

# MAKING MARINE PROTECTED AREAS RELEVANT TO A DIVERSE PUBLIC

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MARINE PROTECTED AREAS FEDERAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS  
SEPTEMBER 2017

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Coastal, ocean, and Great Lakes communities and resource user groups are the traditional target audiences for MPA (Marine Protected Area) literature and programs. Having a vested interest in MPAs, these groups often express pointed opinions about these areas, both pro and con. While continued engagement of these groups is paramount to the success of MPAs, the Departments of Commerce (DOC) and Interior (DOI) should continue to engage in dialogue with an ever-widening range of the American public to enhance awareness of MPAs, show the benefits and effectiveness of these areas, and demonstrate that they are established and managed on behalf of all Americans.

### **DOC and DOI Charge on Making MPAs Relevant to a Diverse Public**

Like the nation's public lands, our waters and their resources are managed on behalf of all Americans. How can we engage new and broader audiences in conserving America's important ocean and Great Lakes places? This will include learning from the National Park Service's Centennial efforts to engage new audiences.

MPA is an umbrella term describing marine- and Great Lakes-based conservation areas established and managed by local, state and federal government. There is no national template of how an MPA is created and managed. They can be created at all levels of government using a variety of processes, which has, at times, led to confusion and criticism of these processes by some members of the public. Each MPA is unique and is part of a system that is crafted to address individual site characteristics and management needs. While there are many stakeholder groups that are aware of and vocal about MPAs and their value, a majority of the American public has little or no knowledge of what MPAs are and why they are important. By increasing public awareness of MPAs, a greater understanding of their value and a stronger desire to more actively steward and protect these places may follow.

The MPA FAC's initial response to this charge is summarized below. Additional detail on the rationale, need and specific recommended agency actions follow in the Action Agenda on Engaging a More Diverse Public.

## RECOMMENDATIONS ON ENGAGING A MORE DIVERSE PUBLIC

### Summary of MPA Federal Advisory Committee Recommendations

We urge the Departments of Commerce and Interior and their MPA programs to promptly:

1. Conduct a comprehensive accounting and assessment of the current MPA outreach programs in the United States.
2. Consider the National Marine Sanctuary Programs, the California MPA Collaborative Network Program, and the National Park Services' Centennial Program as national models for community engagement.
3. Reach out to new and different audiences to better understand shared goals.
4. Create an easy to understand, consistent messaging template to demystify MPAs and MPA creation.
5. Include Tribes and individuals of Native heritage in the planning and decision making process in MPA establishment, management and use.

### FINDINGS

**Finding 1: There is no comprehensive listing or assessment of the effectiveness of MPA outreach programs for the coastal states, territories, and commonwealths in the United States.** Several programs are identified in the appendix, but this is by no means a comprehensive inventory of those activities. An all-inclusive list and comprehensive assessment would be informative and lead to more effective and efficient management of these resources.

**Finding 2: There are successful models for community-based education, outreach, management, and implementation of MPAs.** At the federal level, NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (ONMS) has established advisory councils that advise and assist the national marine sanctuary manager in the execution of critical duties. The National Park Service (NPS) Centennial Program focuses on connecting diverse audiences to public lands. The State of California has recently endorsed a unique program entitled the "California MPA Collaborative Network Program," which is made up of 14 county-based Collaboratives with a diverse membership to assist with education, outreach, management, and implementation of California's network of MPAs.

**Finding 3: MPA managers face great opportunities and challenges in engaging new and broader audiences in an ever-more interconnected world.** On-line technologies and social media provide versatile platforms from which information and messaging can be focused on specific groups, or be broadcast more generally to a wide spectrum of different interest groups. While some segments of the American public are not currently being addressed by MPA

managers, there are proven tools in place to enhance engagement that should be acknowledged and used as models for greater engagement of the diverse American public.

**Finding 4: There is confusion, and at times animosity, surrounding MPA creation and management caused by the myriad MPA names and activities prohibited or allowed and the feeling by some of disenfranchisement of user groups in the establishment and management of MPAs.** This reality demonstrates the need for expanded outreach to more thoroughly inform a broader segment of the public and all stakeholders about what MPAs are, why and how they are established, what they require to be properly managed, and how to comply with any new regulations that may accompany their establishment. The most important requirement for this outreach is to identify mechanisms that are effective at reaching a broad cross-section of different American communities.

**Finding 5: It appears that the engagement of America’s first peoples and the original stewards and protectors of our nation’s lands and waters is minimal. Lack of collaboration and sharing of information with them about MPAs, or requesting their input in the establishment and management of MPAs, is apparent.** As sovereign nations within a nation, Indian Tribes have a unique government-to-government relationship with Federal agencies in which the U.S. government has a fiduciary “trust responsibility” and a “duty of protection” that extends to our shared natural environment. Individual members of federally- and state-recognized Tribal communities possess traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) regarding the stewardship of our oceans and have information that must be part of the adaptive management strategies that guide our resource management decisions and policies. Lack of Tribal engagement is a missed opportunity to engage diverse Native American cultures and incorporate Tribal knowledge and information into the management of the national MPA program.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

To accomplish the charge, certain actions are recommended based on information and findings obtained through the subcommittee’s preliminary research.

