism and healthy fisheries.
- C. Marine protected areas are proven tools that gain effectiveness when created and supported locally.
- D. Some marine protected areas exemplify local stewardship and human connection with the ocean.

*2. Key Messages about **Recreation** and Marine Protected Areas*

- A. By maintaining vibrant and healthy ecosystems, marine protected areas support diverse recreational opportunities like swimming, diving, fishing, boating, hiking, camping and kayaking.
- B. Marine protected areas generate billions in economic activity and support tens of thousands of jobs through outdoor recreation and tourism.
- C. Nearly all of the nation's marine protected areas allow multiple uses, including recreational boating and fishing. Fishing and other extractive uses are allowed in 97% of U. S. waters, including 92% of waters inside existing marine protected areas in the U. S.

*3. Key Messages about **Climate Change** and Marine Protected Areas*

- A. Networks of marine protected areas can replenish fish and other species in areas impacted by overexploitation or climate change. They can also be used to provide protection for species and habitats if their distribution changes due to climate impacts.
- B. Marine protected areas provide long-term protection for coastal and marine resources. This higher level of protection contributes to healthier resources that are better able to withstand climate change impacts.
- C. Marine protected areas, with their place-based focus and long-term monitoring, are able to serve as control areas or "sentinel sites" for tracking, evaluating and predicting climate change impacts.

Messages for educational purposes that provide general knowledge and information regarding marine protected areas are different than those designed to serve outreach, i.e., to familiarize people with the National System of Marine Protected Areas, or for

professional development, i.e., training for protected area practitioners, or for engagement and communication with stakeholder groups.

Similarly, different types of marine protected areas require different versions of the same topical messages, depending on the restrictions imposed on human activities in the protected area and the protections afforded nature and cultural resources in the area. Each of the 10 priority messages indicated in this section need to be crafted to describe the performance of each of the nine marine protected area configurations identified in the National System of Marine Protected Areas¹. Further, since 85% of marine protected areas in U. S. waters are zoned for multiple uses, the outcomes of various kinds and levels of protection for each designated protected area will vary accordingly.

Audiences

Stratifying potential audiences into cohesive categories that reduce variability of knowledge, experience, engagement and capacity to participate in marine protected area issues is essential for effective communication. We recommend a nested design with four broad categories of constituents or audiences: Stewards, Users, Students, Other Publics. Each of these groups of people bring different levels of knowledge, experience and understanding of marine resources stewardship, marine protected area governance and management, and the social and economic concerns of communities dependent on the ocean.

Audience 1: Marine Protected Area and Marine Resource Managers

Description of audience:

- 1) Practitioners—staff from state / federal / tribal agencies who manage marine protected areas
- 2) People engaged in governance of ocean resources or marine protected areas (politicians, tribal councils, fishery commissions)
- 3) People who provide visitor access to marine protected areas

Rationale for Selecting Audience: Scientists and managers engaged in stewardship of marine resources need to be aware of the National System of Marine Protected Areas and its important contributions towards the effective management of natural and cultural resources / biodiversity.

Desired Action: Resource managers / MPA managers will become more educated and informed about the diversity of MPAs, the MPA Center, and the importance and necessity of the national system. All resource managers are expected to develop a

¹ Categories of marine protected areas identified in the National System of Marine Protected Areas: 1. Cultural, 2. Natural, 3. Uniform No-take, 4. Zoned No-take, 5. Uniform Multiple Use, 6. Zoned Multiple Use, 7. Sustainable Production, 8. Ecosystem-focused, 9. Feature-focused.

sophisticated level of understanding and familiarity with MPAs, their design and function in conjunction with other fishery / ecosystem management actions, and their contributions towards the preservation of the nations' coastal and marine natural and cultural resources.

Audience 2: Major Users of Oceans and Great Lakes

Description of Audience: Major ocean users, including:

- 1) Recreational marine protected area visitors
- 2) People dependent on ocean resources for cultural or economic livelihood including indigenous communities
- 3) Military organizations co-located with marine protected area
- 4) Scientists and scholars who study nature and humans in and around marine protected areas

Rationale for Selecting Audience: Ocean users use the ocean and its resources on a daily basis, and are directly affected by marine protected areas and coastal/ocean management. Many ocean users mistakenly assume all marine protected areas are marine reserves, do not trust managing agencies, and believe the national system is a federal system that will take over managing marine protected areas.

