



Enforcement and Compliance within South Coast Marine Protected Areas

Proper enforcement of, and compliance with, marine protected area (MPA) regulations can influence the success of MPAs. On January 1, 2012 50 MPAs and two special closures were implemented in California's South Coast, which encompasses California's jurisdictional waters (0-3 nautical miles from shore) from Point Conception in Santa Barbara County south to the US-MEX border, and includes waters around offshore islands. California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) **enforcement officers report a relatively low level of compliance during the first year of MPA implementation, linked in large part to probable lack of public awareness of MPA boundaries and regulations.**

While a vast majority of the angling public is law abiding, even a single poaching event may significantly impact the ability to measure MPA effectiveness in the region. For example, in 2012, CDFW enforcement officers caught a diver and his companion with 47 California Spiny Lobsters from the Laguna Beach State Marine Reserve (SMR). The diver was cited for illegally taking the lobsters from an MPA, exceeding the daily recreational bag limit of 7 lobsters per person, and possessing 42 undersized lobsters. **Due to enforcement intervention, all 47 lobsters were safely returned to the ocean, and evidence of the poaching event led to the first successfully prosecuted MPA resource crime since implementation of the revised network of MPAs in the South Coast.**



CalTIP-California Turn in Poachers and Polluters

CDFW relies upon formal and informal partnerships to increase the number of “eyes-on-the-water” to facilitate management, enforcement, and monitoring of MPAs. For example, in May of 2013, acting upon [an anonymous tip](#) provided by concerned citizens, CDFW enforcement officers determined two vessel operators working on a Commercial Passenger Fishing Vessel (CPFV) allowed passengers to illegally target groundfish within the Santa Barbara Island SMR. Additionally, the practice of discarding small/less desirable fish when a larger/more desirable fish is caught, otherwise known as “high grading”, was also observed as taking place. **Based on the evidence collected by CDFW enforcement officers, such as photographs, video, and fish seized during the boarding inspection of the vessel, the CPFV operators were ordered to pay approximately \$7,000 in combined fines and placed on court probation.** This case is just one of the many examples that demonstrate the importance of the public’s involvement in identifying and reporting suspicious activity to CDFW.



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The Mission of the Law Enforcement Division is to protect California natural resources and provide public safety through effective and responsive law enforcement.



Enforcement Partners

CDFW is the primary agency responsible for enforcing MPA regulations, with occasional assistance from California State Parks, National Marine Fisheries Service, National Marine Sanctuaries, U.S. Coast Guard, National Park Service, Harbor Patrol, local police, sheriffs, lifeguards, and city resource officers. Effective multi-agency collaboration can provide an additional enforcement presence or assist CDFW in enforcing resource-related activities. However, these agencies do not always have the necessary authority, training, or mandate to take independent action.



CDFW Resources

Although the number of enforcement officers is dynamic, there are approximately 42 CDFW enforcement officers in the South Coast (at the time of this report) poised to respond to MPA and other marine regulation violations. To augment MPA surveillance efforts, a variety of nearshore and offshore watercraft assets are available to effectively patrol coastal ocean waters including distant waters around the Channel Islands. **There are a total of 10 patrol skiffs and 3 large patrol boats available for enforcement efforts in the South Coast.** CDFW also has a fleet of single and twin engine fixed wing aircraft that work in conjunction with both marine and land based enforcement officers to help identify and investigate violations.



Violations in South Coast MPAs, 2012-2015

There are five coastal counties within the South Coast, including several that also have jurisdiction over individual Channel Islands. Based on analysis of CDFW citation data available **from January 2012 to December 2015, a total of 8,419 marine-related citations were issued.** Approximately 648 of these citations (8%), containing 760 individual violations, can be associated with 24 of the 50 South Coast MPAs (Table 1). **Among the MPA-related violations, 476 occurred in SMRs, 75 in state marine conservation areas (SMCAs), and 208 in no-take SMCAs** (Table 1 and Figure 1). Los Angeles County, which includes Santa Catalina Island, accounted for 60% of the total 760 MPA-related violations, with 15% of the violations occurring in California's jurisdictional waters (0-3 nautical miles from shore) off the mainland and 85% occurring off Santa Catalina Island.

Table 1- South Coast MPA-Related Violations; MPAs listed north to south by county

