

Anacapa Island State Marine Conservation Area

2023-27MPA-AM



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DEFENSE CENTER



Environmental Defense Center



Photo Credit: Kristen Hislop

EDC is a public interest law firm that defends nature and advances environmental justice on California's Central Coast through advocacy and legal action. We primarily work in San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, and Ventura Counties.





Existing Regulations

Photo Credit: Katie Davis

Current Regulations at Anacapa Island SMCA

It is unlawful to “injure, damage, take, or possess any living, geological, or cultural marine resource” EXCEPT:

1. The recreational take of spiny lobster and pelagic finfish [subsection 632(a)(3)] and the commercial take of spiny lobster is allowed.
2. The following federally recognized tribe is exempt from the area and take regulations found in subsection 632(b)(112) and shall comply with all other existing regulations and statutes:
Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians

[California Code of Regulations Title 14, Section 632\(b\)\(112\)](#)



Reasoning for the Petition

Photo Credit: Robert Schwemmer

Channel Islands MPA Designation Intent

Eelgrass is one of the key habitats that must be protected through MPAs as identified by the Master Plan Science Advisory Team

“For the three sub-habitats eelgrass, tidal flats, and coastal marsh to be considered present, a minimum of 25 acres of each must be included within an MPA.”

Longstanding Channel Island management priorities underscore the need to protect eelgrass habitats.

- “Given the criteria that MPAs should include at least 30 percent of existing eelgrass meadows, and that large and contiguous MPAs are most effective for conservation.”
- “One of the goals for MPAs is to protect populations of special concern, which include species of economic importance, keystone species, declining, threatened or endangered species, and habitat-forming species.”
- “The proposed conservation area is an extension of the North Anacapa SMR to provide additional habitat and species protection.”

Eelgrass, *Zostera pacifica*

Habitat: Mainly sandy-sediment areas in exposed coastal shelf habitats and offshore islands. Found in depths ranging from 7 – 20 meters (22.97- 65.62 feet). Sanders, R., *et. al.* 2024

Eelgrass beds support:

- complex food webs
- filter nutrients
- improve water quality
- stabilize sediments
- refuge and nurseries for many marine species



Photo Credit: SBCK

Photo Credit: Katie Davis

Photo Credit: Jeremy Frankel

Z. Pacifica at Anacapa

- Restoration efforts for the eelgrass meadow at several sites at Anacapa island **began in 2002**.
- Researchers noticed impacts to eelgrass at their restoration site beginning 2011.
 - “Information gained from mariners and National Park rangers confirmed that the cove was being targeted by trap fishing during the commercial season months of November and December.”
- [Our findings] “determine that the commercial lobster trap fishery had **severely impacted** the epicenter of our restored eelgrass bed within the Anacapa SMCA at Frenchy’s Cove. Eelgrass occurring within the neighboring marine reserve was **flourishing.**”