Desired Action: Ocean users will become more educated and informed about marine protected areas, the MPA Center, and the importance and necessity of the national system. All ocean users are expected to develop an in-depth level of understanding and familiarity with MPAs and their contributions towards the preservation of the nations' coastal and marine natural and cultural resources.

Audience 3: Students of various age classes and disciplines

Description of Audience: Students from two broad categories:

- 1) Students (K-16)
- 2) University graduate students

Rationale for Selecting Audience: Students need to be informed about the societal importance of the ocean and to be able to evaluate the role of MPAs towards protecting the ocean and its natural and cultural resources for the long-term.

Desired Action: Students will become more educated and informed about MPAs, the MPA Center, and the importance and necessity of the national system. All students are expected to develop a basic level of understanding and familiarity with MPAs and their contributions towards the preservation of the nations' coastal and marine natural and cultural resources.

Audience 4: The Public At Large

Description of Audience: All other citizens not included in the three audiences described above, in particular:

- 1) People who hold existence values for marine protected areas or healthy oceans
- 2) People not engaged in marine protected areas, but interested in oceans
- 3) People interested in marine protected area concepts but who have not engaged in existing processes for planning, establishing, and stewardship of marine protected areas

Rationale for Selecting Audience: All citizens, whether they directly benefit from marine protected areas or not, need to be informed about the societal importance of the ocean and the role of marine protected areas towards protecting the coastal and marine ecosystems and their resources, both natural and cultural, for the long-term.

Desired Action: All citizens will become more educated and informed about marine protected areas, the MPA Center, and the importance and necessity of the national system. All citizens are expected to develop a basic level of understanding and familiarity with marine protected areas and their contributions towards the preservation of the nations' coastal and marine natural and cultural resources.

Within each of these broad categories, we identify two to five important sub-categories of people that may require additional specificity for their messages to be communicated effectively. Following a survey of the MPA FAC, we identified three priority audiences among these sub-categories as targets for marine protected area messages. These are listed below in priority order:

1. People engaged in governance of ocean resources or marine protected areas (politicians, tribal councils, fisheries commissions)
2. People dependent on ocean resources for cultural or economic livelihood, including indigenous communities
3. Practitioners who manage marine protected areas (government and tribal officials; people who provide visitor access to marine protected areas, including managers, rangers)

Delivery techniques

To reach its target audiences with its specific priority messages, the working group established the following as its preferred delivery techniques:

- 1) Website (www.marineprotectedareas.noaa.gov)
- 2) Citizen Science Programs (e.g. Great Annual Fish Count)
- 3) Public Service Announcements / Journal Ads
- 4) Services (e.g., technical reviews, advice, outreach to stakeholders)
- 5) Social Media

Regardless of the delivery technique, the MPA FAC strongly encourages an *interactive* approach.

The MPA Center should take the first steps to develop a robust social media program that builds on the many opportunities presented by marine protected area sites. Delivering a message that attracts citizen engagement and chronicles stakeholder outreach will not only educate target audiences, but also educate a wider general public about the goals of the MPA Center and other MPA programs.

A recommended roadmap to developing a successful social media program includes:

- 1) Identifying social media platforms that will reach the MPA Center's audiences and goals
- 2) Collecting stories and data, and leveraging promotional opportunities
- 3) Relying on messengers from MPA Center stakeholder communities
- 4) Promoting MPA Center social media content to encourage engagement
- 5) Building capacity over time in social media

Recommendations

1) Create a virtual community of marine protected area managers and stakeholders that will:

- Increase the MPA Center's capacity to meet requirements of the Executive Order and support participating MPA programs
- Increase the MPA Center's capacity to communicate and engage key constituencies
- Help brand partner programs as part of marine protected area community
- Create "Friends of the nation's marine protected areas" listserve (including private sector businesses, orgs, etc.) as part of branding strategy
- Help differentiate marine protected areas community from the MPA Center and the national system of MPAs
- Guide the public to the "front door" for marine protected area information on-line

2) Craft messages that tell stories highlighting human dimensions

- Illustrate with images and art, not data alone
- Start with tweet-sized messages, and expand as time and space allow

3) Use *interactive* communications

- Engage where it matters first, close to home
- Make it personal; give people the opportunity to participate

4) Provide leadership to the broader MPA community

- Improve cooperation, collaboration, and communication among MPA stewards
- Leverage partnerships to amplify MPA messages

Appendix 1.

