

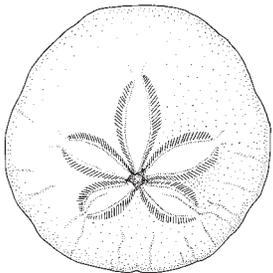
JOINING THE NATIONAL SYSTEM OF MPAs: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

www.mpa.gov

What is the national system of marine protected areas?

The national system of MPAs is the group of MPA sites, networks and systems established and managed by federal, state, tribal and/or local governments that collectively enhance conservation of the nation's natural and cultural marine heritage and represent its diverse ecosystems and resources. Although managed independently, national system MPAs work together at the regional and national levels to achieve common objectives for conserving the nation's important natural and cultural resources.

Why do we need a national system of marine protected areas?



Over the past century, MPAs have been created by a mix of federal, state, and local legislation, voter initiatives, and regulations, each established for its own specific purpose. As a result, the nation's collection of

MPAs (reserves, refuges, preserves, sanctuaries, areas of special biological significance, and others) is fragmented, complex, confusing, and potentially missing opportunities for broader regional conservation through coordinated planning and management. In 2000, a broad coalition of scientists petitioned the White House to create a national system of MPAs to improve conservation of the nation's marine ecosystems, cultural resources, and fisheries. Presidential Executive Order 13158 was signed on May 26, 2000, directing the Department of Commerce to work with the Department of the Interior, other federal agencies, states, territories and stakeholders to establish a national system of MPAs to integrate and enhance the nation's MPAs, bringing these diverse sites and programs together to work on common conservation objectives.

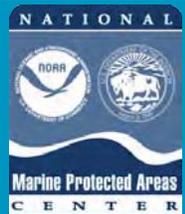
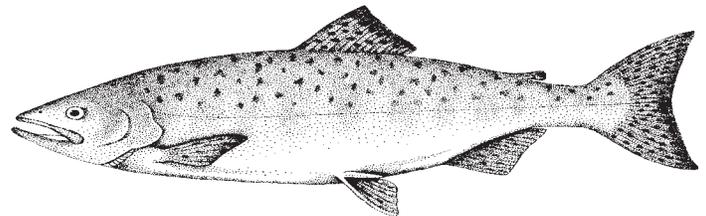
NOAA's National Marine Protected Areas (MPA) Center's mission is to facilitate the effective use of science, technology, training, and information in the planning, management, and evaluation of the nation's system of marine protected areas. The MPA Center works in partnership with federal, state, tribal, and local governments and stakeholders to develop a science-based, comprehensive national system of MPAs. These collaborative efforts will lead to a more efficient, effective use of MPAs now and in the future to conserve and sustain the nation's vital marine resources.

How do I know if my site is an MPA?

A marine protected area is defined by Executive Order 13158 as "an 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." The key terms within this definition (marine, area, reserved, lasting, and protection) have been further defined, with public review and participation, within the *Framework for the National System of Marine Protected Areas of the United States of America* (Framework), available at www.mpa.gov. MPAs include sites with a wide range of protection, from multiple use areas to no take reserves. The term MPA refers only to the marine portion of a site (below the mean high tide mark).

How does a specific MPA become part of the national system?

Eligible MPAs can become part of the national system by applying to the National Marine Protected Areas Center through their managing agency. The current nomination process is open until February 13, 2009, and future nominations will be accepted on a periodic basis thereafter. To be eligible for the national system, a site must meet three criteria: (i) fit the definition of an MPA; (ii) have a management plan that has clear goals and objectives and calls for monitoring and evaluation of those goals; and, (iii) contribute to at least one priority conservation objective of the national system as described in the Framework. Cultural resource MPAs must meet additional cultural resource criteria. More information is available at www.mpa.gov.



What are the benefits of joining the national system?

Benefits of joining the system include the opportunity to work with other MPAs in the region and nationally on issues of common conservation concern; greater public and international recognition of MPAs and the resources they protect; and the opportunity to influence federal and regional ocean conservation and management initiatives (such as integrated ocean observing systems, including MPAs on navigational charts, and highlighting MPA research needs). In addition, the national system provides a venue for coordinated regional planning about place-based conservation priorities, as well as an opportunity to engage stakeholders on MPA issues outside a specific proposal. It will leverage scarce resources toward cross-cutting management needs, and initiate collaborative science and technical projects to support conservation priorities. Moreover, managing MPAs as a system will improve ecological viability by identifying potential new sites that enhance connectivity among regional MPAs.



Will joining the national system restrict the management of my protected area?

No. The national system has no authority to restrict or change the management of any MPA. It does not bring state, territorial or local sites under federal authority. The system will provide technical assistance and help establish partnerships to enhance MPA stewardship.

My protected area spans terrestrial and marine habitats. Why isn't the whole site included within the national system?

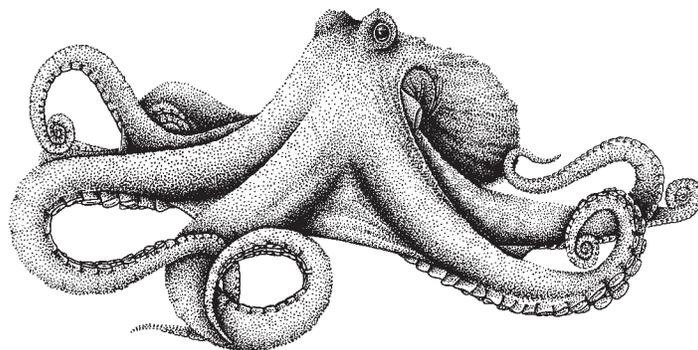
MPAs include only the marine portion of a protected area, as defined in the Framework. So the terrestrial part of the protected area is not considered an MPA and is not included within the national system. All figures on MPA area and GIS boundaries include only the marine portion of sites.

How are ocean and coastal stakeholders involved in the national system?

Stakeholders were extensively involved in the development of the Framework, the road map for the national system, and will continue to be involved in its implementation. In addition, a 30-member Marine Protected Areas Federal Advisory Committee made up of stakeholders from around the U.S., provides ongoing advice to the Departments of Commerce and the Interior about the national system. The Committee includes representatives of commercial and recreational fishing, state and tribal resource agencies, environmental organizations, natural and social scientists and others. Timely information about the national system, such as nominations, is posted at www.mpa.gov.

Will the national system create new MPAs?

The national system has no authority to create new MPAs. These will continue to be created under existing federal, state, territorial, tribal and local authorities. However, to ensure that the national system ultimately represents and protects the nation's key resources and ecosystems, the MPA Center will work with partners and stakeholders on a regional basis to identify significant ecological areas and analyze gaps in our current place-based conservation efforts. MPA management agencies can then use this information to inform their plans about future protection efforts.



What is the MPA Center's Role in the National System?

The MPA Center does not manage any MPAs, but provides coordination, analytical and technical support to MPAs participating in the national system.

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