

A USER'S GUIDE TO MARINE PROTECTED AREA TYPES AND TERMS

TOWARD A COMMON LANGUAGE OF MARINE PROTECTED AREAS

Faced with widespread declines in ocean health, many nations are turning to marine protected areas (MPAs) to protect their most important marine habitats and species. Familiar examples of MPAs in the U.S. include national marine sanctuaries, parks and wildlife refuges, fisheries closures, and many state parks and conservation areas. Although MPAs have long been used as a management tool by federal and state resource agencies, the nation still lacks a consistent and straightforward way to describe the many types of MPAs occurring in our waters or to understand how they affect marine ecosystems and associated human uses. For example, the official programmatic names of many U.S. MPAs rarely reflect an accurate picture of their actual purpose, use restrictions or impacts on users. Consequently, MPAs having similar names may differ fundamentally in their effectiveness in protecting the habitats and resources they encompass. An example of the widespread ambiguity in MPA terminology is the misperception that all MPAs are “no take”, when such areas are, in fact, extremely uncommon in the U.S.

The growing confusion over MPA terminology continues to complicate the critically important national dialogue about whether, when and how to use this promising management tool to sustain the health of the nation's marine ecosystems. In an attempt to clarify discussions about various MPA issues, the National MPA Center is using a set of simple definitions for common MPA types that are intended to provide an objective and intuitive way to understand, describe and constructively assess most MPAs found in the U.S.

WHAT IS AN MPA? THE U.S. DEFINITION

“Marine protected area” is a broad umbrella term that encompasses a wide variety of approaches to place-based management in the U.S. The *official federal definition* of an MPA derived from Executive Order 13158 is: “any area of the marine environment that has been reserved by Federal, State, tribal, territorial, or local laws or regulations to provide lasting protection for part or all of the natural and cultural resources therein”. Areas that restrict access for purposes other than conservation (e.g. security zones), and areas that are inaccessible logistically are not considered to be “marine protected areas”, although they may confer some conservation value.

In practice, MPAs are specific places in the ocean and the Great Lakes within which the natural and/or cultural resources are afforded a higher-level protection than in surrounding waters. Familiar examples of MPAs in the U.S. include national marine sanctuaries, parks, monuments and refuges, fisheries closures, endangered species' critical habitat, and a variety of state parks, conservation areas and reserves. They span a surprising range of habitats including areas in the open ocean, in coastal areas, in the inter-tidal zone, in estuaries and in the Great Lakes waters. MPAs in the U.S. also vary widely in their purpose, legal authorities, agencies and management approaches, level of protection and restrictions on human uses. To date, this diversity of MPA types and names severely complicates the ongoing national dialogue about how, when and where to use this tool to conserve and manage important habitats and species.

A SIMPLE WAY TO DESCRIBE ANY MPA

In an effort to better understand how MPAs are used in the U.S., the National MPA Center has developed a comprehensive system for classifying MPAs using six fundamental and objective characteristics that, together, reflect much about any site's purpose, management strategies and likely impacts on ecosystems and human users. This system is derived from those used by the IUCN, various state governments and non-governmental organizations. This classification system, which is primarily an analytical tool, provides the basis for a more straightforward and intuitive set of definitions for different types of MPAs that can be used by all parties interested in MPAs in the U.S. To this end, we

use two key characteristics that best reflect, and most influence, the design, management and impacts of any MPA in the United States.

- **Primary Conservation Goal** – why the MPA was created and what it seeks to achieve
- **Level Of Protection** – the types of human activity the MPA restricts and the nature of the protection afforded to its natural and cultural resources

When these characteristics are combined for any given MPA, the resulting intuitive description can be used by any interested party to understand, describe and evaluate both existing and proposed MPAs. Moreover, by highlighting goals and protection, the definition addresses many of the issues underlying the current policy discussions about how, when and where to use MPAs for conservation and management of marine ecosystems in the U.S.



EXPLANATION OF TERMS

PRIMARY CONSERVATION GOAL

While many MPAs in the US have multiple objectives, most are established by law to achieve a primary overarching conservation goal that reflects their statutory mandates, implementing regulations and management plans. The primary conservation goal also determines many fundamental aspects of the site’s design, location, size, scale and management strategies. Most MPAs in the U.S. fall into one of the following goal categories.

- **Natural Heritage MPAs** -- established and managed principally to sustain the protected area’s natural biological communities, habitats, ecosystems and processes, and the ecological services, uses and values they provide to this and future generations.

Applications: most national marine sanctuaries, national parks, national wildlife refuges, and many state MPAs.

- **Cultural Heritage MPAs** -- established and managed principally to protect, understand and interpret submerged cultural resources that reflect the nation’s maritime history and traditional cultural connections to the sea.

Applications: some marine sanctuaries, national and state parks and national historic monuments.

- **Sustainable Production MPAs** -- established and managed principally to support the continued sustainable extraction of renewable living resources (e.g. fish, shellfish, plants, birds or mammals) within or outside the MPA by protecting important habitat and spawning, mating or nursery grounds; or providing harvest refugia for by-catch species.

Applications: most federal and state fisheries MPAs and many national wildlife refuges.

LEVEL OF PROTECTION

The degree to which an MPA restricts human uses determines its impacts on both the ecosystem and the people who use it. MPAs in the U.S. vary widely in the level and type of protection provided by their legal authorities to the natural and

cultural resources they contain and to the ecosystems and natural processes that sustain them. Listed below are the two primary approaches to protection found in US MPAs.

□ **Multiple Use MPAs** -- MPAs that allow a variety of human activities that are managed comprehensively to support compatible uses while protecting key habitats and resources. Protections may apply only to certain uses or resources, and may be uniform across the MPA or allocated spatially and/or temporally through marine zoning to reduce user conflicts and minimize adverse impacts.

Applications: presently the most common type of MPA in the US, multiple use sites include most marine sanctuaries, national and state parks, and many fisheries and cultural resource MPAs.

□ **No Take MPAs** – MPAs, or zones within larger multiple use sites, that prohibit all extraction or destruction of natural or cultural resources within the MPA boundaries. Some may also restrict access and/or other activities that may adversely impact resources, processes, and qualities, or the ecological or cultural services they provide.

Applications: rare in the U.S., occurring mainly in state MPAs, and in some federal areas closed for either fisheries management or the protection of endangered species or as zones within a larger multiple use MPA.. No take MPAs are sometimes referred to as marine reserves or ecological reserves.

REAL-WORLD EXAMPLES OF EXISTING MPAs USING THE NEW DEFINITION

Following are some illustrative examples of how the proposed MPA definitions be applied to a variety of existing MPAs in U.S. waters, as well as to specifically delineated management zones within larger multiple use sites.

Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary: A multiple use, natural heritage MPA

MONITOR National Marine Sanctuary: A multiple use, cultural heritage MPA

Channel Islands National Park: A multiple use, natural heritage MPA

Research-Only Zone Within The Florida Keys NMS: a no take, natural heritage *zone* in a larger multiple use site

Gag Grouper Fisheries Closure in the Gulf of Mexico: a multiple use, sustainable production MPA

Marine Mammal Critical Habitat (generic): a no take, natural heritage MPA

Fisheries Closure (generic): a no take, sustainable production MPA

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