Building a Social Media Program Around the National Marine Protected Areas Center's Natural Strengths

Summary

While the National Marine Protected Areas Center (MPA Center) has an active Facebook page, social media for the Center currently focuses on sharing news and updates from other sources. The goal of this committee is to create engagement and reach expressed target audiences. To do so, MPA Center will need to begin the process of creating a presence on the leading social media platforms, creating its own rich content, and packaging diverse social media campaigns that tell social stories driven at target audiences.

Luckily, the MPA Center has a vast and ready-made platform at its disposal: oceans and lakes, and the many millions of Americans that enjoy using and visiting marine areas throughout the year. Marine protected areas create unique businesses interested in reaching our audiences. Associations within marine protected areas have built their own networks to help protect their communities and are among the most active in social media. Entire brands exist solely to service our audiences' recreational and destination experience. In short, our audience is primed for engagement.

The MPA Center will also grow by creating brand partnerships with community leaders and business co-located in and around marine protected areas that will benefit from the positive exposure created by participating in the MPA Center's social campaigns to detail their involvement in protection efforts or region or recreational-specific business. Education is a key aspect of the MPA Center's future outreach goals, including confronting apathy, encouraging greater interest in recreational opportunities, showing the value of protected areas to communities and businesses, and promoting protection-related advocacy.

The argument can be made that apathy within our target audiences does not actually exist in social media. For instance, Instagram users have posted 19,000 total images at the Cabrillo National Monument and beach. Most of the photos express an awe of the site's beauty and seem to grasp the monument's importance. Our job is to help them take the next step and engage with the MPA Center's priorities and understand the value of a national system of sites similar to the Cabrillo National Monument.

In fact, if we view major recreational, businesses and military groups in marine protected areas, community advocacy groups, and social media-savvy students into a single base audience, we already have one of the most enthusiastic audiences in social media. The trick will be creating rich content that engages and educates this preassembled social media audience.

I. Key Elements For Success:

- 1) Rich content.
- 2) Invest in an identity and branding process to create templates for images and typography that will serve all of our social media platforms.
- 3) Always look for a “refresh” to keep our audience interested.
- 4) Cross-pollinate our content throughout our social media platforms.
- 5) Organic recommendations are key to dispelling apathy. Get our audience talking about marine protected areas.
- 6) Personality: Attract audience leaders who can put a face on exploring MPA
- 7) Center’s brand, the national system, and our advocacy priorities, i.e. MPA managers, community activists, photographers, businesses, and students recruited to report through their own social media.
- 8) Look for ways to create earned media through social media by creating social campaigns. This in turn gives back to our social media by creating new followers.

II. A Picture Is Worth A Thousand Words

Much of today’s social media is driven by sharing and curating images. This is evidenced by some staggering statistics: 1/3 of American adult women use Pinterest while 20% of all Americans are registered on the platform. 350 million photos are uploaded to Facebook every day. Instagram, a platform that encourages its users to meet up in cities and recreational locations such as parks and beaches, continues to explode with more than 8,000 photos liked every second. Infographics are liked 4 times more often than presentations and 23 times more often than documents on Slideshare, a LinkedIn company that was responsible for 35% of all social media traffic in 2013. Here are two new rules for social media in 2014 (borrowed from social media analytics giant Klout):

- Content creation is king, but curation is queen. Although the ideal curate/create mix depends on our audience and our goals, it’s a good idea to try to maintain a 1:1 ratio. When it comes to content curation, our value lies in sharing our unique insights or a new angle with each piece of content. Keep in mind that whether created or curated, our content should always be an extension of our brand goals.
- Gain our audience with quality, keep them with consistency. The quantity of shares you are likely to get is directly proportional to the quality of the content. Quality will help you build our audience, and consistency will help you keep them. Social media posts tend to lose their “freshness” relatively quickly, so it is important to spend time sharing our content at different times. The good news is that focusing on creating high quality posts can also help remedy this. The life of our post is extended when people notice the quality of our post and share it for you.

