

MPA CONNECTIONS

Newsletter of the National Marine Protected Areas Center

August 2003

The mission of the National Marine Protected Areas Center is to facilitate the effective use of science, technology, training, and information in the planning, management, and evaluation of the nation's system of marine protected areas. *MPA Connections* was launched to meet continuing calls by agency and external stakeholders for information about MPA Center activities.

Table of Contents

Clarifying Misconceptions about Marine Protected Areas (Fifth Part in a Series)

Feature: Conservation By the Letters: A National Focal Point (Excerpt from Sea Grant's Texas Shores)

Get Ready for National Estuaries Day

MPA Federal Advisory Committee News

Organizations Collaborate on Gulf of Mexico Marine Managed Areas Inventory

Upcoming Events and Conferences

Clarifying Misconceptions about Marine Protected Areas (*Fifth Part in a Series*)

Misconception: There are no marine protected areas or marine managed areas in the Great Lakes.

Reality: Marine protected areas (MPAs) and marine managed areas (MMAs) are not just in deep or coastal marine waters. In fact, there are at least 15 federal MPAs and MMAs located within the Great Lakes. The number of state sites is still being counted.

These areas include a national marine sanctuary, a national estuarine research reserve, eight national wildlife refuges, and five national parks. They cover a diversity of natural and cultural resources in lakes Superior, Ontario, Michigan, Huron, and Erie.

The Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary, which is also a state aquatic preserve, is located in Lake Huron, off the coast of Michigan. One of its more unique elements is the 160 shipwrecks it contains, dating back more than 100 years. Michigan protects a total of nine underwater preserves, which amounts to nearly 1,900 square miles of the region's most sensitive submerged resources. These wrecks provide clues to our Great Lakes history.

On Lake Michigan, about 50 miles southeast of Chicago, is the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore. The Indiana Dunes is considered a marine managed area because its aquatic boundaries contain vital bogs and coastal wetlands, in addition to beaches and dunes.

In addition, Isle Royale National Park, accessible only by boat or float plane, is considered a marine managed area because its aquatic elements include submerged lands that extend four and a half miles into Lake Superior. Founded in 1931, the park encompasses a total area of 850 square miles.

While the majority of marine protected areas and marine managed areas are in oceanic waters, a significant number exist within the nation's Great Lakes.

To learn about the marine protected areas and marine managed areas in the Great Lakes, visit <http://mpa.gov/mpaservices/atlas/gl/grtlks.html>.

Conservation By the Letters: A National Focal Point

(The following article is an excerpt from the spring 2003 edition of Texas Shores, a Sea Grant publication, printed here with permission. The complete article focuses on the process of designating an area in Texas as a National Estuarine Research Reserve, and determining whether it qualifies as a marine protected area.)

Asked if National Estuarine Research Reserve systems (NERRs) qualify as MPAs, Nathalie Peter, a senior project manager with the Estuarine Reserves Division of the NOAA National Ocean Service, says, "Right now, reserves are part of an inventory of marine managed areas that are being considered for a national listing of MPAs. We'll know if NERRs are MPAs in a couple of years when the MPA criteria are developed and applied. There will be plenty of public input during this process."

The term "marine protected area" has been bandied about in natural resources circles for a couple of decades, but it was a fairly nebulous term whose definition depended on who was doing the bandying.

Executive Order 13158 sought to bring some sense of order to the vast collection of marine ecosystems that are under some form of regulation or protection at various levels of government by directing the Departments of Commerce and the Interior to inventory all of these areas. It also created the MPA Center—headed by Joe Uravitch—to help implement the mandates of the Executive Order, which include developing a framework for a national network of MPAs and providing federal, state, territorial, tribal and local governments with the information, technologies and strategies they need to support the system.

“In other words, developing a framework means answering the questions of what is this network going to look like, what are its goals and what are we trying to accomplish?” Uravitch explains. “The second directive is to provide science training and technical support to help people who are managing existing marine protected areas at any governmental level to improve their ability to do that job.”

In essence, the MPA Center functions as a clearinghouse of information on the nation’s marine protected areas.

For the purposes of the MPA inventory, the Order defines MPAs as “any area of the marine environment that has been reserved by federal, state, territorial, tribal or local laws or regulations to provide lasting protection for part or all of the natural and cultural resources therein.”

The Executive Order goes on to define “marine environment” as “those areas of coastal and ocean waters, the Great Lakes and their connecting waters, and submerged lands thereunder, over which the United States exercises jurisdiction, consistent with international law.”

