

THE NATIONAL SYSTEM OF MPAs: ANALYSIS OF NATIONAL SYSTEM SITES (MARCH 2011)

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The information provided here is for the 297 MPAs that are members of the national system of MPAs. Information is current as of March 2011. The national system will expand as federal, state, territorial, tribal, and local agencies nominate additional sites. Additional information on these sites can be found on the List of National System MPAs, available at www.mpa.gov.

THE NATIONAL SYSTEM OF MARINE PROTECTED AREAS

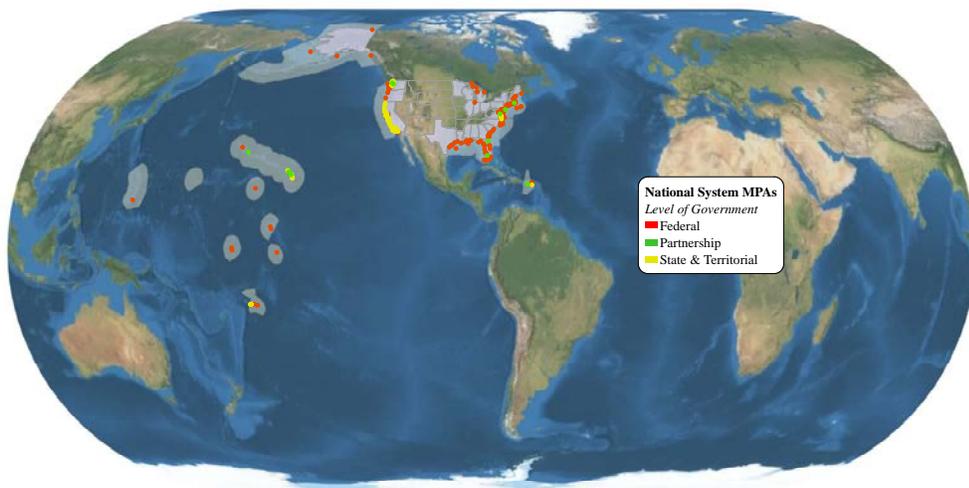
In 2009, the United States established the National System of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) to support the effective stewardship, conservation, restoration, sustainable use, understanding and appreciation of the nation's marine resources. The national system, which currently includes 297 federal, state and territorial MPAs, will expand over time.

The national system coordinates MPAs managed by diverse agencies across all levels of government to work toward national conservation objectives. The system benefits the nation's collective conservation efforts as well as participating MPAs, providing them with a means to address issues that extend beyond their boundaries.

The national system is described in detail in the Framework for the *National System of Marine Protected Areas of the United States of America*.

Key benefits of the national system include:

- Enhancing MPA stewardship
- Building partnerships
- Building MPA capacity
- Increasing support for marine conservation
- More effective outreach on MPAs
- Promoting cultural heritage
- Protecting MPA resources



NATIONAL SYSTEM SITES AT A GLANCE:

- The national system contains 297 sites and covers an area of 176,252 square miles
- 4% of U.S. waters (0-200 nautical miles) is covered by the national system sites
- Most of the sites in the national system (72%) are multiple use MPAs that allow a variety of human activities, including fishing and other extractive uses.
- All 21 of the national system's priority conservation objectives are addressed by national system members
- Every major ecoregion in the U.S. is represented in the national system

NOAA's National Marine Protected Areas (MPA) Center's mission 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. The MPA Center works in partnership with federal, state, tribal, and local governments and stakeholders to develop a science-based, comprehensive national system of MPAs. These collaborative efforts will lead to a more efficient, effective use of MPAs now and in the future to conserve and sustain the nation's vital marine resources.



IN FOCUS: NATIONAL SYSTEM GOALS

The goals of the national system are to conserve and manage:

- **Natural heritage** – the nation’s biological communities, habitats, ecosystems, and processes and the ecological services, values and uses they provide
- **Cultural heritage** – cultural resources that reflect the nation’s maritime history and traditional cultural connections to the sea, as well as the uses and values they provide
- **Sustainable production** – the nation’s renewable living resources and their habitats (including, but not limited to, spawning, mating, and nursery grounds and areas established to minimize bycatch of species) and the social, cultural and economic values and services they provide

Natural Heritage Focus: Elkhorn Slough State Marine Reserve (CA)



Elkhorn Slough, one of the largest estuaries in California, provides essential habitat for over 700 species, including aquatic mammals, birds, fish, invertebrates, algae, and plants. Elkhorn Slough hosts year-round residents associated with estuaries, such as pickleweed, eelgrass, oysters, gaper clams, and long-jawed mudsuckers, as well as important seasonal visitors such as migratory shorebirds, sea otters, and sharks and rays.

