

California Marine Life Protection Act Initiative

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MLPA Initiative Begins Planning Process in California's North Coast Region

Members of the public are invited to learn about redesigning California's marine protected areas

Sacramento - Three public open houses are scheduled in Northern California to provide information about California's Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA) planning process. These informal events will introduce members of the public to the planning process to reexamine and redesign marine protected areas (MPAs), provide a forum to ask questions and offer input, and solicit public involvement in the process.

"Public involvement is important to successfully achieve a balance between the protection and use of California's valuable marine environment," said Don Benninghoven, chair of the MLPA Blue Ribbon Task Force, a policy body that oversees the planning process. "Our goal is to help the state implement the law through an open and transparent planning process where all members of the public are invited to participate."

The open houses will be held in the MLPA North Coast Study Region, the coastline stretching from the California border with Oregon to Alder Creek near Point Arena in Mendocino County. The three public events are scheduled for:

- **Eureka on Monday, July 20, 2009:** 5 - 8:00 p.m., Wharfinger Building, #1 Marina Way
- **Fort Bragg on Tuesday, July 21, 2009:** 5 - 8:00 p.m., Dana Gray Elementary School, 1197 Chestnut St
- **Crescent City on Wednesday, July 22 2009:** 5 - 8:00 p.m., Cultural Center, 1001 Front St

Using an "open house" format, attendees may choose to visit at any time during the three hours and walk through informational stations, including an overview of the MLPA Initiative, a description of existing marine protected areas in the study region, how the science of MPAs is applied in the planning process, and how the public can become involved. Staff will be available at each station so that attendees may ask questions and provide feedback on the process for the north coast.

"This is a stakeholder-driven process that is dependent on local knowledge of the marine environment," said Ken Wiseman, executive director of the MLPA Initiative, a public-private partnership designed to help the State of California implement the MLPA. "We hope to see a large turnout of local residents who want to bring their ideas to the table."

The MLPA, enacted into law in 1999, directs the state to reexamine and redesign California's system of MPAs, which are discrete geographic marine or estuarine areas designed to protect or conserve marine life and habitat. The goals of the act are to increase the coherence and effectiveness at protecting the state's marine life and habitats, marine ecosystems, and marine natural heritage, as well as to improve recreational, educational and study opportunities in marine ecosystems that are subject to minimal human disturbance. MLPA Initiative staff seek to ensure that the planning process includes input from scientists, resource managers, experts, stakeholders and members of the public.

The next steps in the planning process will be to appoint a science advisory team, a panel of highly-distinguished science advisors who will provide scientific support for the MLPA Initiative in the north coast study region process. The science team will be appointed in September by the director of the California Department of Fish and Game.

A regional approach is being used in the MLPA Initiative process, where California's 1,100-mile coastline has been divided into five study regions. In September of 2007, regulations for the first of the five study regions were implemented for the central coast (Pigeon Point in San Mateo County to Point Conception in Santa Barbara County). In the second study region, four proposals for redesigning MPAs in the north central coast (Alder Creek in Mendocino County to Pigeon Point in San Mateo County) were submitted to the California Fish and Game Commission in December 2008 and specific regulations are expected to be adopted by the commission next month.

The MLPA Initiative's south coast study region planning process (Point Conception in Santa Barbara County to the California border with Mexico, including offshore islands) is expected to result in a set of alternative MPA proposals by late 2009. The fifth and final study region, San Francisco Bay (from the Golden Gate Bridge northeast to the Carquinez Bridge), is expected to begin following the north coast process.

The MLPA Blue Ribbon Task Force will make a final recommendation regarding north coast MPA proposals to the commission near the end of 2010.

For additional information about the MLPA Initiative, visit www.dfg.ca.gov/mlpa.

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