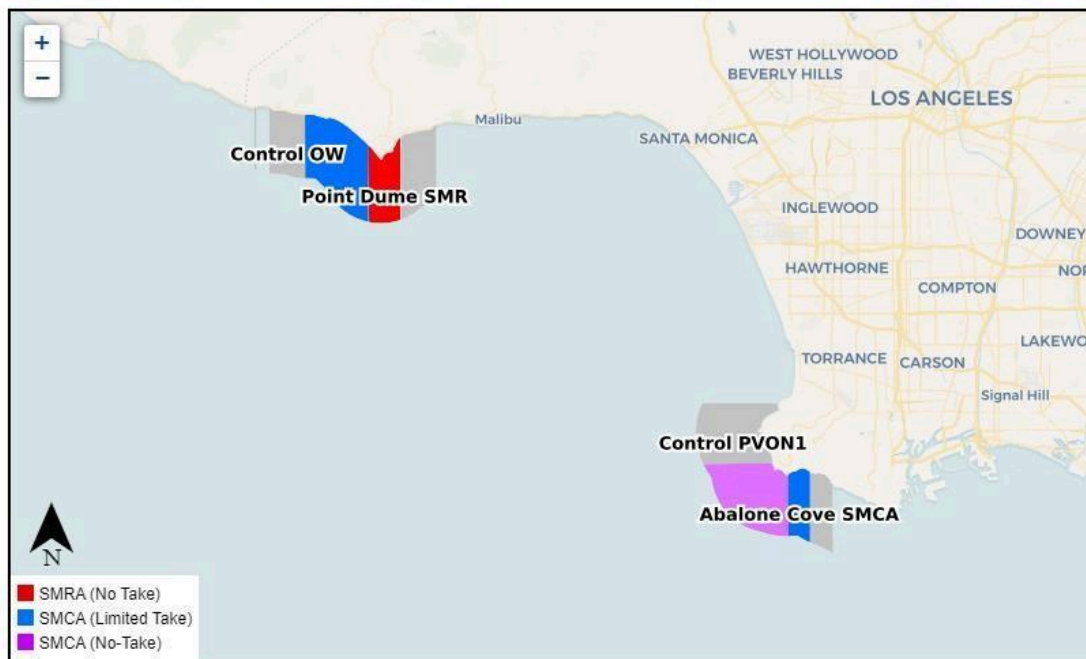


Marine Protected Area (MPA) Watch Regional Report

Los Angeles County Shore-Based

January 1, 2025 - June 30, 2025

Map of Region's MPAs



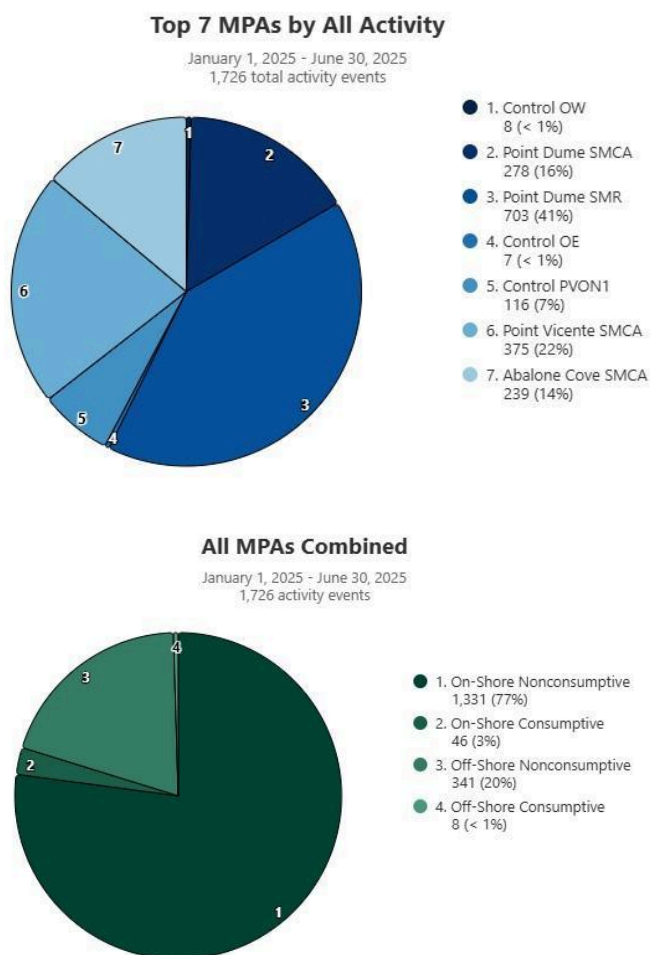
California's network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) was established by the Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA) of 1999 to safeguard our marine resources and ecosystems. To ensure success and to inform adaptive management, long-term monitoring of these protected areas must be conducted. Developed in 2011, MPA Watch was designed as a community science program to collect data on the human use of MPAs. In Los Angeles County, the non-profit organization Heal the Bay manages MPA Watch shore-based data collection. Heal the Bay volunteers monitor LA's four mainland MPAs: Abalone Cove State Marine Conservation Area, Point Vicente No-Take State Marine Conservation Area, Point Dume State Marine Conservation Area, and Point Dume State Marine Reserve. This report also includes surveys conducted by California State Parks.

Executive Summary

- Thus far in 2025, 15 active surveyors conducted a total of 137 MPA Watch surveys across 71 total survey miles and recorded a total of 1,726 activities.
- Consumptive activity remains low in LA County mainland MPAs and observed potential violations were also low, indicating good compliance.
- MPA Watch team leaders discovered a drift in survey protocol that has impacted recorded observation rates of onshore activity, particularly onshore recreation. The drift will need to be corrected under the guidance of the statewide management team.