**Recommendation 1: The MPA Center should conduct a comprehensive accounting and assessment of the current MPA outreach programs in the United States.** This would be a tremendous resource and could be completed within a reasonable amount of time, given sufficient staff and/or consultant resources. Such a document would lead to more effective and efficient communication about MPAs to a more diverse American public, which, ultimately would improve and enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of their stewardship and management.

**Recommendation 2: Consider national models for community engagement regarding MPA education, outreach, management, and implementation, including the National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Councils, the California MPA Collaboratives Network, and the National Park Service’s Centennial Program.** The 13 national marine sanctuaries and two ONMS co-

managed marine national monuments have advisory councils that provide valuable information to and assistance with the management of these areas' natural and cultural resources and their public outreach programming. The California MPA Collaborative Network is a statewide program, organized regionally, to provide on-the-ground assistance with education, outreach, management, and implementation of the 139 MPAs in California State waters. Both of these programs are examples of efficient and cost-effective ways to help provide outreach to a cross-section of each affected community to achieve federal, state, and local resource protection objectives. The success of the NPS Centennial Program has been achieved through the development of new initiatives and enhancements to existing programs that have been focused on one central goal: to connect with and create the next generation of park visitors, supporters, and advocates. The Centennial's "Find Your Park" message has reached hundreds of millions of Americans and advanced the NPS mission by providing new opportunities for visitors to share their own experiences exploring our nation's parks, trails, heritage areas, and public lands. The NPS' comprehensive strategic plan, "Call to Action," and Centennial Program are preparing the NPS for its next century of service. They focus on a course of action designed to achieve long-term relevancy and sustained viability of National Parks.

**Recommendation 3: The MPA Center and MPA managers should reach out to new and different audiences to better understand shared goals.** Communication and consultation to develop a better understanding of the shared goals of diverse interest groups and the MPA program will help foster and inform the development of more-focused engagement programs that are better able to reach a broader and more diverse American public. This can be achieved initially by working with community-based groups, with additional measures identified and added to help engage other audiences.

**Recommendation 4: The MPA Center, MPA managers and community-based MPA leadership should work on messaging to demystify MPAs and the MPA establishment process.** Improved communication, inclusion, transparency, and understanding are extremely important when dealing with a diverse American public, particularly those user groups that have been negatively affected by the creation of an MPA.

**Recommendation 5: A focused effort to engage and request the participation of Indian Tribes and their individual members is needed as we collectively learn about MPAs. Tribes and individuals of Native heritage should be part of the planning and decision making process in MPA establishment, management, and use.** Native American Tribes and their individual members, who are also American citizens, are important elements of America's diverse public. It is crucially important that their engagement is sought. As descendants of those who are the original inhabitants of this country's lands since time immemorial, who developed and maintained TEK and stewardship practices that supported and sustained human populations for thousands of years prior to America's European colonization, Native peoples have valuable lessons to share from their traditional perspectives and Native stewardship and management practices that would be applicable to multiple types of resources found within MPAs.

As resource managers with unceded inherent rights, and a responsibility to continue to steward and gather marine resources within their ancestral waters, it is critical that Tribes play an integral role in the manner in which data about resource and habitat health is gathered, analyzed, disseminated, and used to inform policy and management. This includes TEK, as well as “Western ecological knowledge” (WEK), or “Western science.” Tribal customary harvesters have an intimate knowledge and understanding of certain places and the ways in which these places and the resources therein may be changing.<sup>1</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

Engaging new and broader audiences in the stewardship of America’s important ocean and Great Lakes places will require effective communication, focused outreach, and increased utilization of the inventory of public outreach programs currently available. The Departments of Commerce and Interior should look beyond the traditional coastal communities and user groups to focus efforts on bringing the MPA message to an ever-widening range of the American public to enhance awareness of MPAs, expand the understanding of their importance, and demonstrate that they are established and managed on behalf of all Americans.

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<sup>1</sup> Informing the North Coast MPA Baseline: Traditional Ecological Knowledge of Keystone Species and Ecosystems

## APPENDIX 1. LIST OF SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS AND STAFF

### **MPA FAC Members**

John Ballotti, Chair  
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## **APPENDIX 2. CURRENT OUTREACH PROGRAMS AND EFFORTS TO INFORM THE PUBLIC**

[Click here](#) for an overview of some of the MPA outreach programs we have identified throughout the nation that have been established by federal, state, and local agencies, academia, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector.