



**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
NATIONAL OCEAN SERVICE  
**Office of National Marine Sanctuaries**  
1305 East-West Highway  
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

January 2013

Dear Marine Protected Areas Manager:

Special places in the ocean -- marine protected areas -- are critical to America's future, sustaining our natural systems, the local economies they support, and our cultural connections to the sea. I am writing to invite your program's participation in the National System of Marine Protected Areas. Established in 2009, the national system connects and strengthens the nation's diverse marine protected areas, providing opportunities for us all to work together on shared priorities, as called for by Executive Order 13158. Details on the national system are provided in the *Framework for the National System of Marine Protected Areas of the United States of America*, (<http://www.mpa.gov/nationalsystem/framework/>).

Currently, a total of 355 federal, state, territorial and partnership sites are participating in the national system. Through the national system, marine protected area programs have opportunities to collaborate on ocean management initiatives; raise awareness of marine protected areas and the ocean resources they conserve; support targeted regional science and stewardship initiatives; receive training and technical assistance; and build regional marine protected area networks.

The National Marine Protected Areas Center coordinates the national system and maintains the national Marine Protected Areas Inventory, built from data provided by federal and state programs. Based on an analysis of this data, the MPA Center has determined that the sites listed in the attached Program Summary Sheet are potentially eligible for the national system. This nomination package and the list of potentially eligible sites are available electronically at <http://www.mpa.gov/nationalsystem/nominationprocess/>

Any MPA in US waters must meet three criteria to be eligible for the national system: (1) fit the definition of an MPA; (2) have a management plan that has clear goals and objectives and calls for monitoring and evaluation of those goals; (3) contribute to at least one priority conservation objective of the national system as described in the Framework. In addition, cultural heritage MPAs must meet additional cultural heritage requirements.

**If you would like to nominate some or all of these sites to the national system, please complete the attached nomination form and submit it by March 29, 2013.** We have determined that the attached list of potentially eligible sites for your program (Program Summary Sheets) meet criteria #1 and #2. If you believe that they also meet criterion #3 (and cultural heritage requirements, if applicable), please confirm that as well by submitting the attached checklist (fillable PDF). Nomination checklists should be sent to Jordan Gass ([Jordan.Gass@noaa.gov](mailto:Jordan.Gass@noaa.gov)).

Accurate and current information is essential for effective MPA planning and management. So please review your Program Summary Sheet and verify that it is correct. Any necessary corrections can be made by requesting an excel spreadsheet of data for your program.

The MPA Center will host a webinar on February 21, 2013 from 2:00-3:00 EST to discuss the function and benefits of the national system, explain the nomination process and answer any questions. Please have interested staff contact me to participate in the call, or with specific questions about the nomination process or the national system. I can be reached at 301-713-7265 or [lauren.wenzel@noaa.gov](mailto:lauren.wenzel@noaa.gov).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lauren Wenzel', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Lauren Wenzel  
Acting Director  
National Marine Protected Areas Center

Attachments:

- Nomination Process Fact Sheet
- Checklist for Evaluating Whether Existing Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) Meet Priority Conservation Objectives for the National System of MPAs (in PDF and Excel)
- Instructions and Definitions Sheet for Checklist
- Definitions of Terms for Program Summary Sheet – Potentially Eligible MPAs for the National System of MPAs
- Joining the National System of MPAs: Frequently Asked Questions
- Link to List of Potentially Eligible MPAs for the National System of MPAs (Program Summary Sheets)

# THE NATIONAL SYSTEM OF MARINE PROTECTED AREAS: NOMINATION PROCESS

[www.mpa.gov](http://www.mpa.gov)

## ABOUT THE NATIONAL SYSTEM OF MPAS

Special places in the ocean -- marine protected areas -- are critical to America's future, sustaining our natural systems, the local economies they support, and our cultural connections to the sea. The U.S. is building a national system of marine protected areas (MPAs) to connect and strengthen the nation's diverse marine protected areas. The national system will include eligible existing MPAs across all levels of government that have chosen to work together on shared conservation priorities. Recognizing that an MPA system is greater than the sum of its parts, these programs collaborate to strengthen conservation of the nation's natural and cultural marine heritage and represent its diverse ecosystems and resources. For frequently asked questions about the national system and other information, see [www.mpa.gov](http://www.mpa.gov).

