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NEW CENTRAL COAST MARINE PROTECTED AREAS EFFECTIVE SEPTEMBER 21

'Underwater Yosemite' chart course for California's ocean legacy

SACRAMENTO—Starting on September 21, the landmark network of marine protected areas (MPAs) to protect the scenic coastline and rich marine life of California's central coast will go into effect. These new protected areas were unanimously adopted by the California Fish & Game Commission this April, and affect designated areas off the coastline from Point Conception near Santa Barbara to Half Moon Bay. The goal of these new protected areas is to help recover declining fish stocks and ocean health, and protect ecologically important areas for future generations. The 21st marks completion of the initial phase of a five stage process to develop a network of marine protected areas down the entire 1,100 mile California coastline. California is the first state in the country to propose such a comprehensive plan to protect its marine resources.

"It's an exciting day. This is equivalent to creating fourteen new parks along the Central Coast, protecting our ocean's richest areas," said Kate Wing, Senior Policy Analyst at the Natural Resources Defense Council. "I think a lot of researchers and ocean enthusiasts see an enormous benefit that these marine protected areas will bring to the health of California's beautiful underwater ecosystems."

This final plan, adopted by the Fish & Game Commission last April, was made possible by the commitment of the Schwarzenegger administration to an innovative public/private partnership. A high level group of policy advisors, called the Blue Ribbon Task Force, oversaw a process involving expert scientists and a group of local citizens including divers, business owners, fishermen, and conservationists. Through that process, the Task Force considered countless hours of public input, scientific review and economic information to develop a balanced package of MPAs.

The new marine protected areas are required by California's Marine Life Protection Act, enacted in 1999, requiring the state to review and improve the protection it gives its marine wildlife and habitats. The new regulations will place a total of 18% (or 204 square miles) of state ocean waters off California's central coast in some type of protected area. Of the overall coastal ocean area of more than 1150 square miles, 8% will be fully protected marine reserves, and the remaining 92% will allow fishing. A survey conducted by the Public Policy Institute of California in 2006 found that three out of four Californians support the creation of new marine protected areas.

"These marine protected areas will enhance fisheries to a healthy and sustainable level, which will be a boon to all fishers in this area," says Jim Webb, member of the central coast regional stakeholder group and a recreational fisherman in Cambria. "We all want more fish out there, and more marine reserves is what local fisheries scientists recommend as one of the best ways to increase fish population size and quality."

Studies of existing marine reserves (where destruction of wildlife and its habitat is prohibited) show that reserves over time can allow fish to grow older and bigger, producing up to 200 times as many young. ([Click here to read more facts.](#)) Presently, some species of fish are caught so quickly they don't have time

to mature and reproduce. Marine protected areas are widely regarded as an important conservation tool that can improve the benefits of existing fisheries management.

“Over the years, some of the big fish and endless schools I used to see and photograph have vanished,” said diver, photographer and regional stakeholder group member Marc Shargel, of Santa Cruz county. “Developing a network of marine protected areas—safe havens that act as nurseries where marine life can feed, breed and recover—is a good start. Today, our state has set a standard for ocean protection.”

“These new protections for the ecological jewels of California’s central coast, establish a legacy of ocean protection that all Californians can be proud of,” said Kaitilin Gaffney of Ocean Conservancy and a member of the regional stakeholder group. “As new coastal areas from Half Moon Bay northward are considered for future protections, we are getting closer and closer to realizing our shared goal of healthy marine habitat and abundant fish for California.”

Next, the MPA planning process moves to the north central coast, between Half Moon Bay and Point Arena in Mendocino County. The California Fish & Game Commission is currently gathering feedback from scientists, fishermen, conservationists and community members on creating marine protected areas in ocean waters off that stretch of coastline. To get involved, go to www.dfg.ca.gov/mlpa.

To read the consensus statement signed by over 160 scientists stating that marine reserves are a highly effective but under-utilized tool that can help alleviate the declining state of the ocean, go to <http://www.nceas.ucsb.edu/Consensus/>

For more information, including scientific background and maps of the new central coast MPA network, please go to www.caloceans.org. For a contact list of scientists, conservationists, divers and others involved in the planning process, and other information related to this release, please email sian@resource-media.org or tel. 206-374-7795 x102.

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STATEMENTS TO THE PRESS

Kaitilin Gaffney, member of the Central Coast Regional Stakeholder Group, Ocean Conservancy Central Coast Program Manager, and Santa Cruz resident

“These new protections for the ecological jewels of California’s central coast establish a legacy of ocean protection that all Californians can be proud of. As new coastal areas from Half Moon Bay northward are considered for future protections, we are getting closer and closer to realizing our shared goal of healthy marine habitat and abundant fish for California.”

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Kate Wing, Senior Policy Analyst, Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), San Francisco

“We applaud Governor Schwarzenegger for his visionary leadership putting California at the forefront of marine conservation. With this new network of protection for our coast, the ocean has won the day.”

Tel. 415-875-6100, 510-520-5209 (cell), kwing@nrdc.org

Dr. Chris Harrold, Director of Research and Conservation, Monterey Bay Aquarium

“I have seen so many fascinating marine species and habitats in my research, and I think that our coast draws so many visitors because people want to experience the unique marine ecosystems that make our coast special. We now have the opportunity to ensure that this resource for our economy, heritage and way of life, remains healthy for future generations to enjoy.”

Tel. 831-648-4934, 831-594-2512 (cell), charrold@mbayaq.org

Marc Shargel, member of the Central Coast Regional Stakeholder Group, diver, photographer, and Santa Cruz County resident Marc Shargel

“Over the years, some of the big fish and endless schools I used to see and photograph have vanished. Developing a network of marine protected areas—safe havens where marine life can feed, breed and recover—is a good start. Today, our state has set a standard for ocean protection.”

Tel. 831-588-6471 (cell), enviro@lumigenic.com

Steve Shimek, member of the Central Coast Regional Stakeholder Group, executive director of The Otter Project and Monterey Coastkeeper, and Marina resident

“This plan is the first step to protecting not just the fish, or the clams, or the sea otters – but protecting the entire web of life. The plan protects the ecosystem at our special places like Año Nuevo, Point Lobos, Big Sur, and Piedras Blancas. But critical to the plan’s success is the science guided network concept that will add value to the whole; California is reaching for a sustainable ocean ecosystem.”

Tel. 831-883-4159, 831-241-8984 (cell), exec@otterproject.org

Reverend Deborah Streeter, Upwellings Ministry of Environmental Stewardship in Carmel

“Every religious tradition encourages people to care for the earth and be responsible stewards. Many members of the Central Coast interfaith community testified in favor of these marine protected areas. The oceans are a blessing; to protect and heal them is a deep moral obligation.” Tel. 831-277-8394,

streetcook@aol.com

Jim Webb, member of the Central Coast Regional Stakeholder Group, recreational fisherman and Cambria resident

“These marine protected areas will enhance fisheries to a healthy and sustainable level, which will be a boon to all fishers in this area. We all want more fish out there, and more marine reserves is what local fisheries scientists recommend as one of the best ways to increase fish population size and quality.”

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Stanford University, Professor of Marine Sciences, Science Advisory Team member

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