From Peter’s perspective, there is a question of whether NERRs qualify as MPAs under the definition set out in the Order because it focuses on the marine environment and not the uplands.

However, a working definition being used to develop the inventory provides that an MPA can include a land component associated with its marine area.

Uravitch concedes that arriving at one clear and unambiguous definition of an MPA for federal use may prove to be his biggest challenge.

“For example, if you look at original MPA definition, there is a requirement that a site be ‘lasting.’ What does lasting mean?” asks Uravitch. “Does it mean 24-hour-a-day protection 365 days a year in perpetuity? What does that mean for sites that have a sunset provision but with the authority for renewal. Is that lasting or not lasting?”

“Some fishery management areas may be closed three months a year to protect spawning areas. But is the same site closed the same months a year in perpetuity? Is that lasting?” he continues.

“People are understandably confused by all of this,” says Uravitch. “One of our major goals is to help to move toward some kind of definition of terms.”

Uravitch says he plans to publish a notice in the Federal Register asking for public comment on the criteria that should be used to determine which sites qualify as MPAs, thus setting a standard for the country. Until then, Uravitch is focusing the inventory on listing sites that fit the much broader category of marine managed areas, or MMAs if you’re not tired of acronyms yet. Those are sites that are not necessarily protected but are under some form of governmental management, and that definition includes NERRs.

The MPA program will also come out soon with a system that will classify MPAs according to three different characteristics: a site's conservation goal; the level of protection of a site; and the duration of protection.

“A sanctuary at the Flower Garden Banks may not be the same as a state sanctuary in Minnesota. The word sanctuary loses its meaning because it depends on the definition in whatever law established that program,” says Uravitch. “By using these three characteristics you'll be able to have value-free ability to categorize these things. You won't have to look at the name of the site. You'll be able to figure out what it is by these characteristics, what the site does.”

The MPA inventory is simply an attempt to find and categorize what will end up being several thousand existing managed and protected sites. Uravitch emphasizes the term “existing” sites, adding that the project will in no way designate new sites.

“We have no authority to overrule programs at any governmental level,” he stresses. “We have no authority to designate new marine protected areas and we have no authority to managing existing sites. All of that responsibility resides with the various government programs, whether they are federal, state, tribal or local.”

###

Texas Shores is published quarterly by the Texas Sea Grant College Program in an effort to promote a better understanding of the Texas marine environment. For the complete edition of the article excerpted above, go to <http://texas-sea-grant.tamu.edu/pubs/txshores/spring2003.pdf>.

The Federal Register noticed referenced in this article is now available for review and comment. For details, go to <http://a257.g.akamaitech.net/7/257/2422/14mar20010800/edocket.access.gpo.gov/2003/pdf/03-18733.pdf>. All comments must be received on or before September 22, 2003.

Note of clarification: The MPA Center is currently collecting an inventory of federal, state, commonwealth, territory, and tribal marine managed areas. This inventory will become the initial pool of sites from which the List of MPAs called for in section 4(d) of MPA Executive Order 13158 will be developed.

Get Ready for National Estuaries Day

NOAA's National Estuarine Research Reserve System and the Environmental Protection Agency's National Estuary Program are gearing up for National Estuaries Day, an annual event held on the last Saturday of September. Scheduled for September 28 this year, National Estuaries Day is a celebration of the places where fresh water from rivers mix with

salt water from the ocean. A main feature of the day is EstuaryLive, an interactive field trip of the nation's estuaries using the Internet.

Begun in 1988, National Estuaries Day has become a popular and hands-on way for teachers and students to learn about the value of estuaries and the need to protect them. In 2001, the celebration attracted 35,000 participants; in 2002, 1 million people across the United States participated in various events and by logging on to the EstuaryLive website.

An estuary can be a bay, lagoon or slough. These vital coastal habitats are used as spawning grounds and nurseries for at least two-thirds of the nation's commercial fish and shellfish. The wetlands associated with estuaries buffer uplands from flooding. Estuaries also provide many recreational opportunities, such as swimming, boating, and bird watching.

In the United States, a network of 25 reserves are protected and studied through NOAA's National Estuarine Research Reserve System.

To learn how to participate in National Estuaries Day, visit <http://www.estuaries.gov>. To learn more about estuaries, programs, and sites around the country, go to <http://www.ocrm.nos.noaa.gov/nerr/>

MPA Federal Advisory Committee News

The Federal Advisory Committee pages on <http://mpa.gov> have been revised to include a full transcript of the Committee's inaugural meeting from June 24-25, 2003, as well as links to the agenda, background documents, public comments, and presentations. Visitors will also find guidelines about how to submit public comments to the Committee.

