

MPA NEWS

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New group aims to engage young professionals in MPA field, involve them in high-level decisions

The IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas - Marine has launched a new task force to engage and network young professionals in the global MPA field. Designed in part to support WCPA-Marine's work, the task force also seeks to raise the profile of young practitioners and involve them directly in communications and decision-making at regional and global levels.

The Young Professionals Marine Task Force defines young professionals as being 35 years old and younger. The group is co-chaired by Kathy Zischka and Mariasole Bianco and supported by Rebecca Koss, all active members of WCPA - Marine. It grew out of the 2014 World Parks Congress, where there was a dedicated stream on intergenerational partnerships and shared decision-making.

"Young professionals tend not to be as constrained by traditional approaches," says Zischka. "They bring fresh, creative, and innovative initiatives to the marine arena. They also bring new perspectives and skills with regard to social media. This allows for greater flexibility and interconnectivity and the potential to add value to current decision-making frameworks."

Young professionals, or YPs, also speak the language of their age group, says Bianco. "YPs are generally more effective in communicating with passion the importance of marine conservation to younger generations in a peer-to-peer approach," she says. "Building a solid global network of YPs working in marine conservation represents a significant step in addressing current and future challenges for the field."

A framework to empower YPs

The task force will work in two directions: empowering young marine leaders by supporting their contributions to marine conservation, and communicating new potential solutions and inspiration to a broader audience. The group is developing a framework to facilitate increased connectivity between YPs and senior professionals within WCPA and IUCN more broadly. It will also put YPs in contact with regional MPA initiatives as contributors to programs of work.

"In its first year, the task force will focus on creative communication for MPAs and ocean conservation," says Koss. "This will include a strong focus on the role of the ocean as our life support system, and on solutions to problems."

The task force has the buy-in of WCPA leaders. Dan Laffoley, Vice Chair - Marine of WCPA, notes that a gifted team of YPs already runs much of the institution's public presence, including its social media and blog. "Their involvement is essential," he says. "I hope to see many more young professionals in key roles in WCPA in coming years."

If you are a young professional and want to apply to be a member of the task force, read the MPA Blog to find out more (<http://bit.ly/YPtaskforce>). For additional information, contact Zischka, Bianco, and Koss via the YP Marine Task Force email address: wcpamarineyp@gmail.com

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