

California Marine Life Protection Act Initiative

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To: MLPA North Central Coast Regional Stakeholder Group (NCCRSNG)
From: Marine Life Protection Act staff (MLPA I-Team)
Re: Status report on NCCRSNG Special Closures Work Group and draft options for special closures to protect marine birds and mammals
Date: February 20, 2008

In response to requests from members of the NCCRSNG to address marine bird and mammal disturbance issues concurrently with the MLPA planning process, the California Department of Fish and Game and MLPA Initiative staff convened two workshops to discuss these issues. Participants included a mix of NCCRSNG members and other interested stakeholders.

Workshops

A half-day workshop was held on January 8, 2008, followed by a full day workshop on January 17, 2008. Both workshops were held at the Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary offices in San Francisco.

The January 8, 2008 workshop was attended by 14 constituent participants including NCCRSNG members and non-NCCRSNG members with a demonstrated interest in, and local knowledge of, seabird and marine mammal disturbance issues, two representatives from the MLPA Master Plan Science Advisory Team (SAT), five MLPA I-Team staff members, and a representative from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The focus of the workshop was several-fold. Participants (1) gained a better understanding of the nature of the disturbance issue for marine birds and mammals and (2) identified marine bird and mammal hot spots (areas of high species diversity and/or abundance) in the MLPA North Central Coast Study Region; and (3) identified major feasibility considerations. Identification of 19 hot spots for marine birds and mammals was a key outcome from this workshop.

The January 17, 2008 workshop was attended by NCCRSNG and non-NCCRSNG participants from the first workshop, one SAT member, and four MLPA I-Team staff members. The focus of the second workshop was to walk through each hot spot in detail and identify options for action to address seabird and marine mammal disturbance. At this workshop, participants discussed current or potential disturbance issues that affect birds or mammals at each location and the human uses in the vicinity of the hot spots. Participants also considered whether the hot spot was included in a proposed marine protected area. For 13 of the 19 hot spots, individual participants identified potential options for special closures, which would restrict human access either seasonally or year-round. For 3 hot spots, multiple alternative options were identified (in addition to the status quo).

Work Products to Date

The special closures concepts developed at the workshop are intended to represent a menu of options; they are not intended to reflect endorsement by all disturbance workshop participants or a recommendation from the group as a whole.

Participants worked collaboratively to identify important geographies and some potential options. As expected, participants had differing views about the need for special closures in the study region. Participants agreed, however, on the need for enhanced education efforts to raise public awareness about marine bird and mammal disturbance issues, independent of special closure considerations.

Workshop participants have had an opportunity to validate the accuracy of the information captured on the maps and the descriptive template. The data fields in the template include:

- Area name
- Proposed options
- Seasonality
- Other uses potentially impacted
- Species involved
- Rationale for closure
- Comments, questions, or other important information

Next Steps

Work products generated by the workshop participants will be provided to the full NCCRSG to consider when refining draft MPA proposals at the March 4, 2008 work session and March 18-19, 2008 NCCRSG meeting. The need for an additional workshop to refine and prioritize the menu of special closure options in advance of the NCCRSG work session will be evaluated.

Enclosures

Draft Consideration of Marine Bird and Mammal Protection Areas (Special Closures)

Generated at January 17, 2008 Workshop

Maps of draft special closure options to protect marine birds and mammals

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Revised February 20, 2008

Note: all options (including status quo) recommend an enhanced education and outreach program on marine bird and mammal disturbance issues