HUMAN USE OF MPAS JANUARY - JUNE 2025

OVERVIEW



Figures 1a and 1b: Pie charts of human activity by MPA or Control site.

ACTIVITY CLASSIFICATIONS

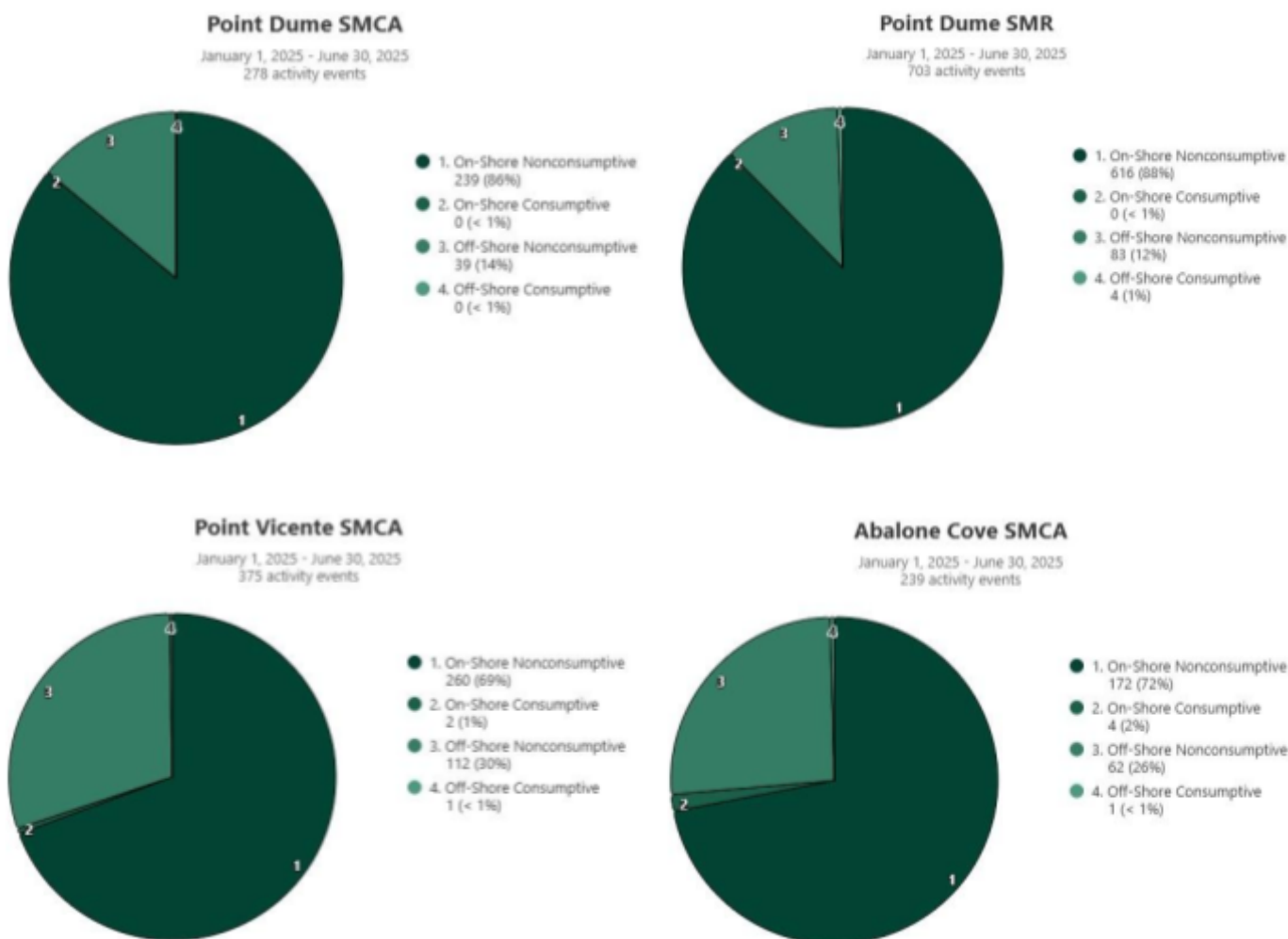
On-Shore - Activities that take place on a sandy or rocky beach. Excludes bluffs, trails, sea walls, parking lots, or other man-made structures. Includes recreation, tidepooling, shore-based fishing, etc.

Off-Shore - Activities that take place offshore, typically in knee-deep water or deeper. Includes surfing, SCUBA diving, kayaking, boat fishing, etc.

Consumptive - An activity in which a natural resource (i.e. fish, kelp, shells) is being collected.

Non-Consumptive - An activity in which a natural resource is not collected.

