

California Marine Life Protection Act Initiative

1416 Ninth Street, Suite 1311 Sacramento, CA 95814 916.653.5656

To: MLPA North Central Coast Regional Stakeholder Group (NCCRSG)
From: Marine Life Protection Act Initiative Staff (MLPA I-Team)
Subject: Characterization of potential special closures options by marine bird and mammal disturbance work group members
Date: March 13, 2008

Background

At its February 14, 2008 meeting, the MLPA Blue Ribbon Task Force (BRTF) considered the question of potential special closures. The BRTF recognized that, in some instances, special closures may offer geographically-specific protection to seabirds and marine mammals from disturbance, which is not necessarily addressed by marine protected areas (MPAs). The BRTF stated that the special closure designation should be used both sparingly and selectively. The BRTF also directed that the NCCRSG may elect to include recommendations for special closures in the final MPA proposals, so long as this does not detract from completing the primary task of developing alternative MPA proposals.

Consistent with this advice, on February 21, 2008 the NCCRSG members received a menu of potential special closure options generated by the Marine Bird and Mammal Disturbance Work Group during two work sessions. The menu of potential options was distributed to assist NCCRSG members as they consider inclusion of special closures concurrent with MPA planning efforts.

Disturbance Work Group Characterization of Options

Subsequent to the work sessions, the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) and MLPA Initiative staff proposed that the NCCRSG would benefit from further characterization of the menu of potential special closure options. For each potential special closure, MLPA Initiative staff asked disturbance work group members to:

1. Characterize both the conservation value and feasibility of menu options, based on their professional judgment, as "low", "medium", or "high"; and
2. Provide a specific rationale that explains the characterizations.

To date, eight of the fifteen work group members have submitted their characterizations or feedback on the options. Six respondents are NCCRSG members; two respondents are non-NCCRSG members with a demonstrated interest in, and local knowledge of, seabird and marine mammal disturbance issues.

Data Fields and Format of Attached Table

The attached table includes respondents' characterizations of the special closure options distributed on February 21, 2008, including a rationale for each characterization. Feedback has been aggregated according to the number of responses for "low", "medium", and "high" for both conservation value and feasibility, and rationales for these characterizations have been summarized in the same cell. Feedback that was not received within the table format is summarized in the comments section.

The revised menu of special closure options includes the following information for each option (new information items are feasibility, conservation value and comments):

Hot spot geographic name – Hot spots are areas of high diversity and abundance for marine birds and mammals. Nineteen geographic areas were originally identified by the disturbance work group and two MLPA Master Plan Science Advisory Team members at a meeting on January 8, 2008. In the attached version of the special closures menu we have retained only the marine bird and mammal hotspots for which the disturbance work group generated special closure options, recognizing that the work group identified the need for an enhanced educational program exceeding the status quo at all hot spots.

Proposed options – The special closure options generated by individuals in the disturbance work group that would prohibit or limit human access to marine bird and mammal hot spots within a specific distance.

Seasonality – The proposed annual duration of the special closure option, corresponding with the time that the area is used by marine birds and mammals for nesting and breeding.

Conservation benefit – The significance of the marine bird and mammal populations to be protected (e.g. in terms of diversity, abundance and conservation status) using “low”, “medium”, or “high” and indicating a rationale for that characterization.

Feasibility – The implementation considerations such as safety, enforcement and conflicts with existing human uses, again using “low”, “medium”, or “high” and indicating a rationale for that characterization. (Note to disturbance work group: we originally asked for a characterization of “feasibility concern”, which caused some confusion among respondents. We have recast this as simply “feasibility” for greater ease of understanding and have adjusted your responses to reflect this; we considered “low” responses for “feasibility concern” to equate with a “high” characterization for feasibility)

Human uses potentially impacted – The current known human uses that would be denied or have restricted access within a discrete area if a special closure were implemented.

Species involved – Species and number of breeding birds and mammals involved, including specific location within hotspot.

Rationale for closure – Identification of current or foreseeable disturbance threat(s) and why current regulations (if any) are not sufficient to address that threat(s).

Site-specific comments, questions or information – Additional site-specific information on existing research and monitoring, notes on disturbance work group deliberations, and other interests potentially affected by potential closure.

General comments – Feedback from disturbance work group members who provided general feedback on special closure options rather than a site-specific characterization.

Use of Attached Menu of Special Closure Options

NCCRSB members should consider the attached menu of special closure options while crafting proposals for MPAs in the MLPA North Central Coast Study Region. The options should be considered in conjunction with the CDFG memorandum regarding use of special closures (dated November 1, 2007) and the BRTF directive that special closures be used both sparingly and to the extent that they do not detract from developing alternative MPA proposals. Stakeholders might most closely consider those special closure options that receive "high" characterization for both conservation benefit and

feasibility, also recognizing the rationale for each option as well as potential impacts to human use. Options with more than three responses for a “low”, “medium” or “high” categorization are shaded in the attached document.

Stakeholders should also note that the disturbance work group plans to meet via conference call before the March 18-19, 2008 NCCRSO meeting and may be able to provide additional information on the characterization of special closure options. In addition, NCCRSO members should feel free to approach disturbance work group members for additional information on any specific option or geography.

Attachment