County	MPA ¹ with Violations	2012	2013	2014	2015	Total
Santa Barbara	Naples SMCA	10	0	0	0	10
Santa Barbara	Campus Point SMCA (no-take)	4	0	2	0	6
Santa Barbara	Harris Point SMR	0	2	0	1	3
Santa Barbara	Carrington Point SMR	2	7	3	0	12
Santa Barbara	Scorpion SMR	3	14	0	6	23
Santa Barbara	Santa Barbara Island SMR	3	8	6	1	18
Ventura	Anacapa Island SMR	0	0	4	0	4
Ventura	Anacapa Island SMCA	6	0	1	2	9
Ventura	Footprint SMR ²	10	39	13	35	97
Los Angeles	Point Dume SMCA	0	8	1	0	9
Los Angeles	Point Dume SMR	0	20	3	10	33
Los Angeles	Point Vicente SMCA (no-take)	0	6	2	1	9
Los Angeles	Abalone Cove SMCA	0	6	2	7	15
Los Angeles	Arrow Point to Lion Head Point SMCA	0	9	5	6	20
Los Angeles	Blue Cavern Onshore SMCA (no-take)	15	27	100	36	178
Los Angeles	Long Point SMR	3	47	64	72	186
Los Angeles	Lover's Cove SMCA	2	0	2	1	5
Los Angeles	MPA ³	0	0	0	1	1
Orange	Bolsa Chica Basin SMCA (no-take)	0	0	4	3	7
Orange	Upper Newport Bay SMCA	3	1	1	1	6
Orange	Crystal Cove SMCA	0	1	0	0	1
Orange	Laguna Beach SMR	9	2	6	5	22
Orange	Laguna Beach SMCA (no-take)	0	8	0	0	8
San Diego	Matlahuayl SMR	2	2	0	2	6
San Diego	South La Jolla SMR	8	12	33	19	72
Total		80	219	252	209	760

¹MPA=marine protected area; SMR=state marine reserve; SMCA=state marine conservation area.²Footprint SMR lies within Ventura and Santa Barbara counties.³One MPA-related violation was issued within an undisclosed Los Angeles County MPA in 2015.

From 2012 to 2014, the number of MPA violations issued in the South Coast increased from 80 to 252 (Figure 1 and Table 1), respectively, as **enforcement officers transitioned from a focused effort on warning and education in the first year of MPA implementation to issuing citations to incompassant fishermen in following years**. These changes may reflect a general lack of public knowledge surrounding the newly implemented MPA regulations.

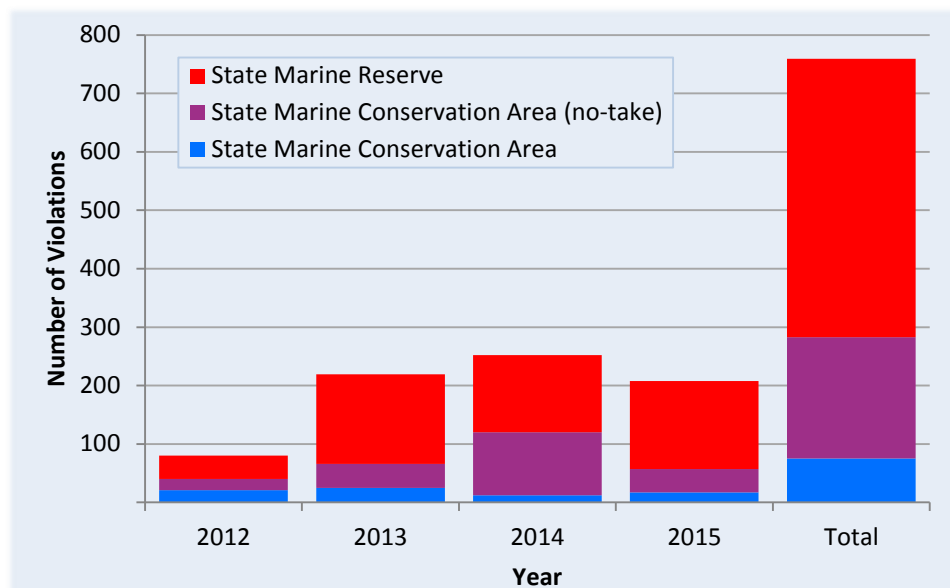


Figure 1. Total number of South Coast marine protected area (MPA) violations issued by year from 2012-2015. Note: one MPA-related violation was issued within an undisclosed Los Angeles County MPA in 2015, and is therefore excluded from total amount ($n = 759$). Data source: CDFW.



Violations within Individual MPAs

Blue Cavern Onshore SMCA (no-take) and Long Point SMR, both on Santa Catalina Island, were identified as violation hotspots from 2012-2015 (Table 1). Together, the two no-take MPAs accounted for nearly half of the 760 South Coast MPA-related violations, 24% occurring in Long Point SMR and 23% in Blue Cavern Onshore SMCA (no-take), respectively. This may be attributed to a significant change in the regulations for these two MPAs from their pre-existing states. At the start of 2012, the area known as Long Point went from having relatively high fishing pressure, to prohibiting all take activities within the Long Point SMR. The area within the current Blue Cavern Onshore SMCA (no-take) was renamed (previously Catalina Marine Science Center SMR since 1988) and expanded nearly 50 times of its original size to include the ecologically important offshore Bird Rock, a popular site for Yellowtail and White Seabass fishermen.

Improvements to MPA Monitoring and Compliance

New and emerging technology options such as remote surveillance, vessel management systems, global positioning system data logger systems, and others may provide options for increased enforcement efficiency and compliance within MPAs. Specifically, enforcement agencies would benefit from a Records Management System as antiquated databases may hinder effective collecting, organizing, and tracking of MPA-related violations. The passage of [Assembly Bill 298](#) (effective January 2016) **may also strengthen MPA enforcement, by giving enforcement officers the ability to cite MPA violations as an infraction, or a misdemeanor for direct file with the legal system.** Over time, monitoring the resulting changes in compliance levels will contribute to our understanding of the relationship between compliance with MPA regulations, enforcement presence, education, and outreach activities.

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