

# BENEFITS OF THE NATIONAL SYSTEM OF MPAs

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The national system of marine protected areas (MPAs) brings MPAs managed by diverse federal, state, territorial, tribal and local agencies together to work toward national conservation objectives. Marine protected areas are special places like coastal or underwater parks that protect habitats, fish and wildlife, and cultural resources, and have a critical role in our nation's future. "Marine protected area" is a broad term that includes places with a wide range of purposes, legal authorities and levels of protection. The national system benefits the nation's collective marine conservation efforts and participating MPAs by helping sites address issues beyond their boundaries. Below are some of the benefits of the national system of MPAs.

## BENEFITS TO PARTICIPATING MPAs

- **Enhancing Stewardship** - The national system will help protect MPAs against the harmful effects of human activities through enhanced regional coordination, public awareness, site management capacity, and recognition of these MPAs as important conservation areas.
- **Building Partnerships** - The national system provides opportunities for MPAs to work together more effectively. The system is building partnerships between member MPAs and related ocean management initiatives, such as ocean observing systems, ocean mapping, navigational charting, and others.
- **Increasing Support for Marine Conservation** – Being part of the national system can enhance the stature of member sites within their managing entities and their local communities. This designation also builds support for investment in MPA programs. It also provides national and international recognition, like that provided by international protected area networks such as World Heritage and Ramsar Wetlands.
- **More Effective and Efficient Outreach** - The national system helps increase public awareness and understanding of the importance of marine resources and conservation efforts. Coordinated outreach efforts will increase the impact of outreach by individual MPAs. Participation in the national system will help bring increased recognition and visibility to MPAs, particularly those that protect important resources but are remote or little known.
- **Promoting Cultural Heritage** - Participation in the national system elevates the recognition of and appreciation for the cultural heritage value of MPA sites such as shipwrecks and archeological sites, an often overlooked focus of marine conservation
- **Protecting MPA Resources** - Executive Order 13158 calls for federal agencies to "avoid harm" to the natural and cultural resources protected by National System MPAs. Federal agencies are required to identify their activities that affect the natural and cultural resources protected by individual national system MPAs, and (to the extent permitted by law and the maximum extent practicable) avoid harm to those resources. This will be accomplished through existing resource management or review authorities.



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

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## BENEFITS TO THE NATION

- **Protecting Representative Ecosystems and Resources** - The national system will boost ongoing efforts to preserve the natural and cultural heritage of the United States by ensuring that representative examples of the nation's marine ecosystems, habitats and cultural resources are conserved for future generations.
- **Enhancing Connectivity among Marine and Coastal Protected Areas** - The national system provides an opportunity to identify and establish ecologically connected networks of MPAs and associated coastal protected areas. An ecological network of MPAs is a set of MPAs within a region that connect key habitats for important marine species to grow and reproduce throughout their life cycles. Planning MPAs at both national and regional scales provides an opportunity to address connectivity for many different marine organisms at different spatial scales, an important consideration in dealing with climate change and other impacts.
- **Identifying Gaps in Current Protection of Ocean Resources** - The national system supports MPA program and community efforts to identify and highlight gaps in the protection of important places in the ocean. These gap analyses will help inform future planning efforts to create MPAs to fill the identified gaps to address national and regional conservation objectives.
- **Providing New Educational Opportunities** - The national system enhances opportunities for natural and cultural heritage education, including onsite education and interpretation, as well as classroom and web-based resources. National system members can help educate students and visitors about the nation's diverse marine and coastal ecosystems and cultural resources, and the importance of connectivity and adaptive management. They system also provides a mechanism to share educational materials about resources or management approaches among MPAs.
- **Enhancing Research Opportunities** - The national system provides scientists and managers with more opportunities to understand the dynamics of marine ecosystems and human interactions with them under different management regimes.
- **Improved International Coordination** - The national system helps connect regional, state and territorial MPA efforts with relevant international initiatives to address issues of common concern. For example, the National Marine Protected Areas Center leads US involvement in the North American MPA network across the US, Canada and Mexico to share scientific information, enhance MPA management, and build public support for MPA networks. The national system also serves as a focal point to help implement international treaties and agreements.



## BENEFITS TO OCEAN STAKEHOLDERS

- **Sustaining Fisheries** - One goal of the national system is supporting sustainable production of fisheries and other marine resources. The national system provides a means to coordinate fisheries management activities by regional fisheries management councils, inter-state fisheries commissions, states and tribes with other conservation efforts at the regional scale. This contributes to species recovery, spillover and seeding effects, habitat protection, conservation of old-growth age structure and genetic diversity, as well as providing improved information about access opportunities.
- **Better Information for Diverse Ocean Uses and MPA Management**  
 - To support the national system, the MPA Center has established a national MPA Inventory, providing comprehensive information on MPAs managed by all federal, state and territorial agencies. This information supports state and regional efforts to plan for diverse ocean uses, including new or enhanced MPAs. The Inventory can also answer questions from visitors such as: “Where can I go fishing?” and “What is the purpose of my local MPA?”
- **Stakeholder Involvement in Establishing New MPAs** - The national system outlines a science-based, transparent process that includes stakeholder involvement for identifying gaps in current protection where new or enhanced MPAs may be needed to address resource conservation needs. The national system does not provide any new authority for establishing or managing MPAs. Rather, it lays out design and implementation principles that will guide the development of the system. These include a commitment to balanced stakeholder involvement, respecting local and indigenous values, and adaptive management.



## HOW THE NATIONAL SYSTEM OF MPAs CAN WORK FOR ALL OF US...

The National Marine Protected Areas Center focuses its efforts on building the capacity of federal and state MPA programs to more effectively manage natural and cultural marine resources; communicating with and engaging stakeholders to help connect marine protected areas to communities; and serving as a unique and neutral source of MPA science, information and tools for coastal and ocean decision makers. Coordinated, cooperative work to achieve common conservation objectives is especially critical during these times of limited operating resources at all levels of government and the private sector.



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