

## Members of the Marine Protected Areas Social Science Planning Team

This strategy was developed by a dedicated team of social scientists, ecologists, and marine conservation practitioners drawn from within NOAA and academia. The team included:

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# Social Science Research Strategy

*For Marine Protected Areas*

## Introduction

As concern over the health of the oceans grows, many nations, including the United States, are considering marine protected areas (MPAs) to conserve their most important marine habitats and resources. MPAs can be an effective tool to balance sustainable use with long-term conservation of the ocean, especially when they are planned, managed and evaluated using sound natural and social science.

Because MPAs often involve some restriction of human uses within the designated area, they often generate considerable debate and concern among stakeholders. In many cases, this debate stems from the relative costs (often measured in socio-economic terms) and benefits (often measured in ecological terms) of specific site-based proposals for MPAs. Although we are beginning to understand the natural ecology of these systems more fully, federal and state management agencies often lack information on the social, cultural and economic aspects of MPAs. This critical information gap severely complicates consideration

of MPAs as an effective management tool.

To fill this need, the National Marine Protected Areas Center, working with several agency and nongovernmental partners, has developed a national strategy for social science research. This document identifies high priority needs for social science information that are fundamental to the planning, management and evaluation of MPAs. It also recommends practical ways to meet them through research, assessment, capacity building and leveraged funding. The issues identified here are national in scope and apply to MPAs designed for many purposes under many jurisdictions. A series of regional workshops is planned to develop detailed research priorities based on the specific needs of particular areas around the U.S. This national social science research strategy, along with the resulting regional research action plans, will form the foundation for a research program that will provide crucial information about MPAs to agencies, funders, and Congress.



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# Priority Social Science Research Themes and Topics

The national social science strategy identifies six priority themes that encompass a broad range of disciplines and address pressing social science needs in the planning, management and evaluation of MPAs across the U.S. Within each theme, specific topics are outlined with more detailed examples or projects.

The adjacent tables illustrate how the themes relate to different stages in MPA processes and how they vary in complexity, cost and duration. Clearly, specific applications may differ depending on local needs and conditions.

- High
- Medium
- Low

Theme: Governance, Institutions and Processes	Planning	Management	Evaluation	Complexity	Cost	Duration
Topic	MPA Processes			Characteristics		
Jurisdictional Structure	●	○	○	○	○	○
Public Participation and Stewardship	●	○	○	○	○	○
The MPA Process	●	○	○	○	○	○
Institutional Analysis	●	○	○	○	○	○

Theme: Use Patterns	Planning	Management	Evaluation	Complexity	Cost	Duration
Topic	MPA Processes			Characteristics		
Baseline Data on Human Ecology of Use	●	○	○	○	○	○
Political Ecology of MPA-Related Use Patterns	●	○	○	○	○	○
Historical Ecology of MPA-Related Use and Management Patterns	●	○	○	○	○	○

Theme: Attitudes, Perceptions and Beliefs	Planning	Management	Evaluation	Complexity	Cost	Duration
Topic	MPA Processes			Characteristics		
Baseline Data	●	○	○	○	○	○
Traditional and Local Ecological Knowledge	●	○	○	○	○	○
Uncertainty and Attribution	●	○	○	○	○	○
Aesthetics	●	○	○	○	○	○
Environmental Ethics	●	○	○	○	○	○

Theme: Economics of MPAs	Planning	Management	Evaluation	Complexity	Cost	Duration
Topic	MPA Processes			Characteristics		
Baseline Information	●	○	○	○	○	○
Cost Benefit Analysis	●	○	○	○	○	○
Environmental Variability	●	○	○	○	○	○
Non-Market Values	●	○	○	○	○	○

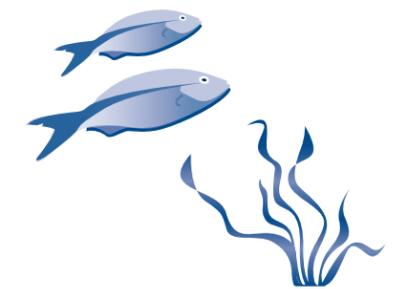
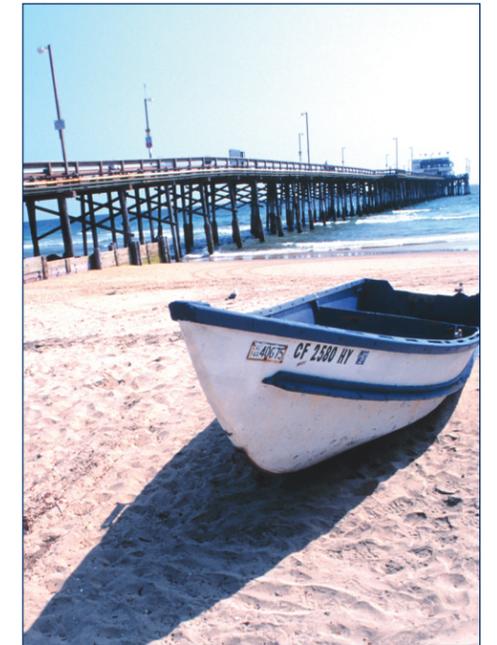
Theme: Communities	Planning	Management	Evaluation	Complexity	Cost	Duration
Topic	MPA Processes			Characteristics		
Socioeconomic Conditions	●	○	○	○	○	○
Capacity and Skills	●	○	○	○	○	○
Information Flow and Use Among Communities	●	○	○	○	○	○
Management Structures and Processes	●	○	○	○	○	○
Lessons Learned	●	○	○	○	○	○

Theme: Submerged Cultural Resources	Planning	Management	Evaluation	Complexity	Cost	Duration
Topic	MPA Processes			Characteristics		
Characterization	●	○	○	○	○	○
Protection	●	○	○	○	○	○
Information Resources	●	○	○	○	○	○



## Cross-Cutting Information Needs and Issues

The Social Science Research Strategy outlines several cross-cutting issues and related information needs that emerged from the list of priority themes and topics. Among these is the growing need to collect, analyze, synthesize, store and manage social science data of all types. Additionally, the needs for baseline data, monitoring programs and evaluation methods are described. Finally, the strategy discusses the need for the refinement and innovative application of existing tools and methods.



## Building the National Capacity

The nation is currently ill-equipped to make significant progress in filling these crucial information gaps. This section of the strategy discusses actions necessary to create the ability to actually conduct this research and act on its findings in the pursuit of our long-term stewardship of the nation's most treasured marine ecosystems. To that end, a series of recommendations in three critical arenas is presented:

- Building the national social science research program
- Developing agency expertise and commitment
- Integrating social science and natural science endeavors.