## NOMINATION PROCESS FOR EXISTING SITES TO JOIN THE NATIONAL SYSTEM

The nomination process for the National System of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) is transparent, science-based, and provides an opportunity for public comment. The National Marine Protected Areas Center is responsible for the technical review of nominations.

All sites must meet three entry criteria to be eligible for the national system:

1. Meets the definition of an MPA as defined in the *Framework for the National System of Marine Protected Areas of the United States of America*.
2. Has a management plan (can be site-specific or part of a broader programmatic management plan; plan must include site goals/objectives and monitoring and evaluation of those goals/objectives).
3. Contributes to at least one priority conservation objective as listed in the Framework

In addition, cultural heritage MPAs must meet additional cultural heritage requirements.

The MPA Center will use existing information to determine which sites meet the first two criteria. These identified sites are potentially eligible MPAs. The managing entities of potentially eligible MPAs will be sent a nomination package and invited to nominate some or all of their potentially eligible sites for inclusion in the national system. To do so, they will be asked to document how each nominated MPA meets criterion number three above (and cultural heritage requirements, if relevant).

## ENSURING PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The list of nominated sites will be available for public comment. The public will be notified through a *Federal Register* notice, information on [www.mpa.gov](http://www.mpa.gov), and other outreach. The MPA Center will receive, evaluate and forward public comment to the relevant managing entity, which will then reaffirm or withdraw the nomination based on public comment received and other factors deemed relevant. After final MPA Center review, mutually agreed upon MPAs will be accepted into the national system.



Currently, the national system includes 355 sites representing three federal programs, multiple programs within 12 states and territories, and one partnership program. MPAs newly accepted into the national system will be publicly announced and added to the official List of National System MPAs, which will be made available to the public via the *Federal Register*, the website [www.mpa.gov](http://www.mpa.gov), and other means.

*The Nation's Hub for Building Innovative Partnerships and Tools to Protect Special Ocean Places*

[www.mpa.gov](http://www.mpa.gov)



## DRAFT TIMELINE FOR NOMINATION PROCESS:

### JANUARY 2013:

MPA Center sends out nomination packages to federal, state and territorial MPA managing entities with potentially eligible existing sites.

### MARCH 2013:

Nomination forms due

### APRIL 2013:

MPA Center makes list of nominated national system MPAs available for public review; notice in *Federal Register* and on [www.mpa.gov](http://www.mpa.gov).

### MAY 2013:

MPA Center and managing entities review public comments received. Managing entities make final determination about which sites to nominate.

MPA Center reviews final nominations to ensure criteria are met.

### JUNE 2013:

MPA Center notifies the managing entities of accepted sites. NOAA and DOI make announcement of sites to join the National System of MPAs. Official List of National System sites posted on [www.mpa.gov](http://www.mpa.gov).



For more information on the National System of Marine Protected Areas, visit [www.mpa.gov](http://www.mpa.gov).

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# Checklist for Evaluating Whether Existing Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) Meet Priority Conservation Objectives For The National System of MPAs

*To be filled out by managing programs based on existing knowledge and information.*

