

National Marine Protected Areas Center



The nation's hub for building innovative partnerships and tools to protect the ocean's most important places.

About the National MPA Center

The National Marine Protected Areas Center (MPA Center) was created as a partnership with the Department of the Interior to connect and strengthen the nation's diverse MPA programs. It helps MPA programs increase their impact by working together, and with other stakeholders, on shared conservation goals. The MPA Center also leads international partnerships and capacity building for NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries to promote healthier oceans and their benefits to lives and livelihoods.

The MPA Center is located within NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries and serves as a resource to all federal, state, territorial and tribal programs responsible for the health of the nation's oceans.

About Marine Protected Areas

In the ocean, as on land, some places are more important than others. Communities and governments around the world have chosen to protect these important areas in order to sustain their ecological, cultural and economic benefits.

Marine protected areas (MPAs) are places with valued habitats, species and features in our oceans, coasts, estuaries and Great Lakes that have been given long-term protection. These special places serve critical roles in sustaining vibrant coastal communities. Familiar examples of MPAs in US waters include National Marine Sanctuaries, National Parks, National Wildlife Refuges, and their state, local and tribal equivalents.



The MPA Center does not manage specific MPAs. Rather, it supports US and international MPA programs by providing information, tools and capacity building.

Management networks are made up of MPA managers and staff working together on common objectives.

About MPA Networks

MPAs work best when they work together. According to the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), an MPA network is a collection of individual marine protected areas that operates cooperatively to fulfill ecological goals more effectively and comprehensively than individual sites could accomplish alone. *Ecological networks* should be designed to include ecologically and biologically important areas, connectivity, representativeness, replication and adequate size and protection.



Photo: Kelp Forest, NOAA.

Vision

Effective networks of marine protected areas helping to sustain a healthy ocean.

Mission

To support and grow the network of people working to protect the ocean's most important places through science, tools and capacity building.

Goals

1. Improve MPA design, stewardship and effectiveness
2. Connect MPA programs
3. Advance public understanding and partnerships about MPA programs

Focus Areas for the MPA Center:

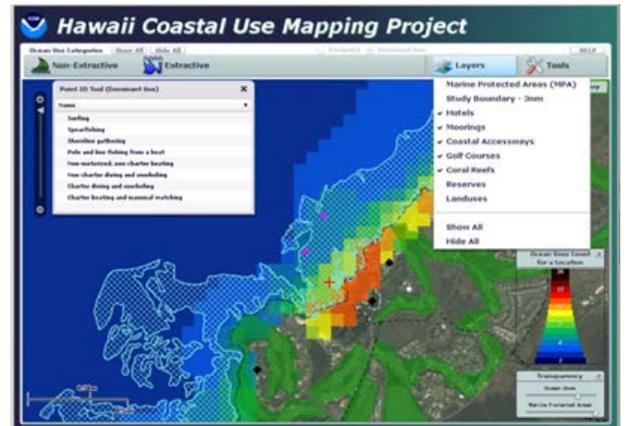
International MPA Partnerships. The MPA Center works with individual countries, regional and international organizations to support ocean health and MPA networks, including through MPA networks, information sharing and sister sites.

Building Management Capacity. The MPA Center manages IMPACT, NOAA's international MPA Capacity Building Team, which works with partners around the world to conduct needs assessments and provide training, technical assistance and mentoring to MPA programs. The MPA Center also supports US MPA programs through webinars and other information and tools.

Analyzing MPAs. The MPA Center created and maintains a unique geospatial database -- the MPA Inventory -- that provides information, maps and other products on the characteristics, resources and authorities of the nation's MPAs.

Engaging Stakeholders. The federally authorized MPA Federal Advisory Committee is a 20-member stakeholder body that advises NOAA and the Department of the Interior on issues related to marine protected areas, and has been instrumental in advancing key issues such as climate change, connectivity and sustainable financing.

Understanding Ocean Uses. Recognizing the connections between human uses of the ocean and the long-term viability of MPAs, the MPA Center is developing innovative tools for understanding patterns, requirements, conflicts and compatibilities of the full spectrum of human activities in the nation's coastal and ocean waters.



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Photos (top to bottom): International Capacity Building Program in Indonesia (A. Nelson); thriving reefs in Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument (NOAA); kayakers in Appalachian National Estuarine Research Reserve (NOAA); map of ocean uses in Hawaii (NOAA).