

# MARINE PROTECTED AREAS – A Threat to Recreational Fishing?

## What's a Marine Protected Area?

The official federal definition of an MPA is: “any area of the marine environment that has been reserved by federal, state, tribal, territorial, or local laws or regulations to provide lasting protection for part or all of the natural and cultural resources therein.” MPAs are defined areas where natural and/or cultural resources are given greater protection than the surrounding waters. In the U.S., MPAs span a range of habitats including the open ocean, coastal areas, inter-tidal zones, estuaries, and the Great Lakes. They also vary widely in purpose, legal authorities, agencies, management approaches, levels of protection, and restrictions on human uses. In certain cases MPAs may unnecessarily restrict the public’s ability to fish along our nation’s coasts.

- In 1999 California passed the Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA) that called for the state to create a network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in state waters. The MLPA specifically called for the use of “marine reserves” which are equivalent to “no-fishing zones”. In April 2007 and August 2009 CA Fish and Game Commission voted to severely restrict or ban fishing in 7 percent, or 357 square miles, in California state marine waters. However, implementation of the MLPA will not be completed until 2011. Through a separate action, the State of California worked with NOAA to establish a series of no-fishing zones in the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary. A final network of MPAs surrounding the Channel Islands was finalized in 2007. This included 318 square miles closed to sportfishing in both state and federal waters. Currently, sportfishing is either banned or severely restricted in 10% of California’s state marine waters.
- Two recent examples of MPA designation and discussion include the Papahānaumokuākea Hawaiian National Monument which was designated by President Bush in June of 2006. It encompasses nearly 140,000 square miles of ocean in the Northern Hawaiian Islands, and is the largest marine protected area in the world. Also, in January 2009 President Bush used the Antiquities Act of 1906 to establish three new marine national monuments in the western and central Pacific Ocean. These monuments encompass approximately 295,000 square miles, the majority of which are now closed to recreational fishing until the Department of Interior develops a management plan for the monuments.

## No Fishing! The Issue for Recreational Anglers

MPAs are established to purportedly protect threatened fish stocks and sensitive habitat within specified boundaries. The establishment of MPAs is increasingly leading to the creation of restrictive ‘no-take’ Marine Reserves resulting in significant permanent closures for recreational fishing, especially in saltwater. Consequently, recreational anglers are being blocked out of miles of prime fishing areas. An MPA is not necessarily a no fishing zone, though the two terms are often erroneously used as though they were interchangeable. Marine Reserves, sometimes called “Ocean Wilderness Areas,” are highly restrictive MPAs where all extractive activities are excluded. There are also MPAs that allow some recreational fishing, but with certain restrictions. These restrictions may include limitations on gear type or species caught.

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### *The Economic Importance of Recreational Fishing*

The huge economic impact of recreational fishing in the US is felt in every state. America’s nearly 40 million anglers spend over \$45 billion per year on fishing equipment, transportation, lodging and other expenses associated with their sport - that’s ten times the amount of all US commercial seafood landings. With a total economic impact of \$125 billion, recreational fishing supports over one million jobs and generates \$34 billion in wages and \$16 billion in tax revenues each year.

The American model of fisheries (and wildlife) management is funded through fishing license sales and excise taxes on fishing equipment and motorboat fuel. Nearly \$900-million of anglers’ and boaters’ dollars are provided to the states each year for local conservation and recreation. This important system must be protected to ensure the funding for fisheries conservation is maintained. Its very success depends on angler participation and interest - the opportunity to go fishing. Closing areas to recreational fishing hurts both the local and national economies and cripples fisheries management.

## *What is the Fishing Community's Involvement?*

Fisheries conservation organizations, leading recreational fishing groups and the fishing and boating industry are paying attention to Marine Protected Areas and their potential impact on recreational fishing. The partnership among these stakeholders is strong and united, supporting the following key principles.

- We strongly support scientifically based management of our marine and freshwater resources.
- We support public access to marine and freshwater fishery resources for consumptive recreational activities where appropriate and under management systems for resource sustainability.
- We understand the concept of MPAs as a means to achieve specific conservation goals such as protecting specific areas of sensitive habitat and spawning aggregations. But, we believe that MPAs - especially no-take MPAs - should be just one tool among the suite of other, less restrictive management tools that maintain recreational fishing opportunity and support the American model of user-pay resource management.
- We believe that discussions about measures that restrict public access to public resources must involve an open public process, a solid scientific basis, and specific guidelines on implementation and follow-up.

It is a long-standing policy of the federal government to allow public access to public lands and waters for recreational purposes consistent with sound conservation. This policy is reflected in the principles of our wildlife refuges, national forests, national parks, and wilderness areas, and should be reflected in any decision to implement MPAs. The ability of recreational anglers to use public marine resources should be as strong as the ability of hunters and anglers to use public lands.

*You can learn more about MPAs and their impact on recreational fishing...*

MPAs and Recreational Fishing: <http://www.asafishing.org/government/mpa.html>

Developing the National System of MPAs: <http://www.mpa.gov/>

The Coastal Zone Management Plan: <http://www.coastalmanagement.noaa.gov/>

Papahānaumokuākea in Hawaii: <http://hawaiireef.noaa.gov/about/welcome.html>



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