Area Name	Proposed Options	Seasonality (Year round or specific season)	Other Uses Potentially Impacted	Species Involved	Rationale for Closure (i.e. current or potential disturbance)	Comments, Questions or Miscellaneous Important Information
Fish Rocks (A)	Option A1: Status quo. No special closure. Option A2: Square with eastern edge bisecting Western Island and bounded by northern and southern points of island, extending 500 ft. west.	Suggestion needed. Seabird breeding season is March to Aug. Sea lions numerous at Fish Rocks in all months but May, with peak in summer and fall. (1980-1982 report)	Coastal abalone divers and important spearfishing area from kayaks. Recreational kayakers pass between mainland and nearshore rock, and outside of rock. Anchorage south of islands and to cove. Could impact salmon trolling.	Largest and most diverse seabird colony in northern sub region of study region. 9 species, 905 breeding birds. Most birds on West rock. Eastern rock has few birds. Seabird species include pelagic cormorants, pigeon guillemots, Brandt's cormorants, Leach's storm petrel and small numbers of rhinoceros auklet, Cassin's auklet, and tufted puffin. Mammals mostly found on sand spit at low tide between the two rocks. Haul out for California sea lions and Steller sea lions, and harbor seals.	Importance of colony, potential impacts from boat activity in area.	Option A2 designed to protect birds on West Rock while not impacting small boat/kayak traffic between mainland and rocks. Sarah will provide more info on seasonality on mammals.
Gualala Point Island (B)	Option B1: Status quo. No special closure. Option B2: 500 ft closure around Gualala Pt Island.	Year-round closure	Most of commercial fishing activity offshore. Private access limits divers, but not along river. Other uses not known. People kayak in Gualala river but there is limited shore access.	5 nesting seabird species, 324 breeding birds. Seabird species include pelagic cormorant, pigeon guillemot, Western gull, and black oystercatcher. Brandt's cormorant colony that is declining. 264 breeding birds in 2003. Previously around 1200 birds. This year 90 pairs of Brandt's cormorants. Some cormorants may be shifting to Fish Rocks, a few miles north. Foraging area just off river mouth for remnant population of rare federally threatened marbled murrelet. Large Brown Pelican roost.	Importance of colony, potential impacts from boat activity in area. Fireworks display started last year on bluff above town - about 1 mile from colony. Report on disturbance is soon to be released.	Little observation except for short term monitoring on fireworks. One of few larger islets for breeding habitat north of Bodega, making Gualala and Fish rocks stand out as larger seabird nesting colonies subregionally. Might upwelling be affecting forage base? Is coastal area within 1000ft of Sea Ranch?
Stewart Point	Did not discuss			Pinniped colony		

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Fort Ross Reef (C)	Option C1: Status quo. No special closure.		Anchorage Pt. from N. W. prevailing winds. One of best anchorage spots on the coast. Area heavily used by abalone divers, spear fishers, kayakers.	Steller sea lions, minor haul out		In State Park
Russian River area (D)	Option D1: Status quo. No special closure.			Arched Rock, Gull Rock, and Russian River Rocks. Between the 3 colonies, 7 breeding species, 1,056 birds. Cormorants move around between rocks. Double Crested Cormorant colonies (mostly on Russian River Rocks) - not represented in other closure options. Brandt's cormorants, pelagic cormorants, pigeon guillemots, Western gull, black oyster-catcher. Mid-march to mid-August is breeding season. Large Brown Pelican roosts. Large harbor seal haul out and rookery (about 450 seals).	Importance of colonies, potential impacts from high boat activity in area. Movement in Brandt's and Double Crested cormorant colonies is consistent with colonies that are disturbed. No data collected on disturbance in this area. Colonies photographed every year for population estimates. Population counts have been lower for last 3 years in Sonoma-Mendocino coast.	Bird decline reflective of reduced forage base from oceanographic conditions?
	Option D2: 1000 ft closures around Arched Rock, Gull Rock	Year-round closure	Crabbing in area. Commercial salmon fishing against western edge of rock. Abalone and rockfish fishing near rocks. Intense recreational salmon fishing from shore. Uncertain about where most kayak activity is concentrated.			
Bodega Rock (E)	Option E1: Status quo. No special closure.			Mainly California sea lion haul out, with small Steller sea lion haul out, northern elephant seals, and harbor seals. Largest Brandt's cormorant colony in the northern sub-region of the north central coast study region. Other breeding seabird species include western gull, pigeon guillemot, and small number of rhinoceros auklets.	Importance of colony, potential impacts from high boat activity in area.	Need input from Coast Guard on feasibility
	Option E2: Closed area proposed to protect Steller sea lions but size nor season determined. (Lack of information on distance from rock of vessel traffic between rock and mainland.)		Safety issue for small boats. Small boats hang around buoys. Salmon trolling. People dive for abalone near Bodega Rock. Mostly transit issues related to harbor entrance.			