III. Platforms & Case Studies

Twitter

While Facebook is powerful for content publishers in terms of driving traffic, Twitter is vitally important for telling social stories and advocating on behalf of our brand or idea. MPA Center will benefit from a preexisting and emotionally connected user base interested in the #environment, #nature, and #conservation. This user base hits nearly all of our target audiences and touches a number of the “top ten categories” laid out in this document. As our experience with Twitter grows, we should think of Twitter as the front page or billboard for the social stories we plan to tell on other platforms.

Sponsored tweets that demonstrate our engagement and rich content while also educating our audience will be important to building our audience base and generating bona fides with younger audiences and major oceans and lakes users.

Case Studies:

- 1) [@WhiteHouse](#): The President’s social media strategy on Twitter is the best in the advocacy community. The account balances about one visual message for every five text messages. These visual messages are reflective of the growing popularity of rich content on Twitter, and are tightly woven into the White House’s social media identity and design. They retweet staff and coalition leaders who are carrying their message in sub-audiences and regularly share links to stories they have developed on their blog. [@NOAA](#) and [@CommerceGov](#), the parent offices of the Center, have similar strategies for Twitter that could be replicated to scale.
- 2) [@Interior](#): The Dept. of the Interior was recently showcased by Twitter as one of the most retweeted brands on the platform. The Dept. accomplished this without a great deal of internal effort and relied on the images created by contracted photographers which were shared by the Interior. MPA Center could replicate this strategy, hold contests, and reach out to photographers on Instagram or Twitter for copyright release. As we will see below, these images could be shared on any number of social media platforms.

Facebook

The world’s largest network is nearing a saturation point, yet it continues to serve as a valuable tool for driving traffic through Facebook ads and image posts that drive traffic to our brand’s website, blog posts, events, or opportunities to engage. It will be important to transition away from sharing other publishers’ news and move these opportunities over to Twitter as future retweets.

One of MPA Center’s strengths is the number of protected areas within the national system. While some might be stronger than others, it would be helpful to ensure our Facebook page is connected to all of the sites’ individual Facebook pages. Through

regional staff, or emails, disseminate draft content for sites to encourage their networks to follow the MPA Center.

Case Studies:

- 1) [Visual Supply Co](#): Creators of a mobile application heralded by the iTunes App Store as one of the best iPhone apps of 2013, this four-man team relies on Instagram and Twitter users to push their social engagement. However, they also employ a very successful strategy to push Facebook users to their product (and Instagram and Twitter) by acting as if each of their free Facebook Posts were actually a paid advertisement with typography-friendly image posts borrowing from photos taken by consenting users on Instagram. Visual Supply Co also represents an established social media brand that the MPA Center could explore for future collaboration. For instance, Visual Supply Co could curate photos from our MPA sites posted by users on Instagram and interview MPA managers about the value of the national system in a blog post that is avidly followed by engaged recreationalists who are likely to see the post and choose to explore a local MPA site.

Collaborations such as this are valuable for the MPA Center on Facebook, Instagram, and Tumblr and should be explored if we feel we can reach two or more of our target audiences.

Instagram

The wildly popular photo platform is more than just a “selfie” engine; Instagram proudly refers to itself as an explorers guide – a moniker worth noting. Instagram combines the social media power of photos with location and exploration.

Case Studies:

- 1) [Griffith Observatory](#): The popular observatory and park is known for its breathtaking views overlooking Los Angeles. Despite numerous student tours organized by schools, the observatory was becoming concerned by the lack of engagement on their social media and an eventual lack in interest from local youth. They recruited a popular photographer in the LA region to promote and host an “instameet” at the Observatory. Instagram’s blog curated a number of the more beautiful photos created with the #griffith_instameet hashtag which in turn created local earned media write-ups. Both the Instagram post and the earned media – along with the implied recommendation from #griffith_instameet users – has led to more than 55,000 #griffithobservatory posts on Instagram alone.
- 2) [@PolerStuff](#) is a new outdoors apparel brand that is popular with hikers, photographers, and wider, younger audiences. They share their “[adventures](#)” – essentially photo narratives that show off their products – on their website, but also cultivate a large audience by using #hashtags correctly on Instagram.