*Please refer to the provided instructions for more information.*

**Site Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Contact Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Contact Number:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Contact Email:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Contact Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Site Legal Authority:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Secondary Legal Authority:** \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Priority Conservation Objectives (PCOs)</b> Conserve and Manage:	(1) <b>Presence:</b> Site Contains the PCO?	(2) <b>Goals:</b> Site Management Goals or Objectives Address the PCO?	(3) <b>Tools:</b> Site Has Protection or Regulations That Benefit the PCO?	(4) <b>Citation for Regulation in Column 3</b>	(5) <b>Information Source:</b> Site Manager, URL, etc.) Insert (A thru G)
<b>Natural Heritage</b>					
Key reproduction areas and nursery grounds	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Key biogenic habitats	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Areas of high species and/or high diversity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Ecologically important geological features and enduring/recurring oceanographic features	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Critical habitat of threatened and endangered species	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Unique or rare species, habitats and associated communities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Key areas for migratory species	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Linked areas important to life histories	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Key areas that provide compatible opportunities for education and research	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
<b>Cultural Heritage</b>					
Key cultural and historic resources listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Key cultural historic resources determined eligible for the NRHP or listed on a State Register	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Key cultural sites that are paramount to a culture's identity and/or survival	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Key cultural and historic sites that may be threatened	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Key cultural and historic sites that can be utilized for heritage tourism	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Key cultural and historic sites that are under-represented	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
<b>Sustainable Production</b>					
Key reproduction areas, including larval sources and nursery grounds	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Key areas that sustain or restore high priority fishing grounds	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Key areas for maintaining natural age/sex structure of important harvestable species	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Key foraging grounds	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Key areas that mitigate the impacts of bycatch	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Key areas that provide compatible opportunities for education and research	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		

Legend for (5) Information Sources (Indicate all that apply A-G)	
A. Site Management Plan	E. Program Web Site
B. Code of Federal Regulations	F. Scientific Paper(s)
C. Code of State Regulations	G. Other
D. Site Manager	

Note: The National Marine Protected Areas Center has reviewed the MPA Inventory and provided a list of potentially eligible sites to MPA Programs to invite them to nominate these sites by submitting this checklist. Potentially eligible sites are those that meet the criteria for 1) meeting the definition of an MPA; and 2) having a management plan. See attached instructions for details on completing this checklist for the priority conservation objectives component.

**Instructions and Definitions**  
**Checklist for Evaluating Whether Existing Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)**  
**Meet Priority Conservation Objectives of the National System of MPAs**

**January 2013**

The National Marine Protected Area Center (MPA Center) invites you to complete the enclosed checklist for your program's potentially eligible marine protected area(s) (MPA) for nomination of the site(s) into the National System of MPAs. A list of sites that the MPA Center has determined to meet most of the national system eligibility criteria has been enclosed with this nomination package. This checklist requests information on the remaining eligibility criteria, contribution to the national system's priority conservation objectives. One checklist should be submitted for each site that the Program wishes to nominate.

The checklist should be completed by the managing agency of the MPA, in consultation with any other entities with management responsibilities for that site. The managing agency has the ultimate responsibility for nominating their sites to the national system. Non-governmental organizations or members of the public wishing to nominate sites will be referred to the managing agency.

The deadline for nominations is March 29, 2013. (A nomination process will be held annually.) For further information about the National System of MPAs please refer to the *Framework for Developing the National System of Marine Protected Areas of the United States of America (November 2008)*, posted at [http://www.mpa.gov/pdf/national-system/finalframework\\_full.pdf](http://www.mpa.gov/pdf/national-system/finalframework_full.pdf)

For questions about completing the checklist please contact Jordan Gass at 831-647-6464 or [Jordan.Gass@noaa.gov](mailto:Jordan.Gass@noaa.gov).

**Instructions for completing the Priority Conservation Objectives Checklist**

- Please read all instructions carefully and refer to the definitions below for further clarification.
- The checklist is attached as a fillable PDF. Please fill out the checklist in the PDF format, save your changes, and email the form to: [Jordan.Gass@noaa.gov](mailto:Jordan.Gass@noaa.gov). If you have problems with the PDF form, please fill out the checklist in the attached Excel spreadsheet and email the Excel format.
- Please fill in the name of the site. Use a separate checklist for each site.
- Please fill in your name or the name of the appropriate contact person regarding the site and the answers on the checklist.
- Please fill in the telephone number and email for the contact person

