What are Marine Protected Areas?
Marine protected areas (MPAs) are marine or estuarine waters set aside primarily to protect or conserve marine life and its associated habitat. MPAs have varying levels of protections and allowed activities, with special regulations in addition to general fishing regulations.

Types of MPAs
California uses three main MPA classifications: State Marine Reserve (SMR), State Marine Conservation Area (SMCA), and State Marine Park (SMP). No SMPs exist in Southern California, however this region does include two special closures.

Southern California MPAs
Major revisions and additions to Southern California MPAs went into effect on January 1, 2012. The 50 MPAs encompass close to 355 square miles (just over 15 percent) of state waters in the Southern California region. Of those, about 275 square miles are designated as “no-take” SMCA and SMR. Southern California MPAs are part of a statewide network of MPAs that extends all along the California coastline.

Fishing may be restricted, but what other activities are permitted in an MPA?
Unless specifically prohibited, non-consumptive activities such as diving, surfing, swimming and boating are allowed within MPAs, as long as take restrictions are followed. General fishing regulations may be found online at wildlife.ca.gov/Ocean-Sport-Regs. It’s a good idea to review the regulations before visiting an MPA.

For more information, visit wildlife.ca.gov/MPAs, email AskMarine@wildlife.ca.gov, or visit one of the following Southern California CDFW offices:

Santa Barbara
1933 Cliff Drive, Suite 9

Los Alamitos
4665 Lampson Avenue, Suite C

San Diego
3883 Ruffin Road

In 1999, California’s Marine Life Protection Act was passed into law with a clear mandate: to re-evaluate all existing marine protected areas (MPAs) and potentially design new MPAs with input from a broad array of stakeholders. The California Department of Fish and Wildlife was integral to this effort. The MPAs in this brochure were designed, in part, to:

- Protect and sustain marine life, habitats and ecosystems
- Provide opportunities to learn from and enjoy marine areas subject to reduced human disturbance

For more information, visit the California Marine Protected Area website at wildlife.ca.gov/MPAs

For general fishing regulations that are in effect in addition to MPA regulations, visit wildlife.ca.gov/Ocean-Sport-Regs

Help stop poaching and polluting.
Call CalTIP!
1-888-334-CalTIP (1-888-334-2258)

Sustainable Fish and Wildlife Resources

MPA Mobile Website

Coastline near Gaviota
Photo by D. Stein

CDFW photos

Alternate communication formats of this document are available upon request. If reasonable accommodation is needed, call CDFW at (916) 322-8911 / California Relay Service for the deaf or hearing-impaired from TDD phones: (800) 735-2929
California's coast and ocean are among our most treasured resources. The productivity, wildness, and beauty found here is central to California's identity, heritage, and economy. Southern California marine protected areas (MPAs) were designed by local stakeholders with guidance and feedback from scientists, managing agencies, experts, policymakers, and the general public, to achieve the goals set forth in California's Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA). MPs conserve biological diversity and protect a variety of marine habitats, communities, and ecosystems for their intrinsic value, while allowing for some human use of marine resources under recreational and/or commercial fishing regulations. By protecting sensitive ocean and coastal habitat, marine life flourishes and, in turn, creates a healthier system overall.

Southern California’s Marine Protected Areas

California uses a combination of protected areas with varying levels of protection and allowed activities to meet MLPA conservation and natural heritage goals:

- **State Marine Reserve (SMR):** An MPA where injury, damage, take, or possession of any living, geological, or cultural marine resource is prohibited.

- **No-Take State Marine Conservation Area (No-Take SMCA):** An MPA where injury, damage, take, or possession of any living, geological, or cultural marine resource is prohibited, EXCEPT for take incidental to permitted activities such as infrastructure maintenance, sand renourishment, etc.

- **State Marine Conservation Area (SMCA):** An MPA where injury, damage, take, or possession of any living, geological, or cultural marine resource is prohibited EXCEPT for species expressly allowed for recreational and/or commercial take (species and gear exceptions vary by location).

- **Special Closure:** An area that prohibits or restricts access and/or boating activities in waters adjacent to sea bird nesting or marine mammal haulout sites. May overlap other marine protected areas.

Southern California Marine Protected Areas

The Southern California MPA network spans the ocean waters relatively close to shore within the California Bight, from Point Conception to the California-Mexico border. In this area, cold, temperate waters from the north mix with warmer waters from the south, forming a complex system of currents and environmental conditions. Habitats and marine life are amazingly diverse here. Southern California MPAs include a variety of habitat types, from sandy beaches to rocky reefs to deep submarine canyons. Some MPAs include kelp forests that provide shelter and hunting grounds for fish such as basses, sheephead and seaperch; others encompass tidal estuaries or lagoons that serve as nursery areas for young fish, crab, and shrimp. Some MPAs are located miles offshore, in the state and federal waters surrounding islands. MPAs allow for more natural interactions between popular, heavily-fished species and species that fishermen normally don’t target. In total, this area is home to 481 species of fish, four species of sea turtles, 195 species of birds, seven species of seals and sea lions, and more than 5,000 species of invertebrates.

More Information

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife maintains several websites with extensive information about Southern California MPAs:

- California MPA website: [wildlife.ca.gov/MPAs](http://wildlife.ca.gov/MPAs)
- Mobile-device friendly sport fishing and MPA website: [wildlife.ca.gov/OceanSportfishMap](http://wildlife.ca.gov/OceanSportfishMap)

Questions? Email AskMarine@wildlife.ca.gov
Permitted/Prohibited Activities

Recreational take of finfish by hook-and-line only is allowed. Commercial take of coastal pelagic species except market squid, by hand held dip net, brail gear, and light boat; and swordfish by harpoon is allowed. Take of invertebrates is prohibited.

Recreational take of sea cucumber by diving only, and finfish by hook-and-line or spearfishing, and white seabass by held dip net, pelagic finfish by hook-and-line, and swordfish by harpoon is allowed.

Recreational take of lobster and pelagic finfish is allowed. Commercial take of coastal pelagic species; species by round net, brail gear, and light boat; swordfish by harpoon is allowed. Take of invertebrates is prohibited.

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