ACTIVITY BY MPA

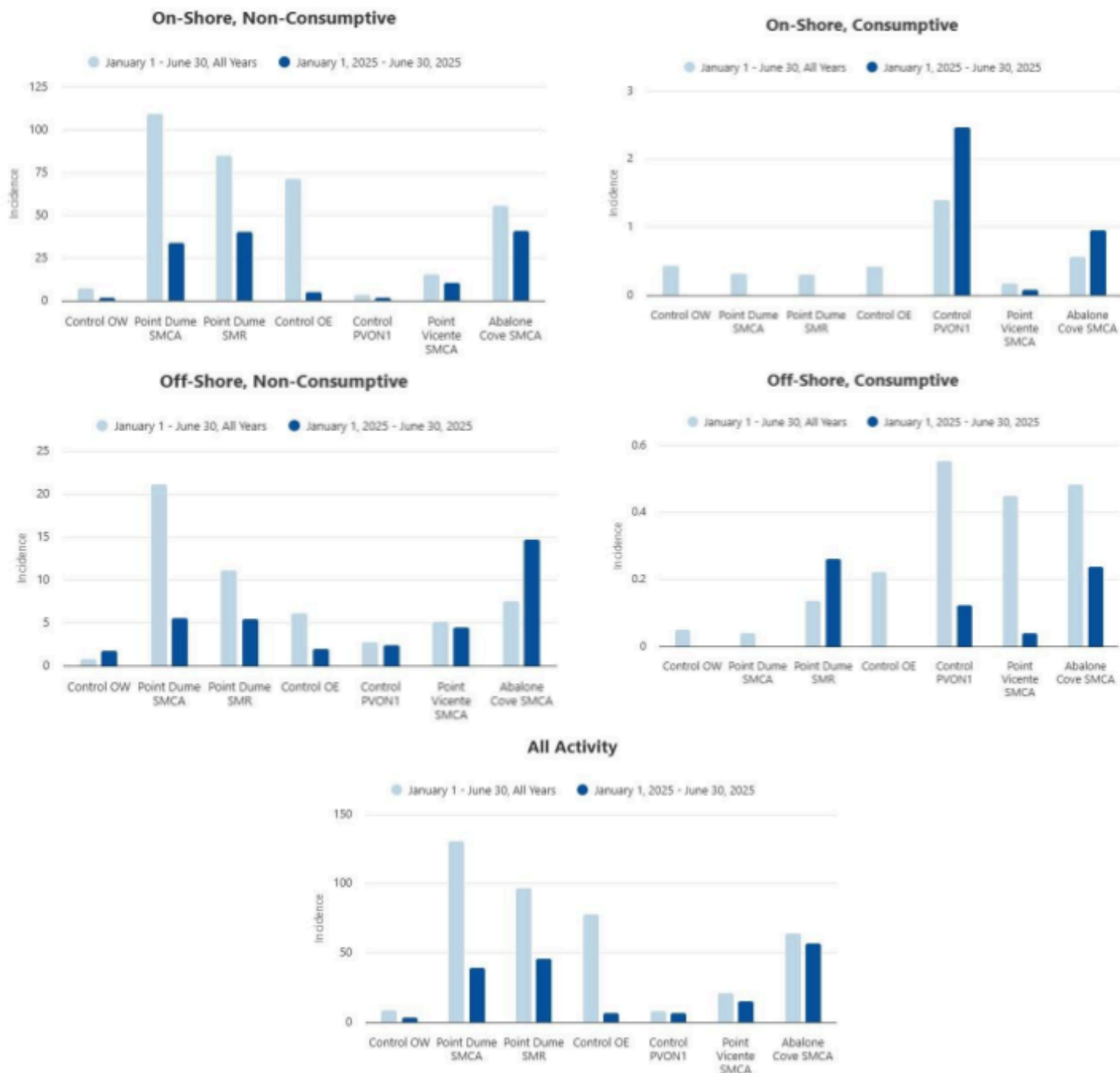


Figures 2a) Point Dume SMCA, 2b) Point Dume SMR, 2c) Point Vicente SMCA, and 2d) Abalone Cove SMCA in order of left to right and top to bottom show pie charts of activity type by MPA or Control site.

Figures 1 and 2 show the raw number of activities observed by the MPA Watch Program in Los Angeles County and are not standardized for the number of surveys performed.

ACTIVITY INCIDENCE BY SITE

Incidence Bar Charts



Figures 3a (onshore non-consumptive), 3b (onshore consumptive), 3c (offshore non-consumptive), 3d

(offshore consumptive), and 3e (all activity) in order of left to right and top to bottom: activity rate bar charts for 2024 compared to all years since 2011. **Incidence is calculated as the number of activities recorded divided by total survey miles.**

ACTIVITY INCIDENCE BY SITE

Incidence Tables

MPA	On-Shore			
	Non-Consumptive		Consumptive	
	January 1 June 30 All Years	January 1, 2025 through June 30, 2025	January 1 June 30 All Years	January 1, 2025 through June 30, 2025
Control OW	7.3	1.8	0.4	0.0
Point Dume SMCA	109.3	34.1	0.3	0.0
Point Dume SMR	85.2	40.5	0.3	0.0
Control OE	71.4	5.0	0.4	0.0
Control PVON1	3.3	2.2	1.4	2.5
Point Vicente SMCA	15.6	10.5	0.2	0.1
Abalone Cove SMCA	55.5	41.0	0.6	1.0
All MPAs Combined	62.9	18.9	0.5	0.7

Table 1: Onshore activity incidence rate by MPA or Control site. Incidence is calculated as the number of activities recorded divided by total survey miles.

MPA	Off-Shore			
	Non-Consumptive		Consumptive	
	January 1 June 30 All Years	January 1, 2025 through June 30, 2025	January 1 June 30 All Years	January 1, 2025 through June 30, 2025
Control OW	0.8	1.8	0.0	0.0
Point Dume SMCA	21.1	5.6	0.0	0.0
Point Dume SMR	11.1	5.5	0.1	0.3
Control OE	6.1	2.0	0.2	0.0
Control PVON1	2.8	2.4	0.6	0.1
Point Vicente SMCA	5.1	4.5	0.5	0.0
Abalone Cove SMCA	7.5	14.8	0.5	0.2
All MPAs Combined	10.3	4.8	0.3	0.1

Table 2: Offshore activity incidence rate by MPA or Control site. Incidence is calculated as the number of activities recorded divided by total survey miles.

