

MPA NEWS



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Will the election of Donald Trump bring a rollback of MPAs?

MPA News does not normally report on elections of national leaders. However, the early-November election of Donald J. Trump to serve as the next President of the US could be relevant to the MPA field. In particular there is the possibility it could bring a rollback of some significant MPAs.

Trump has stated his intent to "cancel every unconstitutional executive action" issued by current US President Barack Obama. Depending on how Trump and his administration choose to define "unconstitutional" (the term is often used loosely in US politics), those executive actions could include MPA designations. Namely these would be MPAs that Obama enacted or expanded without congressional approval, using the executive authority accorded to him as President under the US Antiquities Act.

Three marine national monuments fit that criterion:

- The Pacific Remote Islands National Marine Monument, which Obama expanded by executive order to 1.27 million km² in 2014;
- The new 12,725-km² Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument in the Atlantic Ocean, which Obama designated by executive order in September 2016 and
- Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument, which Obama expanded by executive order this past August to 1.5 million km², making it the largest protected area in the world.

At this time such a rollback is purely speculative. But proponents of a rollback may already be at work. On 17 November, US Congresswoman Aumua Amata Radewagen from American Samoa met with incoming Vice President Mike Pence and reportedly asked that the Trump Administration cancel the executive orders that created and expanded the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument. All commercial extractive activity is currently banned in the MPA. (The Congresswoman's press release on the meeting does not mention the monument request.) Incidentally the MPA was designated originally by former President George W. Bush by executive order in 2009, prior to being expanded by Obama five years later.

This may not be the only impact of the Trump Administration on MPAs. Bills were introduced to Congress earlier this year to block a plan by the National Park Service to designate a 42.5-km² no-take area within 583-km² Biscayne National Park, off the coast of Florida. The no-take area was planned over the course of several years to protect the park's most sensitive coral habitat. The Obama Administration has not taken a position on the bills. Trump, who has voiced support for recreational fishing and hunting and whose sons are avid anglers and hunters, might support them.

More broadly, Trump's stance that man-made climate change is a hoax suggests that the US — the world's second-largest emitter of greenhouse gases — may back away from global emissions targets, potentially worsening the impacts that climate change is already having on the ocean.

Impossible to know

That being said, it remains impossible to know for sure what impacts Trump's election — and his eventual Cabinet appointments — will have on MPAs in US waters or elsewhere. He has no prior political record on which to base expectations, and his only business connections to the ocean have been the several coastal resorts and golf courses that his company owns.

Asked by *Scientific American* magazine what his presidency would do to improve ocean health and sustainable fisheries, Trump's campaign responded simply that he would "work with Congress to establish priorities for our government and how we will allocate our limited fiscal resources." As noncommittal as that answer is, it is the best one available from his campaign. Aside from various general statements the campaign made on the need to balance conserving resources with a thriving economy, it is the only time the Trump campaign provided a position on ocean health as a whole.

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