The Marine Protected Areas Federal Advisory Committee is scheduled to hold its next meeting in San Francisco from November 17-19, 2003. More information about the schedule, venue, and other details will be posted on mpa.gov soon.

Organizations Collaborate on Gulf of Mexico Marine Managed Areas Inventory

The National Marine Protected Areas (MPA) Center and NOAA's Special Projects Office are coordinating with legal researchers from the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Legal Program located within the National Sea Grant Law Center and the National Sea Grant office to inventory, exchange, and analyze information about marine managed areas (MMAs) in the Gulf of Mexico.

By combining the technical assistance and scientific and policy knowledge of the MPA Center with the regional knowledge and legal expertise of the Sea Grant Legal program, the two groups are in a unique position to assist each other with this effort. The National MPA

Center and the National Sea Grant Law Center are jointly collecting site-specific data on MMAs in the Gulf of Mexico. These data include legal and policy regimes, jurisdictional information, habitat profiles, user trends, management techniques, and concerns and issues related to the management of the site. Staff are sharing site-specific data, inventory forms, contacts, and where feasible, the work load to ensure that the projects are complementary. Ultimately, by leveraging time, staff, and financial resources, the inventory and analysis of the Gulf of Mexico MMA sites will be more efficient and accurate.

The MMA inventory is being completed as part of Presidential Executive Order 13158 on Marine Protected Areas that requires a published list of MPA sites and the development of a framework for a national system of MPAs. The National MPA Center has been charged with these tasks, and data is available and continually updated on the U.S. MPA website <http://mpa.gov>, as well as on the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Law Center website <http://www.olemiss.edu/orgs/SGLC/>. The Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Legal Program is assisting by supplying the legal data on gulf sites that meet the MMA criteria.

In addition, the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Legal Program will publish a book in 2004 highlighting the various types of MMAs found in the Gulf of Mexico. The book will include details such as the legal authority to create sites, restrictions on uses, and enforcement within the area.

This partnership between the National MPA Center and the National Sea Grant Law Center and the Mississippi-Alabama Legal Program draws upon the strengths of the respective programs and ensures efficient collection of data in working toward a common goal, which is to improve the understanding and management of coastal and marine resources.

For additional information, visit NOAA's National MPA Center website www.mpa.gov or the National Sea Grant Law Center website <http://www.olemiss.edu/orgs/SGLC/>.

Upcoming Events and Conferences

September

4-6: Centre for Maritime Research (MARE) announces its second international conference entitled "People and the Sea II – Conflicts, Threats and Opportunities," Amsterdam, the Netherlands; http://www.marecentre.nl/people_and_the_sea_2/index.html

8-17: World Parks Congress, Durban, South Africa; <http://www.iucn.org/themes/wcpa/>

14-18: Estuarine Research Federation's 17th Biennial Conference: "Estuaries on the Edge: Convergence of Ocean, Land and Culture," Seattle, Washington; <http://fish.washington.edu/news/erf>

October

3-6: 10th U.S. Coral Reef Task Force Meeting, co-hosted by the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and Guam; <http://coralreef.gov/meet.cfm#tenth>.

7-11: North American Association for Environmental Education, Anchorage, Alaska;
<http://naaee.org/>

9-10: Managing Visitor Use in Coastal and Marine Protected Areas, Elkhorn Slough National Estuarine Research Reserve, California. For more information, contact Tom Fish at the NOAA Coastal Services Center: (843) 740-1271, or Tom.Fish@noaa.gov.

18-22: Coastal States Organization, 33rd Annual Meeting, Portsmouth, New Hampshire

25-30: National Estuarine Research Reserves System (NERRS) and the National Estuarine Research Reserves Association (NERRA) Annual Meeting, Charleston, South Carolina

November

2-5: Eighth Estuarine and Coastal Modeling Conference, Monterey Hyatt, Monterey, California; <http://www.oce.uri.edu/ecm8/>.

8-12: National Association of Interpretation, Reno, Nevada:
<http://www.interpnet.com/niw2003/>

13-15: Managing Our Nation's Fisheries: Past, Present and Future, Washington, D.C.;
<http://www.managingfisheries.org/>

17-19: Marine Protected Areas Federal Advisory Committee meeting, San Francisco, California

17-20: Joint Ventures: Partners in Stewardship, Los Angeles, California;
<http://www.partnerships2003.org/home.html>

TO SUBSCRIBE: Send an email to Dana.Topousis@noaa.gov