They use recreationalists and locations to establish a lifestyle brand with their images, but they had to start from scratch. The team created its own hashtag - #campvibes – and began posting its images along with other popular hashtags such as #nature (32 million posts). Poler Stuff quickly gained a loyal following and the #campvibes hashtag has gone viral on Facebook, Tumblr, YouTube, and Instagram. The trick was to find the right hashtag and post rich content that elicited an emotional response. Combined with their website blog and photos of users who serve as personalities that audiences can relate to, Poler Stuff is telling a social story that recommends recreational travel and exploration. By introducing the element of discovery, the MPA Center could begin addressing apathy and lead our normal website traffic towards pages and content that will create education opportunities.

Pinterest

The sheer size and audience engagement opportunity presented by Pinterest makes it an important social media tool for MPA Center. Use this site to curate photos published throughout other social media posts. Pinterest now incorporates geographic maps making it easier for us to curate content organized by each MPA site. This would also be a great engagement tool for our MPA Managers.

Case Studies:

- 1) The [American Hiking Society](#) (AHS) has a very successful Pinterest account that was built on a “board” of “pins” filled with inspirational quotes written over high-quality landscape images of mountains, forests, national parks, and hikers. The board is so popular that it is consistently one of the top results in the “hiking” and “hiking quotes” Google Searches. AHS has built on this success to curate boards about hiking tips, national park information, advocating reforestation projects, trail funding, and volunteer opportunities.

Tumblr

While the MPA Center has a number of “Stories” on their website, they are isolated from social media. Create a Tumblr page and easily reroute marineprotectedareas.noaa.gov/aboutmpas/stories to MPA Center.tumblr.com or stories.marineprotectedareas.noaa.gov. Tumblr themes come equipped with social sharing tools and give users diverse options for storytelling including quotes, videos, images, and simple posts. It would also offer the MPA Center exposure to 164 million users and allow us to take advantage of Tumblr staff-curated #hashtags such as #landscape, #oceans, #environment, and #conservation that push our content in front of larger audiences.

Case Studies:

- 1) [30 Stories In 30 Days](#) was a social campaign by the National Park Service to commemorate the agency's centennial anniversary and demonstrate steps taken to modernize the agency. The Tumblr highlighted a wide variety of media, including the launch of an in-artist program, clean up days at Civil War battlefields, and a national landmarks photo contest.
- 2) The [Bureau of Reclamation](#) and the [Bureau of Land Management](#) each use Tumblr to curate its ongoing projects and share photos taken by bureau employees.
- 3) The [Peace Corps](#) promotes volunteer and fundraising opportunities and uses the platform to raise awareness about issues where Peace Corps missions are underway.

YouTube

When available, YouTube can be incredibly powerful in educating the general public. This can include ads on Google or Facebook, Google+ Hangouts that serve as webinars for MPA Managers and the general public, and branding opportunities for the national system to encourage Americans to visit MPA sites.

Case Studies:

- 1) [The First 70](#) was instrumental in building social media engagement and real world coalition support in the grassroots fight to keep California state parks open during the recent recession. The small project was very social media friendly and led to many coalition events and education opportunities at live screenings throughout the state. The project could be scaled by the MPA Center and broken out over several "webisodes" that included several personalities visiting MPA sites to learn more about the programs, the Center's priorities, and the national system. Video campaigns like this could have a longer staying power than other social media campaigns, and would be a great way to reach the general public if others entities within the Department of Commerce participated and shared the series.
- 2) The [@NationalParkService](#) exemplifies this opportunity in its Happy Holidays 2013 video shot entirely by volunteers.

LinkedIn

Engaging our MPA Managers through LinkedIn is easy with private groups and forums. This semi-internal communication tool allows us to quickly update Managers on how the Center and its programs are impacting MPA sites and serves as a call-out tool for engagement on social media.