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Bird Rock at Tomales Point (F)	Option F1: Status quo (no special closure) with increased signage and educational outreach effort..			Roosting brown pelicans (population > 500). Seve nesting seabirds species, 894 birds, including Brandt's	Importance of colony, potential impacts from high boat activity in area (mainly approaches from small boats (skiffs) that use the intertidal area nearby).	A lot of sharks in area. Concern about displacement factor - people excluded would dive or fish somewhere else -
	Option F2: Closure of 300 ft around Bird Rock	Year round closure (based on SAT guidelines for sensitive life stage, primary breeding/nesting times for resident species most likely to benefit (Nov-Sept), and peak roosting season for brown pelicans (Aug, Nov))	Use is small boats: 15-18 ft. skiffs out of Tomales Bay. Only safe anchorage is on lee side of Bird Rock. (near Tomales Pt.) Shore-based abalone. Land on East side of point and go over to collect in intertidal. Also tide poolers and birders who walk out from McClures Beach. Also, whale watchers. Area north of Rock is very rough so people don't go there. No beach on bird rock. People tend not to land on rock. Enforcement	Cormorant, Ashy storm-petrel, western gull, pigeon guillemot, rhinoceros auklet, black oystercatcher. Bird Rock is a hotspot for species diversity and overall abundance. A major harbor seal pupping spot and occasional haul-out.		higher impact on adjacent areas. Finger beaches south of area used as haul-outs for harbor seals, pigeon guillemot colonies. Puts pressure on these populations. Existing interpretive signage telling how to interact with coyotes, tule elk, and mountain lions; suggest expanding to include marine species. 300 ft. is proposed as closure distance because larger closure would impact safe harbor, and may lead to problems with displacement

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Point Reyes (G)	Option G1: Status quo. (Existing sport fishing exclusion zone)			Nine nesting seabird species, more than 43,000 birds. Largest seabird colony is South subregion and third largest in NCCSR. Common murre, pelagic cormorants, Brandt's cormorants, pigeon guillemots, western gulls, rhinoceros auklets, roosting brown pelicans (>100 pelicans). Bird colonies from tip of Chimney Rock to tip of lighthouse. Elephant seal rookery. Whole headlands is important. Largest murre colony is outside of existing headland.	Pressure growing from illegal recreational fishing, kayakers, and tide poolers. Monitoring study from 1997-99 (late April - mid August each year) recorded 23 vessels approaching within 460m (1500ft). Results show seven disturbance events, including a flushing of common murre, Brandt's cormorants, and brown pelicans.	General agreement among disturbance work group that this area warrants a special closure.
	Option G2: Closed area around headlands, 1000 ft offshore between Chimney rock and the Lighthouse. (Same boundary as current sport fishing exclusion zone.)	Year round closure (based on SAT guidelines for sensitive life stage, primary breeding/nesting times for resident species most likely to benefit (Nov-Sept), and peak roosting season for brown pelicans (Aug, Nov)).				
	Option G3: same as option G1 with borders going straight south 1000 ft instead of east and west.	Year round closure (based on SAT guidelines for sensitive life stage, primary breeding/nesting times for resident species most likely to benefit (Nov-Sept), and peak roosting season for brown pelicans (Aug, Nov))				
Drakes Estero (H)	Option H1: Status quo (no special closure).			A couple of significant harbor seal haul-outs. Major waterfowl wintering area and migrant shorebirds.	Pressure growing from kayakers. Popular recreational use area. Oyster farming.	Seashore doesn't allow powerboat traffic in Estero. General agreement from disturbance work group on recommendation for closing area.
	Option H2: Two closures of 1320 ft proposed around two harbor seal pupping areas.	Seasonality?				

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Point Resistance (I)	<p>Option I1: Status quo (no special closure) with more signs focused on seabird and mammal disturbance.</p> <p>Option I2: No access from sea from 1320ft around rock. Signage on land.</p>	<p>Year round closure (based on SAT guidelines for sensitive life stage, primary breeding/nesting times for resident species most likely to benefit (Nov-Aug), and peak roosting season for brown pelicans (Aug.-Nov)). Boating activity doesn't really begin until April.</p>	<p>Possible to fish all the rocks, but dangerous at low water. Not popular fishing because all sandy substrate if too far out. Enforcement challenge - colony is offshore but closure would encompass shore - BLM, Pt. Reyes seashore, Coastal Commission, F&G Commission cooperation needed. Currently, no regular ranger patrols. Not much SCUBA diver activity. Abalone diving happens, but expensive due to inaccessibility.</p>	<p>Large common murre colony on rock from waterline up to peak of rock. Pelagic cormorants in cove and pigeon guillemots in caves. More than 100 roosting brown pelicans.</p>	<p>Cliff trail passes a rock, potentially causing disturbance from hikers going off trail. In 2005 counted 20 boats during an observation period (late April-early August) and one disturbance event (alert behavior from birds). Protect from potential increases in disturbance in future.</p>	<p>Caves a destination for hikers. Horse accessibility. Great nature trips on party boats. Suggest putting signage through Park Service. Observations over past few years in addition to regular colony surveys. Partnership Program (NMS,F&G, F&W, State Parks, BLM and other agencies) started in 2005 looking at seabird disturbance. Major component of program is education and outreach. Program is expanding every year. Project covers all of Gulf of Farallones and Monterey Bay Sanctuary. Signs at Monterey, tide books with tips on how to minimize disturbance.</p>
Miller's Point Rocks (J)	<p>Option J1: Status quo. No special closure.</p>		<p>Remote area that presents an enforcement problem. Education may be a better approach. Increasing awareness would be more effective. Putting a closure may actually attract people for curiosity. Anchoring here not advised. Too far from recreational access points (e.g. for kayaks)</p>	<p>Murres on taller rocks in high zone, coming to water line on South rock, Brandt's Cormorants, Western gulls. Birds on North Rock.</p>	<p>Don't see much disturbance currently. With more boat traffic, birds would probably flush. Surrounding rocks seem to protect colony from boat traffic.</p>	

