

## General Facts

# National Marine Protected Areas Center

## Silver Spring, Maryland

### Mission

The National Marine Protected Areas Center works closely with states, territories, regions, tribal trustees, and other stakeholders to improve understanding of marine protected areas (MPAs) in order to protect significant coastal marine resources for present and future generations.

The 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.



### How and When Was the National Marine Protected Areas Center Established?

The MPA Center was established in May 2000, by Executive Order number 13158, to strengthen the protection of U.S. ocean and coastal resources. The Executive Order directs federal agencies to conserve the nation's valuable marine resources through a variety of tasks, including working with public and private partners to significantly strengthen and expand the national system of MPAs. The MPA Center is headquartered within the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, which is part of the Department of Commerce.

### Objective

The MPA Center seeks to maintain the long term economic and environmental viability of the nation's oceans, coasts, and Great Lakes by protecting robust ecosystems and ensuring their continued use and value to society.

### What is a Marine Protected Area?

An MPA is any 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. Under this broad definition, a wide range of protected habitats could be considered MPAs. Most MPAs are established for many purposes (such as for conservation, education, research, etc.), and most permit a range of human activities. MPAs are used as management tools by resource agencies to protect, maintain, or restore natural and cultural resources in coastal and marine waters. Designing and managing MPAs involves identifying which vital marine habitats need additional protection and determining how various human uses will be allowed and managed. MPAs have been used effectively both nationally and internationally to conserve biodiversity, manage natural resources, sustain commercial and recreational fisheries, protect endangered species, reduce user conflicts, provide educational and research opportunities, and enhance commercial and recreational activities.



## Familiar Examples of MPAs in the U.S. Include:

National Marine Sanctuaries, National Seashores, National Parks, National Monuments, Critical Habitats, National Wildlife Refuges, National Estuarine Research Reserves, State Parks, Conservation Areas and Reserves, Submerged Historical Sites, Tribal Areas, State and Federal Fishery Management Zones

## What MPAs Provide the Nation

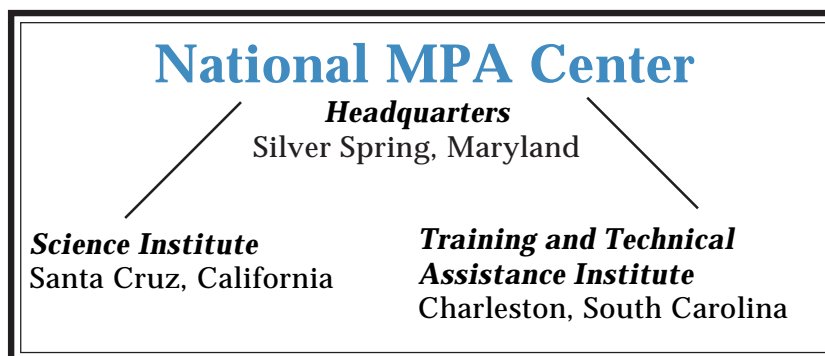
Marine protected areas are internationally recognized as a means for conserving natural, historic, and cultural marine resources. Through protection of marine species and habitats, MPAs provide social and economic benefits, including sustainable recreational and commercial use of marine resources and enhanced research and educational opportunities. Integrated networks of MPAs can help individual MPAs achieve conservation goals, providing additional social and economic benefits. Like most conservation endeavors, achieving the varied benefits of MPAs usually involves costs or tradeoffs. For example, in some cases, certain harmful human uses, like resource extraction, may need to be prohibited or restricted in order to ensure that the habitat provides the full range of benefits envisioned for the MPA.

## Organization

The MPA Center's headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland develops policy, outreach and education, and provides coordination at the regional level. The Center maintains a web site ([mpa.gov](http://mpa.gov)), develops an inventory of MPAs within the U.S., supports an advisory committee, and assists partners with MPA efforts.

As arms of the MPA Center, the MPA Institutes in Santa Cruz, California and Charleston, South Carolina serve as resources for communication and partnerships, connecting experts and resources nationwide. The Institutes are charged with building capacity within federal, state, territorial, tribal, and non-profit organizations to design and manage marine protected areas for a wide variety of purposes.

The Science Institute in Santa Cruz provides a bridge between the science and policy of MPAs by fostering targeted research, hosting workshops, assessing threats to important habitats and resources, and analyzing socio-economic factors that may impact MPAs. The Training and Technical Assistance Institute in Charleston provides training, needs assessments, and technical support for managers, citizens, and others involved in MPAs.



## For additional information, visit [www.mpa.gov](http://www.mpa.gov) or contact:

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