



# Marine Protected Areas Federal Advisory Committee

December 4,

2013

The Honorable Penny Pritzker  
Secretary of Commerce  
U.S. Department of Commerce  
1401 Constitution Ave., NW  
Washington, D.C. 20230

The Honorable Sally Jewell  
Secretary of the Interior  
Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, N.W.  
Washington DC 20240

Dear Madam Secretary Pritzker and Madam Secretary Jewell:

We are the Marine Protected Areas Federal Advisory Committee (MPA FAC), comprising 20 appointed members representing a cross-section of ocean and coastal users, stakeholders and natural and social scientific expertise. Working together to leverage our diverse expertise and perspectives, the MPA FAC advises the Departments of Commerce and Interior on important emerging issues facing the nation's 1,700 marine protected areas (MPAs). Conserving some of the nation's most treasured and intensively used coastal and marine waters, these special places are valued by coastal communities and tourists alike, and, increasingly, by the nation as a whole. Ensuring the sustainable use of these special places is of paramount importance.

In June 2012, the Departments of Commerce and Interior gave the MPA FAC several charges. We are at work on these charges and plan to complete our full recommendations in June 2014. We write now regarding one of the charges: to advise on the role of MPAs for recreation and tourism. We know that recreation and tourism is an issue of great interest to both Departments and note that sustainable recreation and tourism is highlighted as a priority in the National Ocean Policy. We write to inform you of our ongoing work on this charge, and to recommend two important initial steps for the Departments of Commerce and Interior to support sustainable recreational use of MPAs.

Coastal communities around the U.S. are growing rapidly. At the same time, coastal areas are fast becoming destinations for an expanding suite of recreational uses including fishing, surfing, kayaking, whale watching, diving, beachcombing, discovery and spiritual reflection. Many of these human uses occur in MPAs – affirming the wide range of social and economic benefits that MPAs provide. A recent informal survey of MPA managers, conducted by the MPA FAC and the National Marine Protected Areas Center, indicates that marine recreational uses are occurring and expanding in most MPAs, often in ways and with impacts not anticipated by existing management plans and approaches. This comports with our own experience and with other information that MPAs are drawing an increasing number of recreational users and that MPA managers face many real challenges managing this increased recreational interest.

Clearly, growing recreational uses in MPAs hold tremendous promise for sustained human health, fitness and well-being, economic prosperity, and a deeper human connection to the

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natural world. However, the expansion in recreational use can pose challenges and risks to these special places if not anticipated and managed appropriately. Providing tools to recognize and sustain the social and economic benefits associated with recreational uses while ensuring the sustainable management of MPAs is a key focus of the MPA FAC's work on recreation and tourism. To that end, the MPA FAC is developing a set of guiding principles and best management practices for sustainable recreational use in MPAs. Developed with input from practitioners, stakeholders and scientists, these guidelines will help MPA agencies find the balance between use and sustainability. These guidelines will be included in our recommendations to you in June 2014.

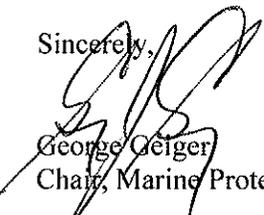
Based on this work, we believe that the Departments of Commerce and Interior – as stewards of many of the nation's special ocean places - can advance the goal of ensuring sustainable use of MPAs in the United States by undertaking two important initial steps:

1. Identify recreational use as a priority issue for NOAA and DOI MPA programs with a focus on enhancing recreational use while conserving natural and cultural resources and values of MPAs throughout the nation. Encourage agencies to actively engage and provide technical support and leadership to federal, regional and local initiatives focused on increasing sustainable tourism and recreation to coastal areas of the U.S. (e.g. America's Great Outdoors, the National Travel and Tourism Initiative, the Federal Interagency Council on Outdoor Recreation, etc.).
2. Support the National Marine Protected Areas Center's ongoing efforts to build the information foundation for managing human uses in MPAs through a rigorous nationwide survey of MPA managers to collect information on the patterns, trends, opportunities and concerns about growing recreational uses within the nation's special places.

As we humans return to the sea in increasing numbers, we hold in our hands the potential to ensure that the benefits of ocean recreation are both encouraged and sustainably managed for generations to come.

We look forward to working with you both on these timely and exciting issues.

Sincerely,

  
George Geiger  
Chair, Marine Protected Areas Federal Advisory Committee

cc. Dr. Kathryn Sullivan, Under Secretary for Oceans and Atmosphere (DOC)  
Eileen Sobeck, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Insular Areas (DOI)  
Mark Schaefer, Deputy Under Secretary for Conservation and Management (DOC)  
Lauren Wenzel, Committee Designated Federal Official, National Marine Protected Areas Center (DOC/NOAA)  
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