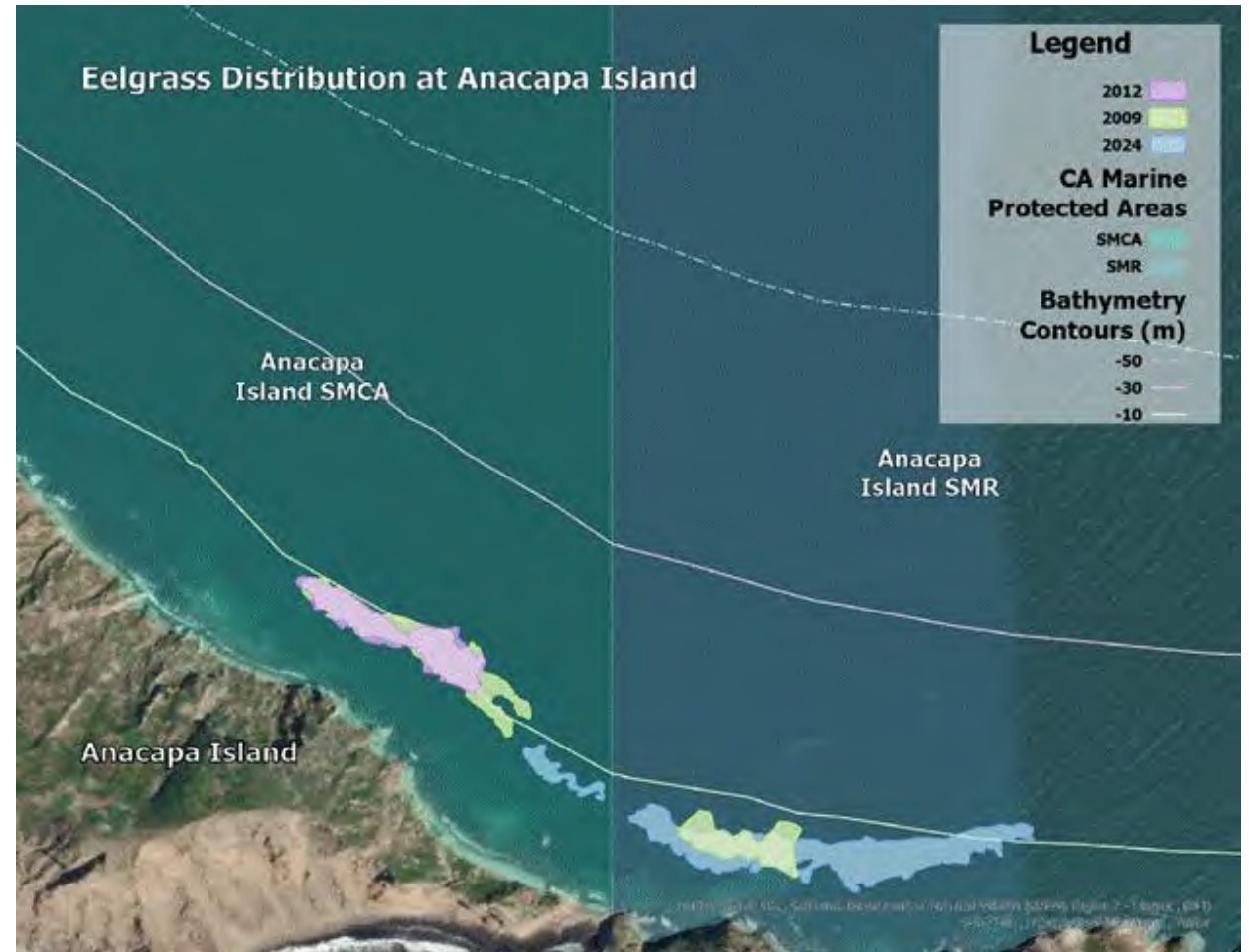


“My permanent transects went from nearly 100% healthy eelgrass in 2011, to ~60% cover, half of which was severely distressed.”

- J. Alstatt

New Data Shows an Impacted Meadow

- 2000s replantation efforts have been diminished in the SMCA as of 2024, while the eelgrass located within the SMR has grown.
- The two MPAs have dramatically different eelgrass distributions due to the main management difference:
 - Two months of lobster trap season within the SMCA.





Original Petition Ask

Photo Credit: Claire Fackler

An underwater photograph of a kelp forest. The water is clear and blue-green. Tall, thin kelp stalks rise from the bottom, with long, flat blades and small, round, yellowish-brown floats. A single, bright red sea urchin is visible in the center of the frame. The background shows more kelp and some small fish swimming in the distance.

November 2023 Petition Request

Reclassify the *Anacapa State Marine Conservation Area (SMCA)* as a *State Marine Reserve (SMR)* or at a minimum reclassify the portion of the SMCA from shore to at least 30 meters depth to better protect eelgrass habitat.

Outreach Post Nov 2023 Submission

Local Tribes

- Shared knowledge on the process and offered clarity when asked for. Maintain regular updates on the process for bands that are not petitioners.

Local Community

- Met with over 20 local community groups to share information regarding the DMR process and MPA Petitions.
- Tabling/speaking events
 - Over the summer of 2024, we garnered over 150 postcards from community members in support of the petitions.
 - Since submitting in Nov 2023, we have given talks in the surrounding communities to over 250 people.

Legislators

- Multiple meetings with relevant legislators in the area. Maintain regular updates on the process.

Local businesses

- Conducted outreach to local businesses. Notified over 25 local businesses.

Local Fishing Community

- Met with many individual fishers and organizations requesting input on our petition.

Agencies

- Multiple meetings with relevant state and federal agencies.



Amended Petition

Photo Credit: NOAA MARE

Proposed Options to Protect Anacapa Island

Option 1: Change Anacapa Island SMCA regulations to disallow commercial California spiny lobster (*Panulirus interruptus*) fishing year-round.

Option 2: Change Anacapa Island SMCA regulations to disallow hard bottomed fishing gear (including anchoring if applicable) near eelgrass meadows.

Modified Opt 3: Change the border of the Anacapa Island Special Closure, prohibiting the deployment of lobster traps from **0-50 feet** instead of the existing 0-20 feet deep.



Photo Credit: Robert Schwemmer



Thank You!

Credit: Erin Feinblatt Photography



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Azsha Hudson, Marine Conservation Analyst

Outreach Post Nov 2023 Submission

***List of organizations EDC had information sharing conversations with. Not an indication of support/opposition**

Local Community

- UC Santa Barbara students
- CSU Channel Islands students
- Women in the Water
- Santa Barbara Channel MPA Collaborative
- Tabling/speaking events
 - Over the summer of 2023, we garnered over 150 postcards from community members in support of the petitions.

Agencies

- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
- National Park Service

Local Tribes

- Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians
- Coastal Band of the Chumash Nation
- Barbareño Band of Chumash Indians
- Wishtoyo Chumash Foundation

Legislators

- Assemblymember Hart
- Assemblymember Bennett
- Santa Barbara County Supervisor Lee
- Congressman Carbajal

Local businesses

- The Refill Shoppe
- Riviera Towel Co.
- Leashless Brewing
- Santa Barbara Adventure Company
- Sea League

Local Fishing Community

- Spearfishers
- Recreational Anglers
- Charter Businesses
- Commercial Fishermen of Santa Barbara
- Commercial Lobster Fishers