MPA	Total	
	Combined	
	January 1 June 30 All Years	January 1, 2025 through June 30, 2025
Control OW	8.7	3.6
Point Dume SMCA	130.7	39.7
Point Dume SMR	96.8	46.3
Control OE	78.2	7.0
Control PVON1	8.1	7.2
Point Vicente SMCA	21.4	15.1
Abalone Cove SMCA	64.1	56.9
All MPAs Combined	74.0	24.4

Table 3: Total activity incidence rate by MPA or Control site. Incidence is calculated as the number of activities recorded divided by total survey miles. NOTE: Catalina Island MPAs are included in Tables 1-3 but were not included in overall analysis. See Catalina Island MPAs section below for details.

NOTES ON CALCULATING INCIDENCE

The baseline rate for the reporting period was calculated by summing the total use count for each category during the same period from each previous year and dividing this value by the transect miles surveyed at each site. The miles surveyed were calculated by first identifying the length of each transect for all the MPAs in question and multiplying the length of the transect by the number of surveys that had been taken along that transect during the same time period. For MPAs with multiple transects, the total distance traveled for each transect within the MPA were summed together to get the total miles surveyed within that MPA.

PROGRAM STATUS AND UPDATES

Heal the Bay's MPA Watch Program has had a successful beginning of 2025. Our hybrid training program remains effective. Heal the Bay has trained 1175 volunteers since 2011 and successfully used this system to train 18 new volunteers thus far in 2025 through our winter and spring public trainings. Heal the Bay volunteers have now submitted over 8,100 surveys since the inception of the program. Despite the numerous setbacks our team has experienced, the number of newly trained volunteers is higher than this time last year by two individuals; while the level of active volunteers is lower than this time last year, this was concurrent with our expectations due to transect closures. We plan to host private trainings with partners to increase our volunteer engagement and recruitment efforts later this summer. Our current MPA Program Coordinator, Zoe Collins, was onboarded in October of 2024 and has had success in transitioning into her role and is now fully managing Heal the Bay's MPA Watch program.

Heal the Bay is continuing to participate in the Marine Protected Network Decadal Management Review (DMR) and is engaging in the ongoing MPA Petition process. We attended the Fish and Game Commission's public commission meetings and Marine Resources Committee (MRC)

meeting to provide public comment on the MPA petition evaluation process and binning outcomes. We will continue to follow the MPA petition process to ensure the MPA network is not weakened and use MPA Watch data to inform our advocacy wherever possible.

Our team attended the MPA Watch Manager's Meeting in March of 2024 and discovered a protocol drift in our surveying methodology. This drift led to the data underrepresenting the amount of onshore beach activity observed. After the protocol drift was pointed out, training staff corrected the protocol and began teaching new volunteers the correct methodology. We have since learned that this update should have been postponed until a statewide protocol overhaul and returned to our original "incorrect" training, which has led to training cohorts who have been trained in different methods. This report, along with all others dating back to 2018, reflects this underrepresentation in onshore recreation, which should be taken into consideration when interpreting our data analysis results in the Breakdown by MPA section below.

Our team has continued some exciting partnerships this year. We have been working with Sacred Places Institute for Indigenous Peoples (SPI), an Indigenous-led, community-based organization located in the ancestral homelands of the Tongva People in Los Angeles and Bleu World, a community science collaborative on Catalina Island. We began meeting with SPI to complete an "Indigenization" of our MPA Watch program, including our training materials and public communication. Additionally, we have partnered with Kayla Fearheller, founder of Bleu World, to relaunch surveying of our Catalina Island MPA transects. Bleu World has since completed their first trainings and began submitting survey data from the island.

Heal the Bay's MPA Watch program concluded a 4-year study in partnership with the Eagle Lab at UCLA this June. The program allowed volunteers to collect sea water samples in Malibu MPAs for environmental DNA (eDNA) scientific testing. We have trained community scientists on sample collection protocols that will be used to analyze the quantification of biodiversity in a standardized way within the marine ecosystem. This has further increased stewardship of our MPAs and we have noticed increased interest in our MPA Watch program from eDNA event participants. We have had 23 volunteers participate in our eDNA sampling events in 2025 (which were canceled January-March due to the Los Angeles wildfires). Now that the program has sunsetted, our partners at UCLA will begin processing the collected samples and we are excited to use the results in our advocacy efforts and will hopefully publish those results in time.

This summer, Heal the Bay's MPA Watch program is participating in the second pilot of the MPA Watch Intercept Survey Working Group with other MPA Watch Statewide Network members to contribute to the understanding of human dimensions within and around MPAs. We have onboarded and trained two interns to administer the survey over the course of ten weeks this summer. These interns will present their feedback on the design of the survey as the culmination of their internship to assist in implementing this project on a wider scale.

Heal the Bay's MPA Watch Intern Program has started its fourteenth year and we have thus far had two successful cohorts of three interns total. This past spring, our intern completed an advocacy project to summarize Heal the Bay's positions on regionally-relevant MPA petitions. Her cumulative project, when finalized by our communications team, will aid in public education and

outreach and lower barriers to involvement in marine advocacy. For more information on future projects, please see the “Next Steps” section on page 14.

Despite the many triumphs of our programming, our team has endured notable setbacks and barriers due to the devastating wildfires that took place in early January. All of our MPA Watch transects were closed from January 6th until March 15th, when we notified volunteers that all Malibu transects were reopened. During this time, only 5 transects were accessible for surveying, and there remains much apprehension to this day about water quality and public safety. It is notable, also, that the stretch of Pacific Coast Highway from Santa Monica to Malibu was closed from January until May 23rd, which restricted access and added transportation barriers not only to MPA Watch volunteers but also the beachgoers MPA Watch surveys. We expect this to be reflected in our data, as outlined below.

