

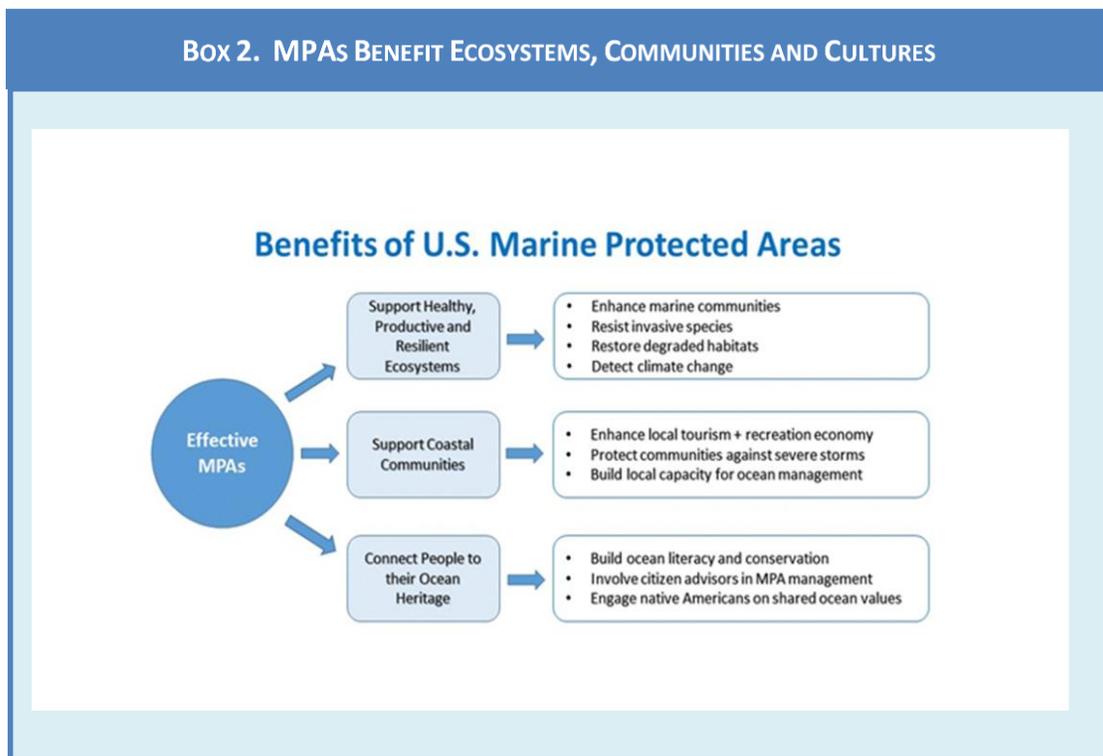
SUSTAINING BENEFITS FROM MARINE PROTECTED AREAS IN A CHANGING OCEAN
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE
MARINE PROTECTED AREAS FEDERAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE
2018 TERM

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In January 2018, the Marine Protected Areas Federal Advisory Committee (MPA FAC) was charged by the U.S. Department of Commerce (DOC) and the Department of Interior (DOI) with identifying benefits of U.S. marine protected areas (MPAs) to marineⁱ ecosystems, economies and communities. The U.S. defines an MPA as “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.”ⁱⁱ

In response, the MPA FAC conducted an extensive investigation that identified significant and far-reaching benefits to U.S. ecosystems, economies, communities and cultures resulting from the creation and long-term implementation of the nation’s MPAs.ⁱⁱⁱ Generally, the MPA FAC has found that our nation’s MPAs: 1) support healthy, productive, and resilient ecosystems; 2) support coastal communities; and 3) connect America’s people to their ocean heritage. (Box 2 from full report)

BOX 2. MPAs BENEFIT ECOSYSTEMS, COMMUNITIES AND CULTURES



Specifically, when properly designed and effectively managed, U.S. MPAs can: sustain and enhance our ecological communities and resist their invasion by exotic species; support restoration of degraded habitats; and, allow scientists to detect and understand the ecological consequences of ocean change. MPAs also provide economic engines for coastal tourism and recreation, help protect coastal communities from severe storms, and build capacity for ocean and Great Lakes management. Finally, MPAs foster citizen science and support robust data sets; inspire local community engagement in coastal management; and provide opportunities to partner with indigenous communities and Native Americans around shared values.

The MPA FAC was also directed by DOC and DOI to identify emerging uses and challenges facing federal, state, territorial and tribal MPAs and to make recommendations for sustaining MPA benefits in the face of those challenges. Chief among these are: growing ocean tourism and recreational uses; expanding industrial and commercial uses; emerging ecosystem impacts of climate change; and policy measures that may weaken, reduce or eliminate MPAs.