- Legal Authority: Please provide the name of the primary legislation under which the site was designated. If a site was established as part of a larger system (e.g. National Marine Sanctuaries), the primary legislation should refer to the umbrella authority (e.g. National Marine Sanctuaries Act) for that system.
- Secondary Legal Authority: If there is an additional statute or act that designated the site, provide this specific statute as the secondary authority. Secondary authority may also include regulations that authorized establishment of a site.
- Mark an **X** in each box where your answer to the question in columns (1)-(3) is a YES,
  - **X = Yes**
- Leave the box blank if the answer to the question in columns (1)-(3) is a NO.
  - leave blank = **No**
- For column (5) please enter letter(s) A-G. A legend is provided on the checklist for descriptions of A-G.
  - A. Site Management Plan
  - B. Code of Federal Regulations
  - C. Code of State Regulations
  - D. Site Manager
  - E. Program Web Site
  - F. Scientific Paper(s)
  - G. Other

### **Column Definitions**

**Note:** The Program must answer “YES” to questions 1, 2, and 3 to meet the eligibility criteria for contributing to a PCO. Question 4 provides additional information about the site to the MPA Center. Information on your Program’s sites is a very valuable addition to the MPA Inventory. Even if you are not able to answer “YES” to all three questions, please answer the questions for each PCO in relation to your site.

**(1) PRESENCE: Site Contains the PCO?** Referencing the Priority Conservation Objective (PCO) definitions below, are there geographic areas within the site boundary that meet the definition described by the PCO? If the site meets this PCO mark an X for YES. If the site does not meet the PCO leave the space blank.

**(2) GOALS: Site Management Goals or Objectives Address the PCO?** If the site management goals and/or objectives explicitly focus on the PCO mark an X for YES. If the site does not meet the PCO leave the space blank.

**(3) TOOLS: Site has Protection or Regulations that Benefit the PCO?** If the site has protections or regulations of your program that directly target the PCO mark an X for YES. If there are no such protections or regulations, leave the space blank. Your answer should reflect the protections and regulations established by your program for your site, not other authorities that may occur within your site. Do not answer YES if your site is protected by the regulations of another agency. For example, if a National Marine Sanctuary formally adopts a state or federal fisheries regulation, then the site should answer YES to relevant PCOs for this question because those regulations are part of its program. However, if the regulation has not been formally adopted by the Sanctuary but applies there, the answer should be NO. As another example, if regulations for a National Estuarine Research Reserve are resource specific, rather than site-specific, but are formally networked and referenced in the designation document for the reserve or some other subsequent legal authority, then the answer for the relevant PCOs would be YES. Education and research programs are non-regulatory and are therefore non-applicable.

**(4) Citation for Regulation in Column 3.** If you answered YES in column 3, cite the federal or state regulation here.

**(5) Information Source (Insert A-G, reference legend provided).** What is the most applicable information source for this PCO within your site that the Marine Protected Area Center should reference? (Indicate all that apply.)

- A. Site Management Plan
- B. Code of Federal Regulations
- C. Code of State Regulations
- D. Site Manager
- E. Program Web Site
- F. Scientific Paper(s)
- G. Other

## Priority Conservation Objective Definitions

*Note: The intent of these definitions is to be broad enough to encompass a diversity of areas within the marine, coastal and estuarine environments. Many definitions are intended to overlap.*

**Key** is defined as controlling or important. When considering the objective, an area is “key” if it directly controls or is important to the objective named.

**Goal 1: For Natural Heritage Marine Resources** - Advance comprehensive conservation and management of the nation’s biological communities, habitats, ecosystems, and processes, and the ecological services, uses, and values they provide to present and future generations through ecosystem-based MPA approaches.