BREAKDOWN BY MPA

Point Dume State Marine Reserve

Point Dume became a State Marine Reserve (SMR) in 2012 as part of the third phase of the California Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA). Point Dume SMR is located at Point Dume in Malibu, California, and encompasses a total of 7.53 square miles. Classified as an SMR, all take is strictly prohibited in this MPA. With panoramic views and miles of visibility down the Malibu coast, Point Dume is known today as an ideal location for hiking, rock climbing, and beach recreation.

Centuries before the settlement of Spanish missionaries in the area, the Indigenous Chumash tribe inhabited Point Dume. Living closely in relation to their natural environment, the Chumash treated Point Dume as a sacred place and a sun shrine. Point Dume’s significance relates directly to its position, as it juts out into the Pacific Ocean. Chumash people used the top of Point Dume as a lookout to observe seasonal migrations of marine mammals, schools of fish, and movements of people along the coastline.¹

Congruent with last year, Point Dume SMR had the most recorded activity of all survey sites in LA County thus far in 2025 with 41% of all recorded activities (Figure 1a). This MPA also had the second-highest activity incidence rate across all activities (46.3 activities observed per mile surveyed) of all four MPAs and control sites, indicating it is one of the most heavily trafficked sites (Table 3). This is a departure from previous years; typically Point Dume SMR has the highest activity incidence rates, but this year it was second to Abalone Cove SMCA. In 2024, it was the highest trafficked site and in years beyond that, both the highest percentage of recorded activity and highest rates of activity incidences were in Point Dume SMCA. When looking specifically at consumptive activity rates, the onshore rate was 0 observations per survey mile, compared to all-year rate of 0.3 and down from this time last year, which was 0.1 observations per survey mile (Table 1). The offshore consumptive activity rate was 0.3 observations per survey mile, which is an increase from the 2023, 2024 and the all-year rate. From January to June 2024, consumptive

¹ Robinson, T., Draft Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration - Point Dume Natural Preserve (2003). Retrieved from [https://www.parks.ca.gov/pages/980/files/Point Dume MND_ Draft2.pdf](https://www.parks.ca.gov/pages/980/files/Point_Dume_MND_Draft2.pdf)

activities made up only 0.2% of all activity in this MPA (reflecting four activity events) which in 2025 has increased to 0.6% of all activity (also reflecting four activity events, despite decreased survey submissions). These consumptive activities include four observations of unknown fishing.

The most common activities in Point Dume SMR thus far in 2025 were sandy beach recreation (36%), rocky beach recreation (21%), rocky wildlife viewing (12%), surfing (9%), and tidepooling (7%). This year saw decreases in sandy and rocky beach recreation and increases in wildlife watching, surfing, and tidepooling. Wildlife viewing had a notable increase in popularity in our 2025 mid-year report and continues to rise in activity frequency from 7% in 2024 to 12% in 2025, representing 86 observations across surveys and 44% of all wildlife viewing activity observations thus far in 2025 across the mainland LA MPAs and control sites. Surfing was observed in this MPA more than any other survey site in LA County, with a total of 60 observations, accounting for 63% of the 96 total observations thus far in 2025. This is notable because historically Point Dume SMCA has hosted the highest surfing observation count.

Consistent with both data reports in 2023 and 2024, tidepooling was more common in Point Dume SMR than in any other MPA surveyed thus far in 2025, a departure from previous years' trends where Abalone Cove SMCA had the highest numbers of observed tidepoolers. These changes are most likely due to both the reopening of transect SMR2a, which includes Dume Cove and has tidepool habitat, along with the continuous closure of transect ACSMCA2 (Abalone Cove) which has popular tidepool habitat. The closure of this transect and the effect it has had on our MPA Watch data is detailed further in the Abalone Cove section below.

This year, the California State Park's team continued conducting MPA Watch surveys along with Heal the Bay volunteers, interns, and staff in the Point Dume SMR. That data is reflected in all tables and figures in this report. MPA Interpreter Hannah Eaton conducted 13 MPA Watch surveys at transects SMR2a (Point Dume to Little Dume), and SMR2b (Wooden Staircase to Little Dume) from January-June 2025. During this time, there were two instances of dogs off leash that were spoken to who put their dogs on leash and left the MPA during the survey, and once instance of a dog within the MPA that was reported to State Parks via SMS. These incidents could highlight the need for new signage reminding beachgoers that dogs are not allowed within these MPAs, although there is existing signage on the beach. In May 2024, three regulatory signs were mounted at each lookout and at the base of the wooden staircase going down to the beach. It was forecasted that a new MPA interpretive sign with Indigenous translations would be arriving at Point Dume, which we have yet to see installed. Based on our team's site visits, these signs do not all appear to be in place on the bluff lookouts, and we believe compliance would be increased with interpretive signage.

Point Dume State Marine Conservation Area

Located adjacent to the Point Dume State Marine Reserve, Point Dume SMCA encompasses 15.92 square miles and runs along Zuma and El Matador beaches in Malibu, CA to the northwest of Point Dume. Adopted in 2012 along with Point Dume SMR during phase three of the MLPA adoption process, this MPA was chosen as the location for an SMCA due to diverse habitats, high

species diversity, and monitoring & research opportunities. Similar to the Point Dume SMR, this site plays a significant role in Chumash maritime culture and is well suited for tribal co-management, maritime cultural preservation, and education and outreach.

