

Date: Tue, 25 Jun 2002 21:23:54 -0700
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Colleagues:

In the past few years, marine protected areas (MPAs) have risen to the top of the ocean conservation policy agenda on the west coast. New or revised marine protected areas are being considered by at least a dozen federal and state agencies along the Pacific coast from California to Washington. In California alone, ongoing governmental MPA planning processes include: four national marine sanctuaries; the state-wide Marine Life Protection Act/Es (MLPA) effort to create a comprehensive network of MPAs including no take reserves; and, a growing interest in marine reserves by the Pacific Fisheries Management Council (PFMC). Similar efforts are underway in Oregon and Washington as well.

Combined, these governmental MPA planning processes have the potential to significantly enhance marine conservation throughout this portion of the U.S. Pacific EEZ, especially if they are well integrated with existing resource management approaches. Their ultimate success, however, will depend largely upon our collectively improving the the status quo in two ways: (a) creating more effective avenues for meaningful engagement in MPA planning by all stakeholders; and (b) facilitating more strategic coordination among federal and state MPA agencies from local to regional scales.

To this end, the National Marine Protected Areas Center (NMPAC) and the Communication Partnership for Science and the Sea (COMPASS) are working together to build upon the initial COMPASS meeting in August 2000, in which MPA practitioners, scientists and policy makers from California, Oregon and Washington identified key information needs for MPA planning in the Pacific. This email is intended to give you an overview of the goals of this new NMPAC-COMPASS initiative, and to solicit your input on two key components that relate to your agency/Es efforts.

1. Pacific MPA Clearinghouse

The plethora of MPA planning efforts is extremely complex and confusing to many observers. We are currently developing a new web site (PacificMPA.org) that will provide "one-stop-shopping" for comprehensive information on all ongoing federal and state MPA planning processes from California to Washington. This site, which will be widely advertised among all stakeholders, will provide up-to-date information to all interested parties about the goals and objectives of planned MPAs, key public events,

ongoing reviews of environmental and management plan documents, etc. The site will focus solely on governmental MPA efforts, and will rely heavily on links to existing MPA agency web sites. It will present strictly factual data on key steps and opportunities for public engagement in these processes, such as dates, times, locations, etc. It will not address underlying policy issues or advocate particular positions on MPAs. We expect this site to be of great interest to all MPA stakeholders who currently face a growing challenge in trying to effectively track and engage in the tremendous variety of MPA events throughout the Pacific region.

2. Pacific MPA Agency Coordination

In addition to providing this basic information on MPA happenings to the public via the new web site, the NMPAC-COMPASS partnership will also convene periodic meetings of key policy and program staff of all the federal, state and tribal agencies actively engaged in MPA planning on the west coast. These informal gatherings will combine basic information sharing and updates about programmatic plans, with more strategic considerations about how best to coordinate and integrate MPA planning on a coast-wide basis to maximize the conservation benefit of any new MPAs, while minimizing adverse impacts — both real and perceived — among user groups. We hope to hold the first Pacific MPA “roundtable” meeting Monterey, California this fall.

Requested Actions

For both of these efforts to succeed, we need your active cooperation and involvement. To that end, we request that you send an email to Sarah Lyons, of the NMPAC’s Science Institute in Santa Cruz (sarah.lyons@noaa.gov) that provides two pieces of information:

- * Identifies a key point of contact for your agency’s programmatic information about ongoing MPA planning processes for the clearinghouse web site, PacificMPA.org. This person will be contacted soon by Sarah to review the draft web site, and to develop a reliable means to regularly update its contents to ensure that it accurately reflects your plans.
- * Identifies one or two key people from your agency’s MPA program who would have the time, inclination and programmatic knowledge to comprehensively discuss your MPA plans and activities throughout the region during one or two coast-wide coordination meetings a year. These individuals will receive a formal invitation from the NMPAC and COMPASS soon.

We would very much appreciate your providing this initial information to Sarah Lyons by Tuesday, July 2, 2002.

We appreciate your interest in MPAs and look forward to working with you on this important ocean conservation endeavor.

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