

MPA NEWS



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US Establishes Center to Coordinate, Implement MPA Science

Editor's note: This past month, there were several MPA-related developments in the US, which are detailed in the following three short articles. Normally, MPA News would not devote this amount of space and attention to assorted developments in one country. However, the following were of a nature that may be of wider international interest to MPA News' readers -- e.g., the formation of a clearinghouse for MPA scientific information, and a high-level science report on the usefulness of marine reserves and ecosystem-based management.

The US federal government has established a center to improve communication between MPA scientists and managers. Called the Center for Marine Protected Area Science, the institution is designed to serve as a hub for initiating, supporting, and coordinating MPA science and policy analysis in the US.

Located in Santa Cruz, California, the center is scheduled to be fully operational by early 2001. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is responsible for managing it.

Charlie Wahle, acting director of the center, said one of its roles would be to address what he called a general lack of understanding between scientists and managers. "Managers don't always understand how scientific information can be used effectively, and scientists don't always understand the major needs of managers," said Wahle. "The center's job is to bridge that gap."

The center is expected to take the lead on:

- Serving as a clearinghouse for scientific information
- Targeting research on ecological processes important to MPA planning and management
- Convening workshops around themes of planning and management
- Exploring and characterizing ocean habitats for new MPAs
- Assessing emerging threats and user conflicts
- Analyzing policy, socioeconomic, and resource-use issues affecting MPAs

Collaborative relationships

The establishment of the Center for MPA Science follows President Clinton's executive order last May that ordered NOAA to establish a new Marine Protected Areas Center to provide the science, tools, and strategies for building a national system of MPAs ([MPA News 1:8](#)). Part of NOAA's response has been to create two regional MPA centers: the Center for MPA Science in Santa Cruz, and a Center for MPA Training and Technical Assistance in Charleston, South Carolina.

Wahle expects the Center for MPA Science to develop collaborative relationships with several marine-oriented institutions in its immediate vicinity, including major research universities, a new NOAA fisheries laboratory, the Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute, and others. The center will also team up with governmental and NGO experts from around the nation and the world.

"I don't expect the center to be doing most of the research itself -- we don't want to duplicate the research that others in academia and the government are already doing," said Wahle. "We just want to help people access it better."

For more information:

Charlie Wahle, 25020 Outlook Dr., Carmel, CA 93923, US. Tel: +1 831 238 2244; E-mail: Charles.Wahle@noaa.gov

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