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Double Point (K)	Option K1: Status quo. No special closure.			About 700-1000 harbor seals in haul-out and breed along beach; California sea lions haul out on islets. Stormy Stack is 2nd largest breeding colony in the subregion with 16,000 breeding birds, almost entirely on Stormy Stack. Murres, Brandt's cormorants, pelagic cormorants, pigeon guillemots, and Ashy storm petrels. Roosting brown pelicans (>100 pelicans).	Recent colony monitoring data has shown disturbance from boats that transport surfers to break off of Stormy Stack and from recreational fishing.	Option K2 designed to avoid impact to halibut fishing in cove, and would not encompass the shore.
	Option K2: 600 ft. closure around Stormy Stack	Year round closure (based on SAT guidelines for sensitive life stage, primary breeding/nesting times for resident species most likely to benefit (Nov-Aug), and peak roosting season for brown pelicans (Aug.-Nov)).	Recreational craft dropping off surfers. Hot halibut spot inside of cove (inside of Stormy Stack) . Fishing occurs outside of kelp. No transit issue between Stormy Stack and shore.			
	Option K3: 300ft year-round closure around Stormy Stack	Year-round				
Bolinas Lagoon (L)	Option L1: Status quo. No special closure.		Most boats come in and out of Sea Drift. Kayaks launch on road side. Most disturbances are roadside from cars, and people walking out through McKinnon gulch and out onto spit. Transit issues between Bolinas and Sea Drift make it almost impossible to propose a closed zone.	Harbor seals (about 400 seals) breed and haul out on tidal sand bars. On the Pacific flyway, large numbers of wintering waterfowl and migrant shorebirds.		

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San Pedro Rock (M)	Option M1: Status quo. No special closure.		Kayakers cannot go between shore and rock because of reef and kelp beds. There are plans to put in more trails. Surfers in Shelter Cove. Some small boat fishing on reef in shelter cove. Potential safety issue for small craft.	Major roosts from cormorants and brown pelicans down to waterline. Large breeding colony of pigeon guillemots.	Do not see a lot of disturbance apart from small recreational craft. Do not know what happens on N. Side of Island.	Devil's slide more important for breeding birds and has more documented disturbance than Pt. San Pedro. Protection may be warranted but may not be feasible due to safety issue for small boats.
Devil's Slide (N)	Option N1: Status quo. No special closure.			Common murre and Brandt's cormorant colony on Devil's Slide, or "Egg", Rock. Pigeon guillemots, pelagic cormorants, western gulls, and black oystercatcher colonies extend south along mainland to Gray Whale Beach. Roosting brown pelicans on rock and mainland (>100 pelicans).	Seeing increase in disturbance from air, small recreational boats, construction of highway in April of 06 (before egg laying started). Rarely see kayaks, but a few have caused disturbance. Most disturbance is on Egg Rock. Personal water craft flush birds off of mainland. Closure would help protect seabird restoration site.	Working with CalTrans to figure out if there will be an impact. Boilers make area dangerous for boats. Calm days see more recreational boats.
	Option N2: 300 ft closure around Egg Rock	Year-round closure	High recreational use coming from San Pedro.			
	Option N3: 1000 ft closure around Egg Rock	Year-round closure	Reserve negates fishing in some current MPA proposals.			
	Option N4: 1000 ft rectangle encompassing Egg Rock and mainland Devil's Slide.	Year-round closure	Fish halibut and white sea bass in this area.			
Cowell Ranch (O)	Option 01: Status quo. No special closure.			Harbor seal haul out and rookery - about 150 seals		Shore rocks. 3 rocks. Look at access and whether anybody goes in there. Whale watching April-May at 3-4 mi. out. Steep, private lands, not a lot of foot traffic. Is there currently a known disturbance problem? Disturbance would be from land. Can get within .25 mile, but dangerous rocks and depths for boats.