### Priority Conservation Objectives for Goal 1: Conserve and manage:

- **Key reproduction areas and nursery grounds:** These areas may include marine, estuarine, and coastal sites where resting, hauling-out, mating, spawning, loafing, feeding, or foraging take place that is important to marine species reproduction and nursery behaviors such as mating, rearing, feeding, weaning, etc.
- **Key biogenic habitats:** Habitat created by a living organism. Some examples include sea grasses, macroalgae, ascidians, sponges, bivalve reefs, corals, hydrothermal vents and kelp forests.
- **Areas of high species and/or habitat diversity:** Areas that have high species diversity or habitat diversity within the marine, coastal and estuarine environments. Species diversity is defined as a variety of species present in a given area. Habitat diversity is defined as a variety of habitats present in a given area.
- **Ecologically important geological features and enduring/recurring oceanographic features:** Ecologically important geological formations within the marine, estuarine and coastal environment and oceanographic features that are relatively consistent in form and location. Marine or coastal geologic features can include, but are not limited to, seamounts, banks, canyons, and rocky outcrops. Ecologically important enduring/recurring oceanographic features can include, but are not limited to currents, transition zones and water masses.
- **Critical habitat of threatened and endangered species:** Defined as a habitat type or location that is critical or essential to a threatened or endangered species as defined by the Endangered Species Act.

- ***Unique or rare species, habitats and associated communities:*** Associated communities can mean any marine, coastal or estuarine area that supports a unique or rare species or habitat.
- ***Key areas for migratory species:*** Areas that have been identified or are thought to be important to migratory species (including fish, birds, mammals, etc).
- ***Linked areas important to life histories:*** Linked areas are those locations a species might use at different life stages that are important to the maintenance of a particular species' life cycle and should be protected as a network.
- ***Key areas that provide compatible opportunities for education and research:*** Areas that are important to education and research can include but are not limited to formal and informal education, interpretation and study locations.

**Goal 2: For Cultural Heritage Marine Resources** - Advance comprehensive conservation and management of 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 to present and future generations through ecosystem-based MPA approaches. Under the cultural heritage goal, only MPAs with submerged cultural heritage resources are eligible for the national system. Cultural resources associated with the marine environment that are not submerged, such as lighthouses, are not included within this definition.

**Priority Conservation Objectives for Goal 2 – Conserve and manage:**

- ***Key cultural and historic resources listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP).*** The resource(s) is (are) listed on the NRHP. Standards developed by the National Park Service for inclusion of a cultural resource in the National Register of Historical Places (NRHP) require that the cultural marine resources within those MPAs must be historic, defined as at least 50 years of age, unless otherwise determined to be unique to the nation's maritime history or traditional connections to the sea as defined by the NRHP. In addition, the resources must also meet the following NRHP evaluation criteria:

*“The quality of significance in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and:*

*A. That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or*

*B. That are associated with the lives of significant persons in our past; or*

*C. That embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or*

*D. That have yielded or may be likely to yield, information important in history or prehistory.”*

- ***Key cultural and historic resources determined eligible for the NRHP or listed on a State Register.*** If the cultural or historic resource(s) is (are) determined eligible for the NRHP or is listed on the State Register. This determination is made by the State Historic Preservation Officer. See criteria for the NRHP listed under the bullet above.
- ***Key cultural sites that are paramount to a culture’s identity and/or survival.*** Sites determined by a culture to be paramount to that culture’s identity and/or survival. This includes sacred places identified by tribal or community officials representing Native Americans, Pacific Islanders, or Native Alaskans. Federally recognized tribes have a Tribal Historic Preservation Officer who may be responsible for this determination.
- ***Key cultural and historic sites that may be threatened.*** A cultural and/or historic site that is threatened by anthropogenic or natural harm.
- ***Key cultural and historic sites that can be utilized for heritage tourism.*** A site that can be used for tourism about cultural and/or historic heritage.
- ***Key cultural and historic sites that are underrepresented.*** If a particular cultural and/or historic sites is underrepresented within the National System. This objective will be used to guide gap analysis for cultural resources, and once there are cultural resource sites within the national system, to review them for representativeness.