IV. Phases

Here is an outline the MPA Center should consider when rolling out future social media platforms and campaigns:

Develop

- 1) 4 to 6 months.
- 2) Arrive at a budget.
- 3) Create an identity pack for the MPA Center's social media (creative messaging, goals for each platform, logos, typography, design templates, style guide, etc).
- 4) Work backwards from projects that will take substantial time to build out.
- 5) Communicate the goals to MPA Managers.
- 6) Start with Twitter. We have a choice of starting soft or unveiling with a bang by launching our first social media campaign through a video or collaboration with a number of photographers on Instagram who can help us launch a hashtag.
- 7) Launch LinkedIn.
- 8) Ensure colleagues, friends, allies, MPA Managers and sites have MPA Center social media links and are following through their own networks.

Attract

- 1) Build out a photo-driven platform.
- 2) Officially redirect our current Facebook page to Twitter retweets. Begin using Facebook for attracting audiences.
- 3) Inspire public engagement by sharing stories about historical stewardship and current conservation gaps.
- 4) Launch our Tumblr blog for the purpose of sharing stories.
- 5) Launch Pinterest. Consider regular guest curators on the platform that would be announced on Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr.
- 6) Begin developing social stories and virtual tours of MPA programs and sites.
- 7) Produce several short-run campaigns with the goal of activating our base to socialize the [Get Involved](#) MPA Center goal. (YouTube ads, Facebook ads, promoted Tweets, infographics, hashtags)
- 8) Be ready to capitalize on viral or earned media opportunities created by these short-run campaigns.

Engage

- 1) Build out a photo-driven platform.
- 2) Develop education program for K-12 teachers and discovery tools for young students using social media platforms like Instagram and Twitter. Engage higher education students on Tumblr with infographics, data visualizations, Q&As with MPA science leaders, and career advancement opportunities.
- 3) Begin engaging the general public during the summer months when water conservation is most important and when the general public is most likely to make use of oceans and lakes.
- 4) Launch commerce/business-focused forum on LinkedIn for businesses in marine protected areas to provide feedback and get involved with the Center.

- 5) Take advantage of collaborations with photographers, videographers, and major ocean and lake users throughout our social media program.
- 6) Begin developing YouTube series.

Pivot

- 1) Launch Google Maps initiative to help educate the public on the benefits of the national system.
- 2) Pivot the general public by encouraging stewardship and societal ownership of the [Get Involved](#) goals of the MPA Center website through similar tactics employed on our audience base during the Attract phase.
- 3) Work with the Dept. of Commerce and other administration offices to develop policy and strategies that demonstrate the value of marine protected areas, support business, and increase the quality of life for America's general public.

V. Other Recommendations:

Scale Social Media To Realistically Fit Budget: Decide on a budget at the beginning of our social media planning and stick to it. Test out platforms that work, but don't jump into platforms or social campaigns that are too costly to develop successfully.

Quick Fixes: Encourage MPA Managers and sites to visibly display the Center's social media accounts. We should also consider updating the website to make it more social media-friendly.

Engage With Our Community: Once our social media begins to grow, the key to keeping our audience engaged is to communicate with them through social media. This can be very time consuming and should be considered when scaling our social media plans. However, remember that time-sensitive engagement is as crucial as attracting attention. Throughout our social media rollout it will be important to also consider ways for users to ask questions or provide feedback.

Infographics: The MPA Center currently makes use of fact sheets that are likely shared amongst colleagues, MPA Managers, and issue-educated groups. However, fact sheets in general lack the ability to pique the interest of new audiences that may be unfamiliar with the MPA Center's priorities or are accustomed to consuming data in 140 characters or images. Investing in regular infographics is a sure-fire way to ensure engagement with our ideas. Data visualization will allow us to go deeper than photos or brand promotions, and allow us to quickly share data, policy positions, survey information, or action alerts more effectively than emails or blog posts.