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Pescadero (P)	Option P1: Status quo (no special closure) with recommendation to State Parks that where marine mammals are being disturbed there is a need for better education.			Harbor seal rookery and haul out	Shore fishing and kayak angling is a threat to disturbance of marine mammals.	One of the few places on the west coast where good, close wildlife viewing of harbor seals is possible.
	Option P2: Closure between parking lots going 500ft offshore, plus educational enhancement at 2 access points.	Year-round closure				
North Farallon Islands (Q)	Option Q1: Status quo. Existing seasonal closure.			Steller sea lions haul out on N. Farallon. More than 72,000 nesting seabirds including common murre, pelagic cormorants, Brandt's cormorants, pigeon guillemots, western gulls, Cassin's auklets	Mainly to protect threatened Steller sea lions and large murre colony. There is not currently any monitoring program on North Farallon. The Farallon National Wildlife Refuge has noted that for the more remote and exposed North Farallon Islands, closer approach by boats likely has more damaging impacts and has recommended a year-round, 1000 ft. closure to protect Steller sea lions and seabirds.	Bob will fine tune with Greg where Steller sea lion haul outs are and where dive sites are. Steller sea lions are mostly on North and South rocks. Few observations here due to remote location. Title 50 Dept. of Commerce states that Steller sea lion Critical habitat includes an aquatic zone that extends 3,000 ft. (0.9 km) seaward in State and Federally managed waters from the baseline or base point of each major rookery in California and Oregon.
	Option Q2: Existing closure boundaries, but year-round closure instead of seasonal.	Year- round closure (based on SAT guidelines for sensitive life stage, primary breeding/nesting times for resident species likely and most likely to benefit)	SCUBA divers at North Islands.			
	Option Q3: 500ft closure around southern single rock to allow charter boats closer than 1000ft. 1000 ft. year- round closure for other 3 rocks (east, west, north)	Year round closure (based on SAT guidelines for sensitive life stage, primary breeding/nesting times for resident species likely and most likely to benefit.)				

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South Farallon Islands (R)	Option R1: Status quo. Existing seasonal access restrictions.			Steller sea lions haul out and rookery on West End Island and formerly on Southeast Farallon and Saddle Rock; Northern fur seals breed on West End, Northern elephant seals breed on both islands, California sea lions haul out on both islands.	Largest seabird breeding colony in lower 48 states. Designated critical habitat for threatened Steller sea lions. One of only two Northern Fur seal colonies south of Alaska. Formerly, abalone and urchin boats caused large number of disturbances to seabirds and pinnipeds. Steller sea lions moved pupping site in response to disturbance. Not currently a disturbance monitoring program on the S.E. Farallon Islands, but since 2002, if resident biologists are in area and see disturbance, they note cause and severity. Biologists also note vessels that come within 300 ft. during seasonal closure if observed. Disturbance has been observed at times outside of the seasonal closure and disturbances have taken place outside of area that is currently closed.	The Farallon National Wildlife Refuge has recommended the following: the 300 ft. closure to include the entire area, extend from seasonal to year-round, and extend closure distance while maintaining quality wildlife viewing opportunities.
	Option R2: Existing closure boundaries, but year-round closure instead of seasonal.	Year- round closure (based on SAT guidelines for sensitive life stage, primary breeding/nesting times for resident species likely and most likely to benefit)	Safe anchorage (USCG): Fisherman cove (N. Buoy w/ 100 ft. line). East Landing, COMU cove. Shark viewing within 300ft of Saddle Rock. Wildlife viewing needs at Shubrick Pt. - permit options? 3000ft for Steller sea lion critical habitat. Abalone diving.	More than 180,000 seabirds. Nesting seabirds include common murre, pelagic cormorants, Brandt's cormorant, Double-crested cormorant, pigeon guillemots, western gulls, tufted puffins, Cassin's auklets, rhinoceros auklet, Ashy storm-petrels, Leach's storm-petrel, black oystercatcher, roosting brown pelicans (>1000 pelicans)		
	Option R3: Expand closure to 1000 ft around whole island. Make closure year-round with permit exemption for research, education (ecotourism), with conditions for lights, loudspeaker, sound etc. (provisions outlined in previous agreement with Golden Gate Fishermen's Association agreement?)	Year- round closure (based on SAT guidelines for sensitive life stage, primary breeding/nesting times for resident species likely and most likely to benefit)				