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\$4 Million Awarded to North Central Coast MPA Baseline Program

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The Ocean Protection Council has awarded \$4 million to support initial monitoring of the recently designated North Central Coast marine protected areas (MPAs). The projects, which will continue for up to three years, will target marine life and habitats, as well as commercial and recreational activities, inside and outside the protected areas.

The North Central Coast MPA Baseline Program is a collaboration of California Sea Grant, Ocean Protection Council, Department of Fish and Game, Ocean Science Trust and MPA Monitoring Enterprise. The set of projects funded through the program, solicited by California Sea Grant through a public call for proposals and selected through a competitive peer-review process, will establish an integrated picture of marine ecosystems and human activities in the North Central Coast from Alder Creek in Mendocino County to Pigeon Point in San Mateo County.

Through the baseline program, teams of researchers and citizen-scientists will survey shallow and deep rocky habitats, kelp forests, rocky shores, estuaries, beaches and other key ecosystems. They will also monitor ecologically and economically important species of fishes and invertebrates, as well as a range of human activities, including commercial and sport fishing, and also “non-consumptive” recreation such as tide-pooling, bird watching and scuba diving.

Researchers will combine new and historical data, collected inside and outside the MPAs, to document key aspects of the region’s ecological and socioeconomic characteristics before and around the time of MPA establishment on April 1, 2010. From this, they will be able to document initial changes in marine habitats, species, fisheries and recreation that may be associated with the MPAs.

The results of the projects will lay a foundation for future assessments of the effectiveness of the MPAs in meeting the state’s policy goals. Broader ecological, social and economic trends in the region will also be evaluated to distinguish possible effects of the MPAs from other influences on the region’s ecology and coastal use patterns.

The selected projects and their leaders are:

- Mark Carr, University of California, Santa Cruz, scuba surveys of kelp and shallow rock ecosystems
- Amy Dean, Farallones Marine Sanctuary Association, analysis of citizen-science data from rocky shores and sandy beaches, collected by LiMPETS (Long-term Monitoring Program and Experiential Training for Students)
- Gregor Hodgson and Cyndi Dawson, Reef Check California, citizen-science scuba surveys of rocky reefs
- James Lindholm, California State University, Monterey Bay, and Dirk Rosen, Marine Applied Research and Exploration, ROV (remotely operated vehicle) surveys of deep-water habitats

- Shannon Lyday, Farallones Marine Sanctuary Association, analysis of citizen-science data collected through Beach Watch
- Gerry McChesney, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Dan Robinette, PRBO Conservation Science, surveys of seabird distributions and ecology
- Karina Nielsen, Sonoma State University, Steven Morgan, University of California, Davis, and Jenifer Dugan, University of California, Santa Barbara, surveys of sandy beaches and surf-zone ecosystems
- Peter Raimondi, University of California, Santa Cruz, surveys of rocky intertidal ecosystems
- Astrid Scholz, Ecotrust, and Christopher LaFranchi, NOAA National Marine Sanctuaries, socioeconomics and demographics of coastal use
- Jan Svejkovsky and Jamie Kum, Ocean Imaging Corporation, aerial kelp surveys and intertidal habitat mapping
- William Sydeman, Farallon Institute for Advanced Ecosystem Research, integrated ecosystem assessment

Further information on each of the projects will be available in March on the California Sea Grant website at [www.csgc.ucsd.edu](http://www.csgc.ucsd.edu).

The California Fish and Game Commission adopted the North Central Coast MPAs in August of 2009, as a step toward establishing a statewide network of MPAs, as required under the 1999 Marine Life Protection Act. The MPAs will take effect on April 1, 2010. MPAs for another region, the Central Coast, were established in 2007; baseline data collection in that region has been completed.

The commission is currently considering MPAs for the South Coast, and planning for the North Coast is under way. The act requires that MPAs be monitored to assess their effectiveness and facilitate adaptive management. The Ocean Protection Council has authorized \$16 million to support MPA baseline monitoring in the Central, North Central, South and North Coast regions; it requires at least 25 percent matching funds or in-kind contributions for each baseline project.

NOAA's California Sea Grant College Program ([www.csgc.ucsd.edu](http://www.csgc.ucsd.edu)) is a statewide, multi-university program of marine research, extension services and education activities administered by the University of California. It is the largest of 32 Sea Grant programs and is headquartered at Scripps Institution of Oceanography at the University of California, San Diego. The National Sea Grant College Program is part of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), U.S. Department of Commerce.

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