

Draft Framework

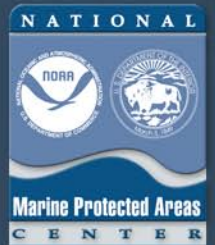


Draft

Framework for Developing the
National System of Marine Protected Areas



July 2006



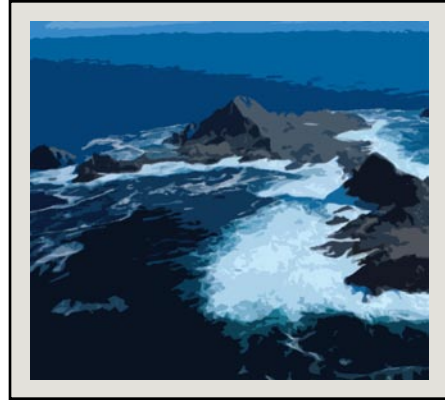


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I. Summary

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s (NOAA) National Marine Protected Areas Center (MPA Center), in cooperation with the Department of the Interior (DOI), has developed this Draft Framework for Developing the National System of MPAs (Draft Framework) to meet requirements under Executive Order 13158 on Marine Protected Areas (Order). This Draft Framework provides overarching guidance for collaborative efforts among federal, **state**,* tribal, and **local governments** and **MPA stakeholders** to develop an effective **National System of Marine Protected Areas** (National System) from existing sites, enhance **marine protected area** (MPA) coordination and stewardship, and identify ecosystem-based gaps in the protection of important marine **natural** and **cultural resources** for possible future action by governmental MPA programs. The document further provides the guiding principles, key definitions, goals, and objectives for the National System. The contents and overall approach of the Draft Framework are based on the breadth of input received from government partners and stakeholders around the nation over the past several years.

The purpose of this Draft Framework is to solicit additional input and comments from governments and stakeholders in order to ensure that the final document represents the diversity of the nation’s interests in the **marine environment** and MPAs. NOAA and DOI further recognize the principal role that state and tribal governments, along with federal agencies, must have in developing and implementing the National System. Moreover, roughly 85% of the nation’s existing **place-based** conservation areas are under the jurisdiction of non-federal governments. The significance of these government-to-government relationships and the marine resources managed by states and **tribes** necessitates this national, rather than federal, approach to building the National System. In developing this Draft Framework, NOAA and the DOI have made and will continue to expand efforts to understand and incorporate, as appropriate, the recommendations of government partners concerning a structure and function for the National System that builds partnerships with and supports the efforts and voluntary participation of state, tribal, and local governments. MPA stakeholders and federal and non-federal government partners alike are encouraged to review and provide comments on the Draft Framework so that it supports the variety of MPA efforts and interests around the country.

Increasing impacts on the world’s oceans, caused by development, overfishing, and natural events, are straining the health of our coastal and marine **ecosystems**. Some of these impacts to the marine and Great Lakes environment have resulted in declining fish populations; degradation of coral reefs, seagrass beds, and other vital habitats; threats to rare or endangered species; and loss of artifacts and areas that are part of our nation’s historic and **cultural heritage**. The effects of these mounting losses are being directly felt in the social and economic fabric of our nation’s communities.

MPAs offer a promising ocean and coastal management tool to mitigate or buffer these impacts. It is important to clarify that the term “MPA,” as used here, is not synonymous with or limited to “no-

* Important terms are bolded the first time they are used and defined in the Glossary found in Section XII of this document.

take areas” or “marine reserves.” Instead, the term “MPA” denotes an array of levels of protection, from areas that allow multiple use activities to those that restrict take and/or access. When used effectively and in conjunction with other management tools, MPAs can help to ensure healthy Great Lakes and oceans by contributing to the overall protection of critical marine habitats and resources. In this way, effective MPAs can offer social and economic opportunities for current and future generations, such as tourism, biotechnology, fishing, education, and scientific research.

Since 2001, the MPA Center and its federal, state, and tribal partners have been collecting information on the vast array of the nation’s place-based marine conservation areas, including those generally considered MPAs, to serve as the foundation for building the National System. This inventory has resulted in the identification of at least 1,500 place-based sites established by hundreds of federal and state authorities. A number of these existing sites are further managed as **systems** by their respective agencies or programs. The types of sites found range from multiple-use areas to no-take reserves. The vast majority of these areas allow multiple uses, and less than one percent of the total area under management in the **United States** (U.S.) is no-take.

