

California Department of Parks and Recreation
California State Parks Guidelines for Creating Marine Managed Areas
November 18, 2008

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide the MLPA South Coast Regional Stakeholder Group (SCRSG) with guidance as it pursues its charge. As both a trustee and managing agency, the California Department of Parks and Recreation (State Parks) has a responsibility to ensure that MPA proposals are consistent with management objectives of existing state park units and to evaluate those marine protected areas (MPAs) proposed for inclusion into the State Park system for consistency with State Park policies, goals and objectives. The majority of feasibility concerns will parallel those of the California Department of Fish and Game and as such, are addressed under the feasibility criteria by DFG¹.

Background

California State Parks manages nearly 30% of the state's coastline terrestrial lands and has been involved in the planning and implementation of underwater parks and reserves since 1960, with the establishment of Point Lobos Marine Reserve off Point Lobos State Reserve. Prior to the passage of the Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA) State Parks had established 14 marine managed areas. In 1979 State Parks prepared its first Underwater Parks Master Plan and updated the plan in 1984. Many of the planning elements and goals fundamental to the department's Underwater Parks Program mirror those of the MLPA and the Marine Managed Areas Improvement Act (MMAIA).

State Park's program goals include:

- Preservation of outstanding and representative examples of marine habitats found in each seascape province off the coast of California.
- Protection of marine resources (flora & fauna) and ecosystems.
- Preserving scenic underwater resources.
- Providing a variety of nearshore recreational opportunities, such as nature observation, diving, underwater photography, fishing and boating.
- Providing public education and interpretation of marine environments, including intertidal areas.

¹ CDFG Memo: California Department of Fish and Game Feasibility Criteria and Evaluation Components for MPA Proposals November 10, 2008

- Providing for enforcement needs to help sustain resource values

To best achieve these goals, State Park's underwater program focused on locating marine parks and reserves adjacent to existing terrestrial parklands.

In 1998, the California Resources Agency convened marine program planners from State Parks, the Department of Fish and Game and other agencies to review the State's existing marine managed areas and to recommend a unified marine managed areas classification system. The committee's recommendations formed the foundation of the classification statues in the Marine Managed Areas Improvement Act of 2000. The new classification names and goals, particularly state marine reserve, state marine park and state marine cultural preservation area, incorporate State Parks' Underwater Parks Program goals.

In 2000, State Parks' planning efforts shifted focus from updating it's 1984 Underwater Parks Master Plan to helping to ensure that the California Fish and Game Commission's Marine Life Protection Program and master plan incorporates those shared goals of the State Parks' Underwater Parks Program.

Guidelines and Considerations

All areas immediately offshore of terrestrial State Park System units should be evaluated for their appropriateness and suitability as marine protected areas. In some cases, large areas offshore of smaller terrestrial parks will have important marine values that will be considered as a MPA under the science guidelines and largely independent of the proximity to terrestrial parks. In other areas, the natural values may not support a MPA recommendation based on the science guidelines, but the area may meet the goals and guidelines for state marine parks adjacent to terrestrial State Park units or other public parklands.

The following provides additional rationale and guidance for identifying and designing marine protected areas adjacent to terrestrial State Park System units and other parklands. MMA should be considered offshore of terrestrial parklands when they will:

- Provide opportunities for the public to visit, experience, and learn about California's exceptional marine resources.
- Help protect representative examples of marine habitats and species across biogeographical regions.
- Provide special protection for intertidal species and habitats.
- Provide important venues for special marine interpretation and education programs, such as the State Parks PORTS program.

- Facilitate law enforcement needed to protect and perpetuate important natural and cultural resource values.

When an MPA is proposed offshore of an existing terrestrial State Park System unit, the terrestrial park's General Plan (http://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=21299) and existing public use patterns should be a guiding element for the designation and shoreline boundaries of the MPA. In some cases, a combination of MPA designations, such as a state marine reserve adjacent to state marine park may be appropriate, provided that the shoreline boundaries are clearly defined and easily understood by the public and law enforcement personnel.

In addition to natural resource objectives, state marine park designations may also include other heritage elements including superlative underwater scenery and geology, or important cultural features that enhance the educational opportunity for state marine park visitors. In a state marine park these heritage elements would be considered complementary or secondary to the identified primary natural resource values. Where important cultural heritage elements exist but natural resource values do not justify the classification of state marine park or state marine reserve, the area could be considered for classification as a state marine cultural preservation area by the State Park and Recreation Commission outside the MLPA master plan process.