Cultural Heritage Focus: Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary (MI)



Located in northwestern Lake Huron, the 448-square-mile Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary protects one of America’s best-preserved and nationally-significant collections of shipwrecks. Fire, ice, collisions, and storms have claimed over 200 vessels in and around Thunder Bay. To date, more than 50 shipwrecks have been discovered within the sanctuary and an additional 30 wrecks have been located outside of the sanctuary boundaries.

Sustainable Production Focus: Oceanographer Canyon (MA)

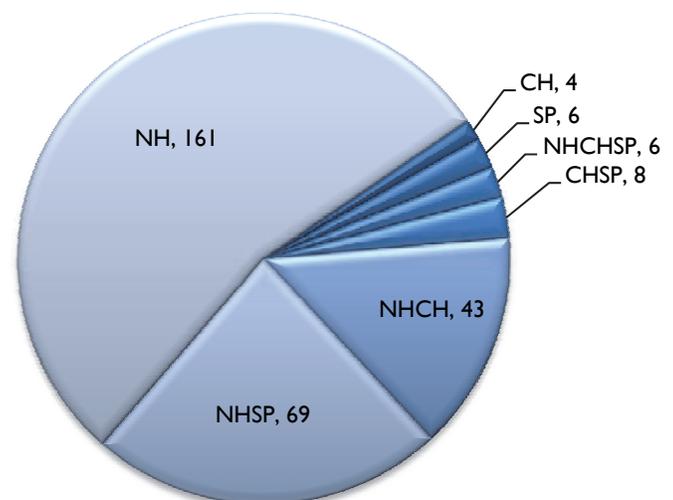


Oceanographer Canyon is one of four canyons in the Mid-Atlantic region managed by the National Marine Fisheries Service in cooperation with the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council. The four canyons are closed to bottom trawling under the Tilefish Fishery Management Plan (FMP) to protect 113,000 acres of deep-sea corals, sponges, and clay outcroppings. Tilefish are shelter-seeking, and create complex burrows in clay outcrops in underwater canyons. Their burrowing habitats can significantly alter the topography of the continental shelf off the East Coast of the U.S.

CONSERVATION FOCUS

Almost all (91%) of the national system sites have a primary conservation focus on conserving natural heritage. Approximately 5% of sites have a primary conservation focus on conserving cultural resources, and 4% of sites are primarily focused on sustainable production. Almost half (42%) of all the national system sites have more than one conservation focus.

NUMBER OF SITES BY CONSERVATION FOCUS



NH = Natural Heritage



CH = Cultural Heritage



SP = Sustainable Production

PRIORITY CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES

All 21 of the national system's priority conservation objectives (see Framework document on www.mpa.gov for complete list) are addressed by member sites. The majority of sites (291, or 98%) meet at least one natural heritage priority conservation objective. Approximately 185 sites (62%) meet at least one sustainable production priority conservation objective, while 89 sites (30%) meet at least one cultural heritage priority conservation objective.

Top Five Priority Conservation Objectives Addressed by Member Sites:

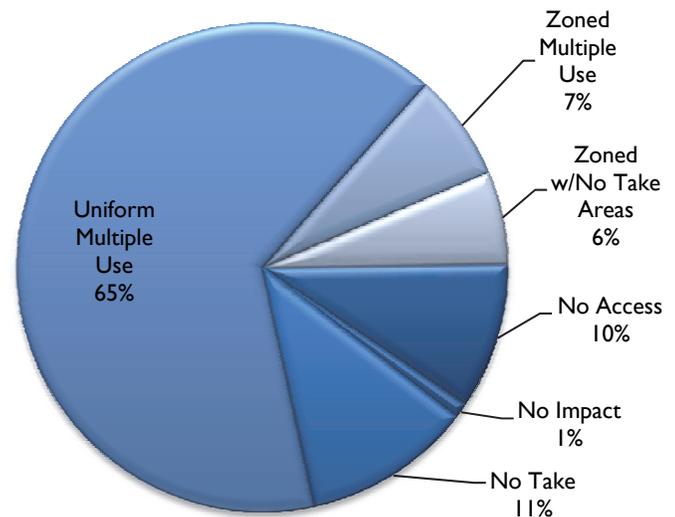
Natural Heritage

- Key areas that provide compatible opportunities for education and research (241)
- Areas of high species and/or high diversity (241)
- Key reproduction areas and nursery grounds (207)
- Key biogenic habitats (199)
- Unique or rare species, habitats and associated communities (196)

LEVEL OF PROTECTION

Most of the sites in the national system (72%) are multiple use MPAs that allow a variety of human activities, including fishing and other extractive uses. By contrast, 28% of the sites are no-take, which prohibit the extraction or significant destruction of natural and cultural resources. However, because one of these no-take sites, the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument in the Northwest Hawaiian Islands, is so large (140,000 square miles), about 83% of the area of MPAs in the national system are no-take. Less than 1% of U.S. waters overall are no-take.