Findings and Recommendations for Sustaining MPA Benefits in a Changing Ocean

America's marine protected areas represent an enduring national commitment to healthy and productive oceans. This goal is achieved, in part, by conserving places of ecological, economic, and cultural significance. Established with public input and managed by federal, state, local, and tribal agencies, many of America's MPAs face significant emerging challenges from changing ocean uses and conditions, as well as from shifting national policy priorities for managing our ocean and its resources. In order to sustain the myriad ecological, social and economic benefits offered by U.S. MPAs, the Departments must exercise foresight, coupled with innovative technical, management, and policy solutions to meet these emerging challenges.

Specifically, the Departments must act on the following recommendations through their respective federal MPA programs. For DOC/NOAA, relevant MPAs include the national marine sanctuaries and monuments, and the federal-state partnerships in national estuarine research reserves. For DOI, those MPAs include the national parks, the marine national monuments, and the national wildlife refuges. Additionally, the Departments should actively encourage and support the broad implementation of these recommendations among the wide array of non-federal, MPA partner programs around the United States, including state, territorial, local, tribal and indigenous agencies.

1) Maintain and Support the Nation's System of MPAs

Finding 1: America's MPAs face increasing challenges to achieving their objectives stemming from expanding ocean uses, climate-driven changes in ocean conditions, and recent realignments of federal ocean management policies and priorities.

Recommendation 1: Fully support, fund, maintain, evaluate, and adaptively manage, the nation's MPAs in U.S. coastal, ocean, and Great Lakes waters. ^{iv} Ensure that any proposed alterations to an MPA's size, location, purpose, protection or designation are based on clearly

articulated objectives, a rigorous evaluation of effectiveness using best available science, and a transparent and inclusive public planning process.

2) Ensure Compatibility of Ocean Uses in MPAs

Finding 2: New and expanding ocean uses, coupled with rapidly changing ocean conditions, could pose significant threats to achieving the goals and objectives of US MPAs, particularly when sites lack sufficient scientific information to evaluate potential impacts and/or appropriate management strategies to address them.

Recommendation 2: Evaluate emerging ocean uses, and ensure that those occurring in MPAs are consistent with the sites' purposes, compatible with other valued human uses of the protected areas, and effectively managed to be ecologically sustainable over time.

3) Provide Sufficient Enforcement for Compliance with MPA Rules

Finding 3: Consistent user compliance with MPA rules can greatly improve sites' ability to meet their objectives and to fulfill their promise to coastal communities and the nation.

Recommendation 3: Support and employ innovative approaches to outreach, monitoring, and enforcement, and use emerging technologies to more effectively enforce U.S. MPA regulations and encourage compliance by MPA users.

4) Work with Communities to Improve MPA Effectiveness

Finding 4: America's ocean resources belong to its people. Proactively informed and engaged coastal communities can become effective stewards of their MPAs for the benefit of current and future generations.

Recommendation 4: Support and fund MPA programs to proactively engage local communities around the U.S. in the design of new MPAs where needed, and the adaptive management of existing MPAs where changing conditions require new site management approaches for achieving their goals.

5) Use Best Available Science to Adapt MPAs to Changing Ocean Conditions

Finding 5: Many emerging challenges to US MPAs, such as a changing climate, could not have been foreseen when the sites were first designed and established, and are not consistently reflected in today's management strategies or in the science that informs them.

Recommendation 5: Explore, characterize, monitor, study, and evaluate U.S. MPAs to detect and assess impacts of climate change and emerging ocean uses on the natural and cultural resources and ecosystem services of the sites, and employ the results to advance their long-term resilience and adaptive management to achieve their statutory goals.

Conclusion

U.S. MPAs are often considered to be international models of place-based management of ocean, coastal and Great Lakes ecosystems. The Marine Protected Areas Federal Advisory Committee was directed to explore the benefits of MPAs to ecosystems, economies and cultures around the U.S. and to recommend practical ways sustain those benefits in the face of a changing ocean.

The Committee concludes that by implementing the above recommendations in federal MPAs, and by supporting their adoption in other non-federal MPA programs, the Department of Commerce and the Department of the Interior can continue help the U.S. achieve our long-standing national commitment to a healthy, productive and secure ocean, by conserving our most important places and the natural and cultural resources they protect.

--- END ---

ⁱ For the purpose of our current MPA FAC charge, the terms “marine” and “ocean” include ocean, coastal, estuarine and Great Lakes ecosystems throughout the United States.

ⁱⁱ Executive Order 13158. Marine Protected Areas. 2000.

ⁱⁱⁱ The U.S. network of MPAs includes the full spectrum of place-based protections; some (3% - will confirm Mon) prohibit all extractive activities within their boundaries, while most others allow a range of activities such as some sport and/or commercial fishing.

^{iv} See also the MPA FAC’s previous 2017 recommendations on adaptive management in US MPAs. <https://nmsmarineprotectedareas.blob.core.windows.net/marineprotectedareas-prod/media/docs/mpafac-adaptivemanagement-recommendations.pdf>