As a conservation area, Point Dume SMCA does allow for some consumptive activity. The recreational take by spearfishing of white seabass and pelagic finfish is permitted, along with the commercial take of swordfish by harpoon and coastal pelagic species by round haul net, brail gear, and light boat. There is an incidental take limit of no more than 5% by commercial fishing activity, and take pursuant to beach nourishment and sediment management practices is also permissible.

Like in previous years, total activity incidence rate in the Point Dume SMCA was much lower during the first half of 2025 than the all-year rate (Table 3). As noted above, this is most likely due to protocol drift in our MPA surveys that has resulted in a smaller onshore area being observed. We suspect this protocol drift will have a greater impact on sites like the Point Dume SCMA which contains multiple transects with wide sandy beaches that are very popular to beachgoers. The rate of onshore nonconsumptive activity in this MPA, for example, was only 34.1 observations per survey mile thus far in 2025, compared to the all-year rate of 109.3 observations per survey mile. This pattern of lower activity incidence as compared to the all-year rate in this and other MPAs seems to have begun around 2018/2019, when the protocol drift is suspected to have begun. We predict that, after the statewide protocol overhaul to include the entire beach up to a shoreline boundary of infrastructure rather than only including activity between the mean high tide line (MHTL) and the water, this gap will close, particularly for onshore non-consumptive activity like sandy and rocky beach recreation.

Other rates of activity incidence in this MPA are also lower than the same survey period in 2023, consistent with a downward trend observed in 2024. Offshore non-consumptive activity incidence dropped from 14.3 observations per survey mile in 2023 to 5.2 for 2024, and now to 5.6 in 2025 for the months of January-June (Table 2). For consumptive activity, onshore activity incidence continued to decrease slightly, from 0.2 in 2023 to 0.1 in 2024 and now to 0.0 in 2025 observations per survey mile (Table 1) while offshore consumptive activity incidence remained at zero (Table 2). Consumptive activity remains very low in this MPA and accounts for 0% of all recorded activities with 0 observations recorded in January-June of 2025 (Figure 2a).

The most common activities in the Point Dume SMCA thus far in 2025 were largely unchanged from previous years and included sandy beach recreation (65%), surfing (13%), rocky beach recreation (11%), animals off leash (4%), and animals on leash (3%). The only notable deviation this year is a stark increase in animals off leash; in 2024, animals on leash only accounted for 1% of observations and animals off leash did not appear in the top five activities category at all. This increase in off leash animals could be cause for concern and indicate a need for improved signage and outreach, as outlined above. These five activities comprised 95% of all 278 total observations thus far in 2025 in this MPA. It is notable that the overall observations decreased from 675 in 2024, though this is expected given the site closures due to the wildfires.

Point Vicente No-Take State Marine Conservation Area

Point Vicente State Marine Conservation Area (SMCA) is a no-take MPA established in 2012. This MPA protects key habitats and covers fifteen square miles. Home to the Point Vicente Lighthouse and 3.7 miles of scenic shoreline, Point Vicente attracts many tourists. Beach access in this MPA is limited which makes beach recreation and other activities less common, however, tourists can still enjoy the views and occasional wildlife viewing from the bluff trails. As a no-take SMCA, no recreational or commercial take is permitted within its boundaries. Specially permitted incidental take for infrastructure maintenance is legally permissible.

As with the last few years, volunteers surveyed Point Vicente SMCA the most out of all the MPAs and control sites thus far in 2025 with a total of 64 surveys, making up 47% of the total number of surveys conducted, but only 22% of the total activities observed (Figure 1a). Historically, Point Vicente SMCA has had more offshore activity than any other LA MPA, making up approximately 60% of the total observed activity in 2024, up from 36% of observations for January-June of 2023. This year, the observed off-shore activity fell to approximately 30% of activity (Figure 2c), which is a notable decrease from last year's mid-year data. In 2024, our reporting noted another deviation in historical trends, because consumptive activity in this MPA was not the highest percentage of consumptive activity of all LA County. This trend continues into 2025, with the highest percentage of consumptive activity being in Abalone Cove, as outlined below. Consumptive activity only accounted for 0.8% of all observations in Point Vicente SMCA (Figure 2c) at 0.1 observation per survey mile (Tables 1 & 2). Total activity incidence from January to June increased in 2025, with 15.1 observations per survey mile (Table 3). Mid-year 2023 was at a similar incidence rate of 16.1 observations, which decreased to 7.9 observations per survey mile in January-June 2024. This 2024 dip in activity could be due to the unprecedented landslides in the area. Overall, our data shows increased on-shore activities this year, which is a relatively new trend.

Onshore consumptive activity increased slightly from 0 observations per survey mile in mid 2023 and 2024 to 0.1 observations in January-June 2024 (Table 1). Offshore consumptive activity decreased from 0.3 activities per survey mile this time in 2023 to 0.1 activities per survey mile in mid-2024, to now 0.0 observations per survey mile in mid-2025 (Table 2). The three total consumptive activities recorded thus far in 2025 have been two counts of rocky beach hook and line fishing and one observation of off-shore active commercial trap fishing.

Across all activity types, the most common activities in this MPA were wildlife viewing (34%), rocky beach recreation (18%), sandy beach recreation (10%), and power boating (9%). Sandy beach recreation has historically not appeared in the top five activities, likely due to the shoreline boundary issue. One transect in Point Vicente SMCA (PVSMCA3) boasts a small stretch of sandy beach above the mean high tide line used by a local resort for kayak rentals. Now that there are volunteers surveying with the correct MPA Watch protocol, we expect to see increases in sandy beach recreation because of observations on this small sandy beach area.

