

January, 2012: 'MPA Watch' Public Statement from Santa Monica Baykeeper

Who we are

Santa Monica Baykeeper is one of over 200 Keeper organizations in the international Waterkeeper Alliance aiming to protect and restore the water quality and natural resources of their local water bodies. Out of the many problems here in Los Angeles County, Baykeeper focuses on water issues ranging from storm water runoff polluting our rivers and surf to the threat of overfishing our valuable rocky reefs and kelp forests. Since 1993, Baykeeper staff and volunteers have helped protect our local water bodies with outreach, advocacy, and litigation when necessary, while our hands-on restoration projects improve freshwater and marine habitats using local volunteers. Baykeeper uses a small staff to engage the Los Angeles community in positive change and environmental activism. The Baykeeper volunteer community is as diverse as Los Angeles itself, including environmentalists, scientists, divers, surfers, fishermen, teachers, students, photographers, actors, and people from all walks of life. Anyone tired of trying to make a home in a polluted city overrun with environmental disasters on both land and sea is welcome to join the cause. <http://www.smbaykeeper.org>

MPAs can help everyone, including fishermen

Marine Protected Areas can protect entire food webs, and allowing the food web to recover is one of many important tools for ecosystem recovery. Simply put, many ecosystems function like a house of cards or Jenga puzzle – there is a point where the removal of too many species can result in a crash or significant degradation. We have personally witnessed and scientifically recorded this phenomenon on Santa Monica Baykeeper's Kelp Restoration and Monitoring Project where we relocate tens of thousands of purple sea urchins every year. Without the sea otter or an abundance of lobster and large sheephead, urchin barrens (degraded areas comprised of mainly emaciated urchins and rock) will continue to plague our rocky reefs in Southern California. It is essential that we restore the predator populations and top-down control in addition to clean water to achieve healthy ecosystems. For MPAs to perform as intended, people must obey the rules and regulations that protect the underwater habitat. Fishing improves when we protect and restore particular areas. Local fishermen have praised Baykeeper Kelp Project divers for improving the fishing around Escondido Beach, Malibu and Long Point, Palos Verdes. Before restoration, vast urchin barrens yielded little to no catch. MPAs, if designed large enough and placed over potentially productive habitat, have been documented worldwide to produce spillover, where a greater abundance of species and large individuals swim across MPA boundaries to be caught by fishermen.

What we hope to accomplish with 'MPA Watch'

The main purpose of MPA Watch from Baykeeper's vessel is to gather data on the trends of boating and fishing in and around Los Angeles County MPAs. Information will help inform CA DFG staff and future scientific studies on MPAs. It is not the intention of Baykeeper to threaten or fight or hurt anyone on the water, as we believe personal and property safety is paramount while operating at sea. As an organization, we have been operating boats since 1993 and use experienced staff to run the boat and supervise divers on our AAUS certified scientific diving program. We haul hundreds of pounds of purple urchins out of the water twice a week, and are well aware of the dangers posed by approaching vessels to diving and fishing operations – if divers or gear are in the water we will NOT approach. Visual signaling and VHF radio will be used to try to contact any vessel observed fishing in a no-take reserve.

THE MAIN OUTREACH TARGET IS FISHERMEN WHO ARE SIMPLY UNAWARE THAT THE RESERVE IS NOW IN EFFECT. The goal is to inform boaters, fishermen, and other fellow watermen about the boundaries and regulations. If there are questions we are happy to discuss on designated non-commercial VHF channels: 68, 69, 71, and 72.

This is your MPA

Many Santa Monica Baykeeper staff and volunteers are excited about the new MPA network that can give these natural communities a chance to exist and flourish. This is not Baykeeper's MPA, it is a new public resource, and if you want to see big fish in a few years please keep an eye on it whether you're a fisherman who wants to reap the spillover, a biologist who wants to conduct fish surveys, or a wildlife enthusiast excited to see large marine life. It is the local community's reserve, and the ultimate success of the MPA depends on the people that work and play in and around it. Santa Monica Baykeeper is here to answer questions, inform users of MPA boundaries and regulations, and be another pair of eyes on the water, both day and night.

Your Local Waterkeeper,
Santa Monica Baykeeper