**Goal 3: For Sustainable Production Marine Resources** - Advance comprehensive conservation and management of the nation's renewable living resources and their habitats (including, but not limited to, spawning, mating, and nursery grounds, and areas established to minimize incidental bycatch of species) and the social, cultural, and economic values and services they provide to present and future generations through ecosystem-based MPA approaches.

**Priority Conservation Objectives for Goal 3 – Conserve and manage:**

- ***Key reproduction areas, including larval sources and nursery grounds*** These areas may include, marine, estuarine, and coastal sites where resting, hauling-out, mating, spawning, loafing, feeding, or foraging take place that is important to marine species reproduction and nursery behaviors such as mating, rearing, feeding, weaning, etc.
- ***Key areas that sustain or restore high priority fishing grounds.*** Areas that have been determined to be vital to maintaining or bringing back high priority fishing grounds. High priority fishing grounds are determined by historic catch data, scientific study, or expert knowledge.
- ***Key areas for maintaining natural age/sex structure of important harvestable species.*** The natural age and sex structure of species can be altered by fishing effort. This refers to areas that are important to maintain or restore this structure. Important harvestable species are those species harvested for consumption or for the economic market.
- ***Key foraging grounds.*** Important foraging grounds that have been determined to be valuable as feeding areas for resource production.
- ***Key areas that mitigate the impacts of bycatch.*** Bycatch is the unintentional or unanticipated take of non-targeted species or individuals. These areas are important for decreasing the impacts of bycatch within the marine, coastal, and estuarine environments.
- ***Key areas that provide compatible opportunities for education and research.*** Areas that are important to education and research can include, but are not limited, to formal and informal education, interpretation, and study locations.

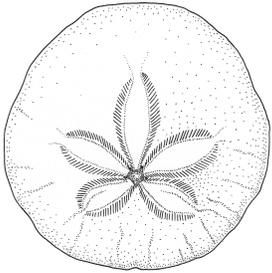
# JOINING THE NATIONAL SYSTEM OF MPAs: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

[www.mpa.gov](http://www.mpa.gov)

## ***What is the national system of marine protected areas?***

The national system of marine protected areas (MPAs) includes MPA sites, networks and systems established and managed by federal, state, tribal and/or local governments that have chosen to work together on shared conservation priorities. Recognizing that an MPA system is greater than the sum of its parts, these programs collaborate to strengthen conservation of the nation's natural and cultural marine heritage and represent its diverse ecosystems and resources. National System MPAs are managed independently, but work together at the regional and national levels to achieve common objectives.

## ***Why do we need a national system of marine protected areas?***



Over the past century, over 1,700 MPAs have been created in U.S. waters by a mix of federal, state, and local legislation, voter initiatives, and regulations, each established for its own specific purpose.

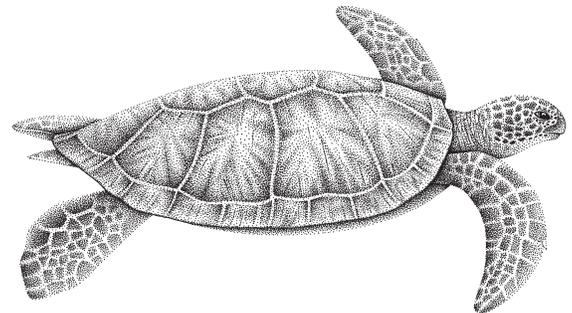
As a result, the nation's collection of MPAs (parks, reserves, refuges, preserves, sanctuaries and others) is fragmented and complex. The national system provides new opportunities for broader regional and national marine conservation through coordinated planning and new partnerships. In 2000, a broad coalition of scientists petitioned the White House to create a national system of MPAs to improve conservation of the nation's marine ecosystems, cultural resources, and fisheries. Presidential Executive Order 13158 was signed on May 26, 2000, directing the Department of Commerce to work with the Department of the Interior, other federal agencies, states, territories and stakeholders to establish a national system of MPAs to integrate and enhance the nation's MPAs, bringing these diverse sites and programs together to work on common conservation objectives.