Abalone Cove State Marine Conservation Area

Located adjacent to Point Vicente SMCA, Abalone Cove SMCA spans just 1.2 miles of shoreline and encompasses only 4.7 square miles. The smallest of the MPAs in LA County, this protected area is located south of the Palos Verdes Peninsula. It was adopted in 2012 and along with Point Vicente SMCA, includes the only south-facing headland in the entire region. The shoreline of this MPA is known for its rocky intertidal habitat. As an SMCA, Abalone Cove SMCA does allow some take of marine organisms. Within the MPA boundaries, the recreational take by spearfishing of white seabass and pelagic finfish; and market squid by hand-held dip net is permitted. The commercial take of swordfish by harpoon; and coastal pelagic species and Pacific bonito by round haul net, brail gear, and light boat are also permitted. Additionally, like Point Vicente SMCA, Abalone Cove SMCA partially contains a superfund site, and therefore take pursuant to the mitigation actions of the superfund site is permitted.

Surveys in Abalone Cove SMCA have been limited to just one of the two transects due to continued beach closures in the Palos Verdes Peninsula. Due to land movement and unstable bluffs, the trails leading to transect ACSMCA2 or Abalone Cove have been closed for all of 2025 and most of 2024. This has led to changes in the makeup of activities observed in this MPA. Unlike previous years, where tidepooling was often observed as one of the most common activities in this MPA, only 4 counts of tidepooling were observed so far in 2025, most likely due to the closure of the Abalone Cove trails which lead to an intertidal zone popular among tidepoolers.

During the first half of 2025, total activity incidence rate in Abalone Cove SMCA significantly increased from 21.9 observations per survey mile in mid-2024 to 56.9 observations per survey mile in mid-2025 (Table 3). Total activity rate in this MPA is below the all-year rate across all activity types (56.9 compared to 64.1) but is closer to the all-year rates than this time last year as is consistent with other MPAs and expected with the protocol drift outlined earlier in this report (Table 3).

Consumptive activity made up 2.1% (5 out of 239 total observations) of observed activities, which is mostly consistent with the consumptive activity rates observed in 2024 (Figure 2d). Onshore consumptive activity incidence rate increased from 0 observations per survey mile mid-2024 to 1.0 observations this year, (Table 1) while offshore consumptive activity incidence rate stayed relatively stable from 0.4 observations per survey mile in 2024 to 0.2 observations thus far in 2025 (Table 2). This increase in onshore consumptive activity is due to one survey's observation of 4 counts of rocky spear fishing. The volunteer who observed this activity happened to converse with these anglers, who shared they came for white seabass. This activity is not a violation and is allowed within the MPA boundaries. The other count of consumptive activity was an observation of active recreational rod-and-reel boat fishing, which would be considered a violation and was reported via phone by the volunteer. The most common activities observed in Abalone Cove during the survey period were rocky and sandy beach recreation (34% and 32%, respectively), kayaking (13%), powerboating (4%), and work boating (4%). This is the only MPA with kayaking regularly appearing in the top 5 most common activities in LA County, and this year did note a considerable increase in work boat observations.

Catalina Island: Lover's Cove SMCA, Casino Point No-Take SMCA, Blue Cavern Onshore (No-Take) SMCA and Offshore SMCA, and Cat Harbor SMCA

Catalina Island hosts nine of the state's MPAs, protecting around 22 square miles of coastal and marine habitat. At this time, select Heal the Bay volunteers and interns have access to four MPA Watch transects on Catalina: Blue Cavern, Cat Harbor, Lover's Cove, and Casino Point. Casino Point, the state's smallest MPA at just 0.01 square miles, is located in Avalon. This MPA is a "no-take" state marine conservation area or SMCA and does not allow for take of any kind, including all fishing activities. This MPA does, however, allow the feeding of fish, an included regulation unique to the island. Lover's Cove SMCA, also located in Avalon, is also a small MPA at only 0.06 square miles. This SMCA prohibits all take except for recreational hook and line fishing from Cabrillo Mole. Feeding fish for marine life viewing, similarly to Casino Point, is also allowed.

The other two MPAs surveyed on Catalina Island are in the Two Harbors area. The Blue Cavern Onshore No-Take SMCA covers 2.61 square miles and does not allow take of any kind. The Blue Cavern Offshore SMCA, however, which runs adjacent to the onshore MPA and covers 7.7 square miles, allows for the recreational take of market squid by handheld dip net, pelagic finfish by hook-and-line or spearfishing, and white seabass by spearfishing. Commercial take of pelagic finfish by hook-and-line and of swordfish by harpoon is also permitted. These two MPAs have been part of a protected area for longer than their current designation within the California MPA network and were once the Catalina Marine Science Center Marine Life Refuge, which was recognized 30 years earlier than the network's designation.

The Cat Harbor SMCA is much smaller, covering only 0.26 square miles and spanning just 0.4 miles of shoreline. This MPA, which is within an all-weather harbor that has calm waters and includes sandy and rocky beaches and tidal flats, allows the recreational take of lobster and sea urchin, squid by hook-and-line, and finfish by hook-and-line or spearfishing. Commercial take of sea cucumber by diving only, and of lobster and sea urchin is also permitted.

Each of these Catalina MPAs (combining the two Blue Cavern MPAs into one) contains one MPA Watch transect and, over the course of this program, have only been surveyed a handful of times, though the new Catalina Island MPA Watch coordinators have recently launched on island training methods and we hope to see an increase in survey efforts. Please see the separate Catalina Island MPA Watch regional report for details on surveys obtained so far with the relaunch of the program there.