Make Use Of Google Maps: Google has updated its widely used Maps tool, allowing users to leave photos, tips, reviews, and recommendations of locations. Google also allows groups to create entirely custom maps that can live on web outside of Google Maps while custom data remains preserved by Google Maps itself. Either through an app or on a the NMAPC website, we could create a map where the general public can

leave tips for other recreationists, get updates about news from around the national system, and share their ideas on Facebook or Twitter. [Represent.LA](#) makes good use of these tools in Los Angeles to promote the growth of a startup community in the region. While the MPA Center already has a professional [mapping system](#) on its website, there is no way to plan a trip to Cabrillo National Monument, add to the 137 reviews or the 100 photos shared through Facebook and Google+. Mobile users cannot engage with the MPA Center's current system, blocking nearly 40% of the general public from viewing MPA Center information and tools.

Social Campaigns: Before launching the MPA Center's social media plan, it would be important to earmark several short-run campaigns to be released at the end of each Phase. This would help bring attention to the Center's priorities and signal a transition to the next Phase. Flexibility is necessary, but try and decide on a general direction and concept for each campaign at the inception of our social media launch.

Engaging And Educating The General Public: Like influencing public opinion, this will depend on how effectively we develop, attract, and engage our audiences. It will also be the most expensive, but if the MPA Center is serious about moving the needle and including the general public as a target audience, the Center's social media must do more than attract attention. Pivoting followers into understanding and action opportunities will require creative content that always builds towards a question, aka "What is the MPA Center and why should I care about the Center?"

Social Media Conclusions

With the decline of earned media and other traditional civic outreach advertising techniques – and the simultaneously rapid growth of social media – the fight for the "general public's" attention is increasingly won by organizations that invest the proper time and resources in producing rich content and engaging their audiences. However, the MPA Center has a built-in base audience that can be easily tapped and energized throughout many social media platforms. Undertaking this directional shift will help overcome a sense of apathy and inform the general public of the value of the Center and the marine protected areas throughout the national system.

Appendix 2: Narrative Responses to Subcommittee Survey of MPA Federal Advisory Committee Members

- Perhaps develop monthly one-page MPAs newsletters that would inform ALL readers about the value of MPAs, and the value of the National System of MPAs. Similar to NASA, we could also consider distributing "image (photograph) of the day" to anyone who wish to receive them (please see NASA's Website about his excellent communications technique).
- More emphasis on biological science (what we know and what we do not know), and less on the tourism impact of MPAs.
- I would have liked to have seen more focus on industry messages and delivery techniques. For example, the recent sanctuary expansion proposals are great, but there needs to be a focused effort to expand no-take areas. Does that make sense?
- I would like to see community stewardship emphasized more, including all user groups. A lot of coastal communities are not really connected with the "outside world" it is important to somehow engage them in the MPA discussions. Good work on the survey!
- This survey is too protectionist and is exemplified in question 2 where the response reads, in part, " recreational opportunities like swimming, diving, boating, hiking, camping and kayaking." and does not include recreational fishing. Due to this overly protectionist bias, in some of the questions, I could not find suitable answer(s).
- A couple of the messages are very good, but need be edited for brevity and punch. Twitter messaging can be powerful; drafting 20 or so short twitter length messages that reiterate core message theme would be a productive to any outreach effort.
- Not all are aware that a National System of MPAs was formed by Executive Order. That should be emphasized somewhat so that folks know the origin of the National System. The messages should encourage critical thinking and evaluation of MPAs as tools to augment traditional management.

Appendix 3: Additional Resources

Engaging Independent Perspectives for a 21st-Century National Park System
<http://www.nps.gov/resources/advisoryboardreport.htm>

Stakeholder Participation Toolkit for Identification, Designation and Management of Marine Protected Areas (MEDPAN)
http://rac-spa.org/sites/default/files/mpa_stakeholder_toolkit.pdf

Appendix 4: Stakeholder Engagement Sub-Committee Members

Gary E. Davis, Subcommittee Chair
Joe Schumacker, Subcommittee Vice-chair
Cirse Gonzalez, Staff Coordinator

Subcommittee Members:

Dave Blazer
Felicia Coleman
John Frampton
David Hyrenbach
Jason Patlis
Cathy Reheis-Boyd
Della Scott-Ireton
Steve Tucker, USCG Ex Officio