

**California Marine Life Protection Act Initiative**  
**Summary of the First (2004 - 2007) and Second (2007- 2008)**  
**Phases of the Marine Life Protection Act Initiative**  
*October 3, 2008*

## **Background**

The Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA) directs the state to design and manage a system of marine protected areas (MPAs) in order to protect marine life and habitats, marine ecosystems, and marine natural heritage, as well as improve recreational, educational and study opportunities provided by marine ecosystems.

The MLPA requires the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) to prepare, or cause to be prepared, and submit to the California Fish and Game Commission a master plan that will guide the adoption and implementation of a Marine Life Protection Program within CDFG. The commission is then required to adopt a master plan, based on the best readily available science, which includes a statewide system of MPAs. The commission is the ultimate decision-making body under the MLPA and has the authority to adopt proposed MPAs after completing its own public process.

To achieve the goals of the MLPA, the California Resources Agency and CDFG partnered with the Resources Legacy Fund Foundation in August 2004 to create the MLPA Initiative, a public-private partnership designed to help the State of California implement the MLPA.

## **First Phase: Master Plan Framework and Central Coast Study Region (2004 - 2007)**

Drafting a master plan framework was the first step in developing a complete master plan for MPAs in California. The MLPA Blue Ribbon Task Force recommended a draft master plan framework in April 2005 and, based on that recommendation, CDFG then submitted a proposal to the commission. The commission adopted a framework in August 2005.

As part of the first phase process, the MLPA Blue Ribbon Task Force also considered long-term funding and coordination of MPA-related responsibilities among state and federal agencies. In December 2005, the task force forwarded to Secretary for Resources Mike Chrisman a consultants' report on options for funding activities of the MLPA. In February 2006, the task force then submitted to Secretary Chrisman a set of recommendations for long-term funding of a system of MPAs in California. In November 2006, the BRTF forwarded a report on improved coordination and collaboration with federal agencies involved in MPA management; the report included 16 specific recommendations. The BRTF also forwarded a recommendation for how the state could secure agreement and commitment among state agencies with marine protected area responsibilities to complete statewide implementation of the Master Plan by 2011.

Beginning in June 2005, an extensive stakeholder process was used to develop draft alternative MPA proposals for the central coast that were reviewed by the MLPA Master Plan Science Advisory Team (SAT), MLPA Initiative staff, and the public. In March 2006 the MLPA Blue Ribbon Task Force (BRTF) forwarded three MPA proposals, with one selected as a preferred alternative, to CDFG. In June 2006, CDFG developed and forwarded its recommendations to the California Fish and Game Commission.

In August 2006 the commission selected a preferred alternative and two other proposals for regulatory review under the California Administrative Procedures Act and environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act.

In April 2007 the commission made a final decision, adopting its preferred alternative of central coast MPAs; those MPAs went into effect in September 2007. In addition, the California State Park and Recreation Commission is expected to take action to designate two of the central coast MPAs as state marine parks, based on the action and recommendation of the California Fish and Game Commission.

### **North Central Coast Study Region (2007 - 2008)**

Beginning in March 2007, a series of five public workshops were held throughout the north central coast study region to introduce the MLPA and the MLPA Initiative planning process to stakeholders and the general public. These workshops provided a forum for discussion of key issues and an opportunity for the public to interact with MLPA Initiative staff.

In May 2007, the MLPA North Central Coast Regional Stakeholder Group (NCCRSG) convened for a series of formal meetings and work sessions to develop alternative MPA proposals for the MLPA North Central Coast Study Region. Over the following ten months, the NCCRSG held eight formal meetings and underwent three rounds of alternative MPA proposal development. Each set of alternative MPA proposals developed in the three iterations was evaluated based on scientific and feasibility criteria by the MLPA Master Plan Science Advisory Team (SAT), CDFG, and MLPA Initiative staff. The MLPA Blue Ribbon Task Force (BRTF) also provided policy guidance for the alternative MPA proposals. This work culminated in three final alternative MPA proposals (Proposal 1-3, Proposal 2-XA and Proposal 4); these final three proposals drew from six original draft alternative MPA proposals developed by three cross-interest NCCRSG work teams, plus four proposals developed, at least in part, by outside groups. NCCRSG members formally presented their final three alternative MPA proposals to the BRTF in April 2008 in a joint BRTF/NCCRSG meeting.

In June 2008 the BRTF presented five alternative MPA proposals to the California Fish and Game Commission. Three of the five alternative MPA proposals (Proposal 1-3, Proposal 2-XA and Proposal 4) were developed through the NCCRSG. The fourth proposal, known as the Integrated Preferred Alternative (IPA), was generated by the BRTF during the joint BRTF-NCCRSG meeting in April and incorporates proposed MPAs from all three NCCRSG proposals and input from public comments. The fifth proposal (Proposal 0) is the “no action” (existing MPAs) alternative. The commission heard presentations on the status and development of each of the MPA proposals, scientific analyses, potential socio-economic impacts and design feasibility. After hearing the presentations and public comments, the commission president directed CDFG staff to prepare a draft initial statement of reasons; the initial statement would include the IPA as the commission’s “preferred alternative” as well as the three NCCRSG proposals as regulatory alternatives for a full breadth of options.

In October 2008 the commission held its first public hearing for the proposed north central coast MPAs. The commission is expected to make a final decision regarding the adoption of north central coast MPAs at the conclusion of its public hearings in early 2009.

### **Future Study Regions and Public Involvement (2008 - 2011)**

The California Fish and Game Commission will consider recommendations for alternative MPA proposals for the two remaining study regions along the California coast between 2009 and 2011; the south coast study region (ranging from Point Conception in Santa Barbara County to the border with Mexico) and the north coast study region (California/Oregon border in Del Norte County to Alder Creek in Mendocino County). The planning process will begin for the San Francisco Bay study region in late 2011. The ultimate result will be the adoption of a full master plan and implementation of a statewide system of MPAs for California.

Throughout all stages of the central coast and north central coast study region processes there was extensive public involvement. In addition to attending the workshops, the public participated by providing comments on draft documents and during all meetings of the regional stakeholder groups, BRTF, and SAT. All meetings of the CCRSG, NCCRSG, BRTF and SAT were videotaped and are archived for public viewing at <http://www.dfg.ca.gov/mlpa>. The same opportunity for public input will exist for the remaining study regions and the public is encouraged to continue its high level of participation.