

# CALIFORNIA'S OCEAN LEGACY

## Marine Protected Areas on the North Coast

### Leading the Nation

Ocean health around the world is in crisis, but California is taking proactive steps to safeguard and restore ocean wildlife and habitats. By acting now, we can restore damaged ocean ecosystems, prevent future harm and protect coastal communities that depend on a healthy ocean.

The Marine Life Protection Act, adopted in 1999, requires establishment of a comprehensive, science-based network of marine protected areas (MPAs) along the California coast. Like our state and national parks on land, these underwater areas protect overall ecosystems because they emphasize healthy habitats and natural diversity. Historically, ocean resources have been managed only in response to severe declines, often with dire consequences for fish and fishermen. Marine protected areas are a scientifically proven, effective tool to help turn the tide towards more sustainable and abundant seas.

### North Coast Approach

Currently, scientists, conservationists, fishermen, tribal and other community leaders from throughout Del Norte, Humboldt and Mendocino counties are working together to implement the Marine Life Protection Act on the North Coast. Following scientific guidance, local stakeholders will recommend where new protected areas should be located. Planning efforts rely on local data, the best science available, an unprecedented level of public input and expert policy advice.

Networks of MPAs have already been put into place from Point Conception to Point Arena, and are being planned for Southern California. California's statewide marine protected area network is expected to be completed by 2011. Once established, marine protected areas are monitored by scientists who study both biological and economic effects.



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## An Investment in Our Future

California fish populations have declined sharply over the past several decades—and the average fish caught on the Pacific coast is only half the size of those caught 20 years ago. (1) As a result, our fishing industry and coastal communities have suffered. If we set aside some key feeding and breeding grounds, fish populations can rebound, helping to ensure a stable future for local fishermen and our seafood supply.

Research in over 124 marine reserves worldwide shows that reserves boost both the size and numbers of fish, invertebrates and seaweeds, increasing the productivity, resilience and biodiversity of ocean ecosystems. MPAs established in 2003 off the Channel Islands near Santa Barbara are already showing benefits. (2) Studies show more and bigger fish within the new protected areas compared to control sites. (3)

1. Levin, Phillip S. et al., Shifts in a Pacific Ocean fish assemblage: the potential influence of exploitation, *Conservation Biology*, 2006

2. Lester, S. E., B. S. Halpern, K. Grorud-Colvert, J. Lubchenco, B. I. Ruttenberg, S. D. Gaines, S. Airmé and R. R. Warner. Biological effects within no-take marine reserves: a global synthesis. *Marine Ecology Progress Series*.

3. Channel Islands MPAs: Report on the First 5 Years of Monitoring: 2003-2008. [www.dfg.ca.gov/marine/channel\\_islands/fiveyears.asp](http://www.dfg.ca.gov/marine/channel_islands/fiveyears.asp)

## Marine Protected Areas: A Toolbox of Protections

You can boat, anchor, kayak, surf and dive in all marine protected areas: only fishing and harvesting are limited. Three kinds of MPAs allow flexibility in finding the right level of protection for ocean habitats and sensitive sea life:

- Fully protected State Marine Reserves protect fish, wildlife and habitat from all harvesting and fishing.
- State Marine Conservation Areas allow some recreational and commercial fishing.
- State Marine Parks allow some recreational fishing.
- State Marine Recreational Management Areas may prohibit harvest of fish and invertebrates, but allow waterfowl hunting.

“Special closures” are another tool the state currently uses to protect extremely sensitive seabird roosting sites as well as marine mammal rookeries and foraging areas. Special closures are typically very small “no-disturbance” zones.

# What's at Stake?

## A Look at Some of the North Coast's Coastal Habitats and Wildlife

### FALSE KLAMATH COVE

This spectacular area just north of the Klamath River and adjacent to Redwoods State Park hosts an amazing array of sea life due to the upwelling of nutrient-rich cold water along the coast. This upwelling provides a constant supply of food for rockfish, surfperch, Dungeness crab and sea lions and makes the cove an annual destination for migrating gray whales. Along the shore, tide pools shelter invertebrates and juvenile fish. Nearby Wilson Rock serves as an important breeding colony for seabirds such as murres and cormorants.

### CAPE VIZCAINO

Cape Vizcaino marks the beginning of the rugged Lost Coast. The remoteness of this area makes it one of the most pristine marine coastlines in all of California. Just offshore of the steep, rocky beaches, the ocean teems with life, supporting a rich diversity of rockfish, invertebrates and marine mammals. Rocky reefs and hard bottom provide ideal habitat for numerous species of finfish. Protected from human disturbance, seabird rookeries and marine mammal haul-out spots are common sights on this coastline.

### HUMBOLDT BAY

California's second largest bay is a crucial estuarine habitat. Existing wildlife refuges in the southern and eastern portions of the Bay include deep channels, eel grass beds and mud flats — critical habitat for leopard sharks, halibut and more than 200 types of birds, including four endangered species. The deep channels throughout the Bay also provide habitat for over 100 species of fish, including steelhead, Coho and Chinook salmon, and White and Green Sturgeon, threatened species that can live to be over 50 years old.

### READING ROCK

Reading Rock - a ten foot rock pillar that rises dramatically from 200 feet below the ocean - offers vital habitat for harbor seals and sea lions. The cluster of offshore rocks, rocky reef and sandy bottom habitat provides a nursery for commercially and recreationally important Dungeness crab, China rockfish and halibut. Invertebrates and lingcod thrive along the rock's underwater walls. Above water, Reading Rock plays host to a colony of common murre, as well as other species of seabirds including guillemots and auklets.

For the latest news, visit [www.CalOceans.org](http://www.CalOceans.org)



Photo by Ron LeValley



Photo by Mark Cortright



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## Help Protect the North Coast's Ocean Treasures

The Marine Life Protection Act relies on a science-based, community-driven process to determine where marine protected areas should be located. In other regions of the state, the most sensitive habitats have been included in fully protected State Marine Reserves, but 90 percent of the coast has remained open to fishing.

Your input is needed to create a network of marine protected areas that will protect both the rich natural resources of the North Coast and the long-term stability of the businesses and communities that depend on them. Priority conservation areas listed below are not yet protected — so let policymakers know that you think additional protection is needed!

## North Coast Priority Conservation Areas



## HOW TO GET INVOLVED

Find out more about the MLPA, get the schedule of public workshops and meetings, or submit your comments and ideas at: [www.dfg.ca.gov/mlpa/northcoast.asp](http://www.dfg.ca.gov/mlpa/northcoast.asp)

Support California's Fish and Game Wardens by purchasing and displaying a \$5 Game Warden Stamp. [www.dfg.ca.gov/WardenStamp](http://www.dfg.ca.gov/WardenStamp)

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## ON THE WEB

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Northcoast Environmental Center  
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Ocean Conservancy  
[www.oceanconservancy.org/mlpa](http://www.oceanconservancy.org/mlpa)

Natural Resources Defense Council  
[www.oceans.nrdc.org](http://www.oceans.nrdc.org)

Department of Fish and Game  
[www.dfg.ca.gov/mlpa/northcoast.asp](http://www.dfg.ca.gov/mlpa/northcoast.asp)