POTENTIAL VIOLATIONS

While some consumptive activities are permitted in LA County MPAs, the consumptive activity metric is a good place to start when looking at compliance and possible violations in MPAs, particularly state marine reserves and no-take state marine conservation areas. The rate of consumptive activities across all MPAs surveyed by MPA Watch remains relatively low in LA County mainland MPAs, consistent with previous reporting. Only 12 counts of consumptive activity were observed inside MPAs, accounting for only 0.7% of total activities thus far in 2025.

An additional 42 counts of consumptive activity were observed in control sites, up from 20 in mid-2024. The highest rates of on-shore consumptive activity occurred at control site PVON1, located at the northern boundary of Point Vicente SMCA. This is consistent with data from 2024 and previous years, however, this year the off-shore consumptive activity rates were highest in Point Dume SMR and Abalone Cove SMCA, both with a 0.3 incidence rate per survey mile (Figure 3d). This is outside typical trends in our data, because historically consumptive activity rates are consistently higher outside of MPAs which could indicate good compliance in our MPAs. A deviation in this trend could indicate non-compliance, though it is important to note that consumptive activity observations do not necessarily equate to a compliance infraction.

Other than at Abalone Cove SMCA and Point Dume SMR, consumptive activity incidence rates were below 0.1 observations per survey mile both onshore and offshore in LA County MPAs, a good indication of compliance in our protected areas. This reporting does not include the activity rates for the Catalina Island MPAs.

MPA	January 1 June 30 All Years	January 1, 2025 through June 30, 2025
Control OW	0	0
Point Dume SMCA	201	0
Point Dume SMR	297	0
Control OE	0	0
Control PVON1	0	0
Point Vicente SMCA	177	3
Abalone Cove SMCA	140	1
All MPAs Combined	815	4

Table 4: Raw counts of observed potential violations by MPA Watch volunteers for all years of MPA Watch compared to the first half of 2025. These do NOT include observed “unknown fishing” as these cannot be deemed potential violations without further information.

Of the observed consumptive activities across all LA County MPAs, only 4 observations were deemed violations, or about 0.2% of total observations. Violations were observed in only 2 of the 4 mainland MPAs monitored by MPA Watch in LA County (Table 4). Observations of a violation were made on 3 surveys, accounting for 2% of total surveys conducted. This number has historically fluctuated, with 0.6% of total surveys containing potential violations in 2024 and 3.5% of surveys that had observed violations in mid-2023.

It is important to note, however, that this count of violations excludes 4 counts of “unknown fishing” observed in the Point Dume SMR which are not included in the total potential violation count due to lack of further information. This could likely lead to an underestimate of the total observations of violations as Point Dume SMR is a no-take MPA.

Of the potential violation observations made during the survey period, only one was reported to CalTIP. We continue to implement measures in an effort to increase CalTIP reports for observed violations by our volunteers, including practice calls during trainings and sample call scripts for volunteers in our training kits. We believe that volunteers are hesitant to call CalTIP for violations in SMCAs because the regulations are harder to

recall than in an SMR where no take is allowed. We hope this is something that can be addressed through additional language in trainings to make volunteers feel confident. We will continue to brainstorm with the broader MPA Watch community to develop additional tools and are continuing to experiment with direct outreach to volunteers who observe but do not report violations to better understand why the calls are not being made and offer resources to encourage the additional reporting.

NEXT STEPS

Looking forward to the rest of 2025, Heal the Bay's MPA Watch team will host two more public training sessions, at least one volunteer enrichment event, and at least one private training with the National Charity League using our permanently adopted hybrid training model. Our team plans to strengthen our volunteer relationships, increase engagement and retention by reaching out to other potential partners such as clubs at different high schools and community colleges to provide them with research and field opportunities.

Our team is passionate about strengthening our relationship with our partners from SPI. We will be meeting with SPI to complete the "Indigenization" of our MPA Watch program. We are looking forward to the final products of this partnership, including an updated manual that will contain information on the Indigenous nations whose land and coastal waters we survey, updated training slides, and other new inclusions to our overall program to be finalized for use in 2026.

Additionally, we are looking forward to releasing updated training materials in congruence with the state-wide protocol epoch shift. A new classroom training video, refresher course, and manual will be developed once we have recommendations from the statewide coordinator. There will be a required training refresher from all MPA Watch volunteers.

This June we completed our second 2-year eDNA study in collaboration with UCLA to monitor the biodiversity of our Malibu MPAs. Now that the program has come to an end, PhD candidate Moriah Byrd will be analyzing the data and potentially utilizing MPA Watch data in her thesis paper. We hope to publish some preliminary results in early 2026 that we will share widely with the public, MPA managers, and partner organizations.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

LA County MPA Watch is part of a larger statewide MPA Watch effort. For more information about this program, please visit www.mpawatch.org. If you are interested in joining the Heal the Bay MPA Watch volunteer team, please attend one of our volunteer orientations for more information. Volunteer orientations are held bimonthly and are a prerequisite to attending one of our quarterly MPA Watch trainings.

For additional information on MPA Watch, including survey sites, participating organizations, protocols and datasheets, media kit, and how to get involved, please visit mpawatch.org. Connect with MPA Watch on social media @MPAWatchOrg.

To learn more about Heal the Bay's MPA Watch Program and to register for an orientation or training, please visit healthebay.org/mpa. For information on California's network of marine protected areas, please visit californiampas.org. For details on the rules, regulations, and management of California's MPAs, please visit wildlife.ca.gov/MPAs.

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MPA Watch Volunteer Trainings: Left – Terranea Resort, May 2025; Middle – Westward Beach, June 2025; Right – Terranea Resort, February 2025