PERCENT OF SITES BY LEVEL OF PROTECTION



SITES BY CEC MARINE ECOREGIONS

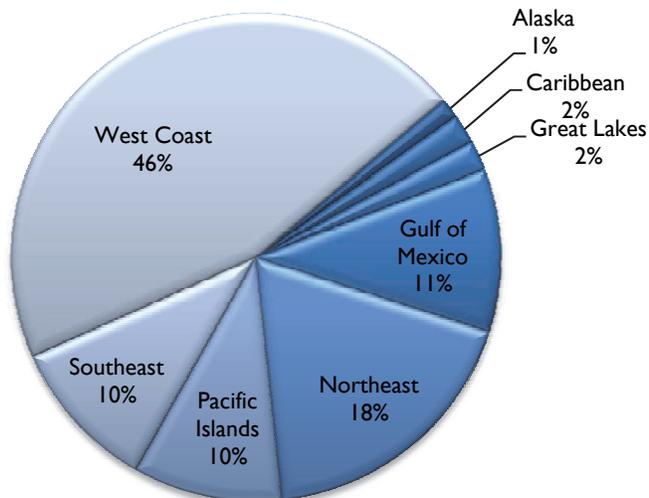


Created by the Commission for Environmental Cooperation, (CEC), the Marine Ecoregions of North America classifies marine ecoregions according to oceanographic features and geographically distinct assemblages of species from the Beaufort Sea to the Gulf of Mexico, covering the continent's territorial waters in the Pacific, Atlantic and Arctic Oceans. The largest number (87, or 29%) of national system sites are located within the Montereyan Pacific Transition marine ecoregion, which stretches along the central California coast from Point Conception to Cape Mendocino. However, the second highest number (48, or 16%) of national system sites are found in the Virginian Atlantic marine ecoregion. Only one MPA is found in the Aleutian Archipelago marine ecoregion.

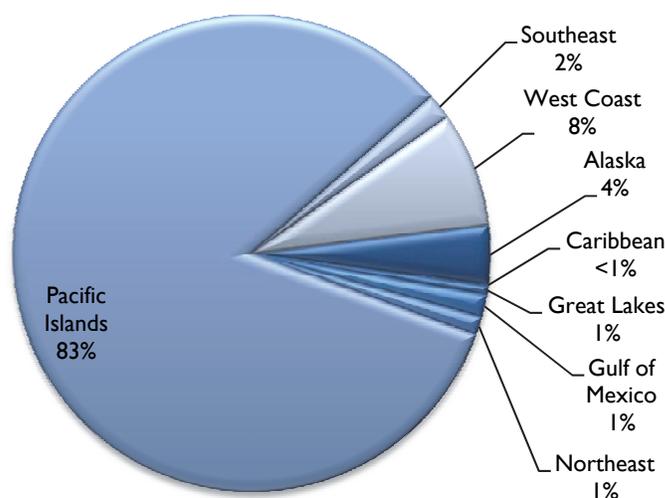
REGIONS AND LOCATIONS

The west coast (California in particular), has the highest number of sites in the national system. The Pacific Islands region has the largest area of sites in the national system, due to the size of the Papahānaumokuākea National Marine Monument in Hawaii, which extends over 140,420 square miles. In contrast, there are 120 sites (40%) in the national system that cover less than 1 square mile of marine area each. In all, 30 states and territories are represented in the national system, plus additional offshore areas under federal jurisdiction.

PERCENT OF SITES BY REGION



PERCENT OF AREA BY REGION



PROGRAMS

Of the 297 national system sites, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service manages 106 sites (36%). The National Park Service manages 29 national system sites, or 10%. There are 13 (4%) National Marine Sanctuaries and five (2%) National Estuarine Research Reserve Sites included in the system. Altogether, 51% of the national system sites are managed by federal agencies, while 37% are managed by state agencies. The remainder are managed by federal/state partnerships or territories.

WHERE CAN I FIND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION?



The National Marine Protected Areas Center launched a new interactive online mapping tool that, for the first time, allows users to view boundaries and access data for more than 1,600 marine protected areas (MPAs) in the United States.

The tool provides an interface to explore MPA information that was previously limited to expert geographic information system users. The site has easy-to-use functions to visualize MPA boundaries, review MPA classification information (e.g., level of protection, managing agency, fishing restrictions), and explore all MPAs in a given location.

The MPA Center's interactive MPA mapping tool, available at www.mpa.gov, allows users to view boundaries and access data for more than 1,600 MPAs in the U.S., including all national system sites.

www.mpa.gov

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