This inventory has also revealed a dramatic increase in the use of MPAs over the past several decades. Most MPAs in the U.S. have been established since 1970, and most allow recreational and commercial uses. With this expanded use of MPAs have come many new and enhanced protections to natural and cultural resources. A preliminary analysis of U.S. place-based conservation efforts reveals important trends in how these areas, including MPAs, are being used to conserve some of the nation’s most significant marine resources. The emerging results illustrate that while there are many such areas currently in U.S. waters, these diverse sites vary widely in mandate, jurisdiction, purpose, size, and level of protection.

Moreover, this initial analysis illustrates how the growing recognition of MPAs as essential conservation tools has resulted in a multitude of new MPA programs and authorities at all levels of government, often times for a sole purpose or objective. There also are a number of good examples where MPA efforts are coordinated locally across programs and levels of government; however, there is no larger framework for collaborating MPA efforts across ecosystems and nationally to meet common goals. This complex environment leads to public confusion, and, in many cases, conservation efforts that are not as effective as they could be with better coordination. The results of this initial analysis have further reinforced the need for a National System and provided much of the baseline information to begin building it.

In recognition of the key role MPAs can play and their growing use, the U.S. is developing an effective National System to support the effective **stewardship**, lasting protection, restoration, and sustainable use of the nation’s significant natural and cultural marine resources. The MPA Center is charged by the Order to carry out these requirements in cooperation with DOI. Neither the Order nor the National System establishes any new legal authorities to designate or manage MPAs, nor do they alter any existing state, federal, or tribal laws or programs.

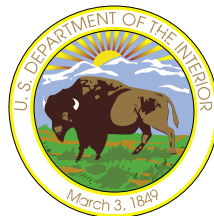
In addition, the U.S. Ocean Action Plan (USOAP) outlines a variety of actions for promoting the responsible use and stewardship of ocean and coastal resources for the benefit of all Americans. A Cabinet-level “Committee on Ocean Policy” (COP) was established by Executive Order 13366 (December 17, 2004) to coordinate the activities of executive branch departments and agencies regarding ocean-related matters in an integrated and effective manner to advance the environmental and economic interests of present and future generations of Americans. The President further directs the Executive branch agencies to facilitate, as appropriate, coordination and consultation regarding ocean-related matters among federal, state, tribal, local governments, the private sector,

foreign governments, and international organizations. Subcommittees of the COP also have been formed as part of the ocean governance structure described in the USOAP, including the Subcommittee on Integrated Management of Ocean Resources (SIMOR) and the Joint Subcommittee on Ocean Science and Technology. Many of the activities outlined in the USOAP and the subsequent work plans of the COP's subcommittees complement efforts to develop the National System. Similarly, many of the collaborative actions under the National System may offer opportunities to help advance the USOAP. As these efforts proceed, the MPA Center will work closely with SIMOR to evaluate progress and plans for developing the National System in order to ensure coordination and consistency with the USOAP's governance structure and overall approach.

The MPA Center has developed this Draft Framework based on information from the initial analysis of information about existing place-based conservation efforts, along with comments from hundreds of individuals at nearly sixty meetings, initial tribal consultations, and recommendations from federal, non-governmental and state advisory groups. As a result, the proposed collaborative development of an effective National System outlined in this document provides a structure for an assemblage of MPA sites, systems, and **networks** established and managed by federal, state, tribal, and local governments to collectively work together at the **regional** and national levels to achieve common objectives for conserving the nation's vital natural and cultural resources.

By establishing an effective structure for working together, the National System will help to increase the efficient protection of important marine resources; contribute to the nation's overall social and economic health; support government agency cooperation and integration; and improve the public's access to scientific information and decision-making about the nation's marine resources. The efforts of the National System are also intended to benefit participating state, tribal, federal, and local government partners through collaborative efforts to identify shared priorities for improving MPA effectiveness and develop partnerships to provide assistance in meeting those needs. Further, it provides a foundation for cooperation with other countries to conserve resources of common concern.

The Draft Framework is available for public comment for 145 days from the date of announcement in the Federal Register. This extended period is intended to accommodate quarterly meeting schedules of some organizations, including regional fishery management councils. At the end of this period, the MPA Center will review all comments received and develop and publish a response to comments and final Framework document. Electronic copies of the Draft Framework can be downloaded at <http://www.mpa.gov/>, or paper copies sent via regular mail can be requested through the contact information below.



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