## ***How do I know if my site is an MPA?***

A marine protected area is defined by Executive Order 13158 as "an 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 key terms within this definition (marine, area, reserved, lasting, and protection) have been further defined, with public review and participation, within the Framework for the National System of Marine Protected Areas of the United States of America (Framework), available at [www.mpa.gov](http://www.mpa.gov). MPAs include sites with a wide range of protection, from multiple use areas to no take reserves. The term MPA refers only to the marine portion of a site (below the mean high tide mark), and also includes aquatic areas in the Great Lakes.

## ***How does an MPA become part of the national system?***

Eligible MPAs can become part of the national system by applying to the National Marine Protected Areas Center through their managing agency. The current nomination process is open until March 29, 2013. To be eligible for the national system, a site must meet three criteria: (1) fit the definition of an MPA; (2) have a management plan that has clear goals and objectives and calls for monitoring and evaluation of those goals; and (3) contribute to at least one priority conservation objective of the national system as described in the Framework. In addition, cultural heritage MPAs must meet additional cultural heritage requirements.



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[www.mpa.gov](http://www.mpa.gov)



**What are the benefits of joining the national system?**

Benefits of joining the system include the opportunity to work with other MPAs in the region and nationally on issues of common conservation concern; greater public and international recognition of MPAs and the resources they protect; and greater opportunities to participate in and influence federal and regional ocean conservation and management initiatives (such as integrated ocean observing systems, including MPAs on navigational charts, and highlighting MPA research needs). In addition, the national system provides a venue for coordinated regional planning about place-based conservation priorities, as well as an opportunity to engage stakeholders on MPA issues beyond those of a specific site. It will leverage scarce resources toward cross-cutting management needs, and initiate collaborative science and technical projects to support conservation priorities. Moreover, managing MPAs as a system will improve ecological viability by helping agencies and communities identify potential new sites that enhance connectivity among regional MPAs.

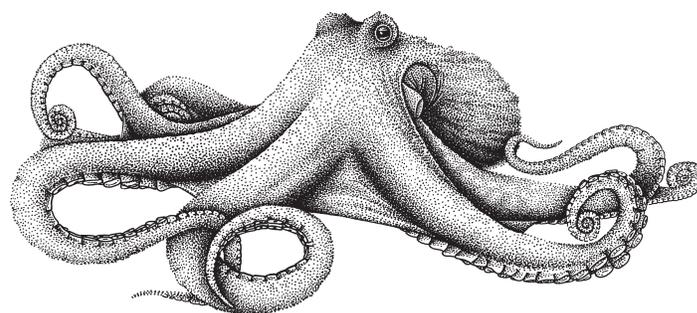


**My protected area spans terrestrial and marine habitats. Why isn't the whole site included within the national system?**

MPAs include only the marine portion of a protected area, as defined in the Framework. So the terrestrial part of the protected area is not considered an MPA and is not included within the national system. All figures on MPA area and GIS boundaries include only the marine portion of sites.

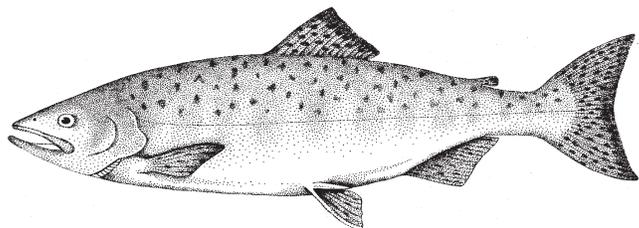
**What is the MPA Center's Role in the National System?**

What is the MPA Center's Role in the National System? The MPA Center does not manage any MPAs, but supports capacity building, stakeholder engagement, and provides information and tools to MPAs participating in the national system.



**Will joining the national system restrict the management of my protected area?**

No. The national system has no authority to restrict or change the management of any MPA. It does not bring tribal, state, territorial or local sites under federal authority. The system will provide technical assistance and help establish partnerships to enhance MPA stewardship.



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