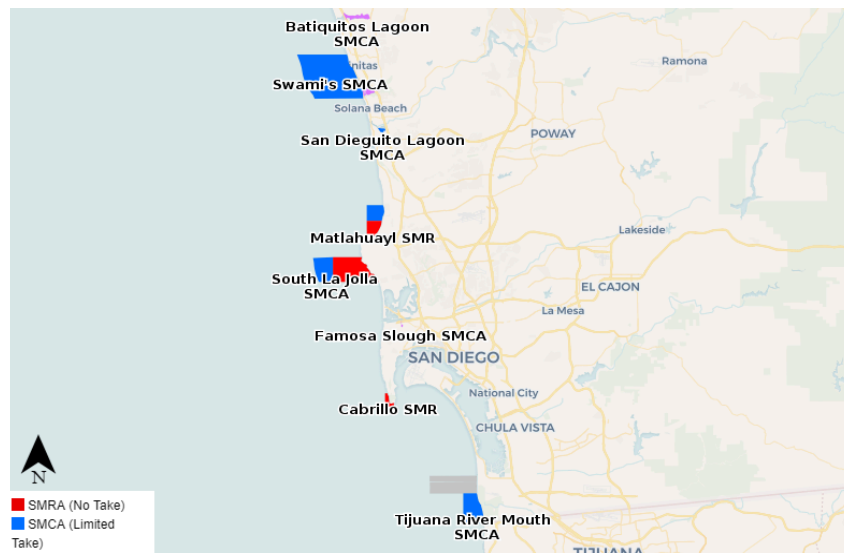


Marine Protected Area (MPA) Watch Regional Report

San Diego County

January 1, 2025 - June 30, 2025

Map of Region's MPAs



MPA Watch is a statewide collaborative effort to collect critical human use data to enhance the management and conservation of marine protected areas (MPAs). MPA Watch data informs the management, enforcement, and science of California's MPAs and allows us insight on how human uses are changing as a result of MPA implementation. By involving local communities in this important work, MPA Watch programs inspire and empower stewardship, and educate California communities about ocean ecosystems. MPA Watch trains volunteers to observe and collect unbiased data on coastal and marine resource use. The San Diego Marine Protected Area Watch Program, organized by WILDCOAST, engages community scientists and CA State Parks in five MPAs in San Diego County, including Swami's SMCA, San Diego- Scripps Coastal SMCA, Matlahuayl SMR, South La Jolla SMR, and the Tijuana River Mouth SMCA.

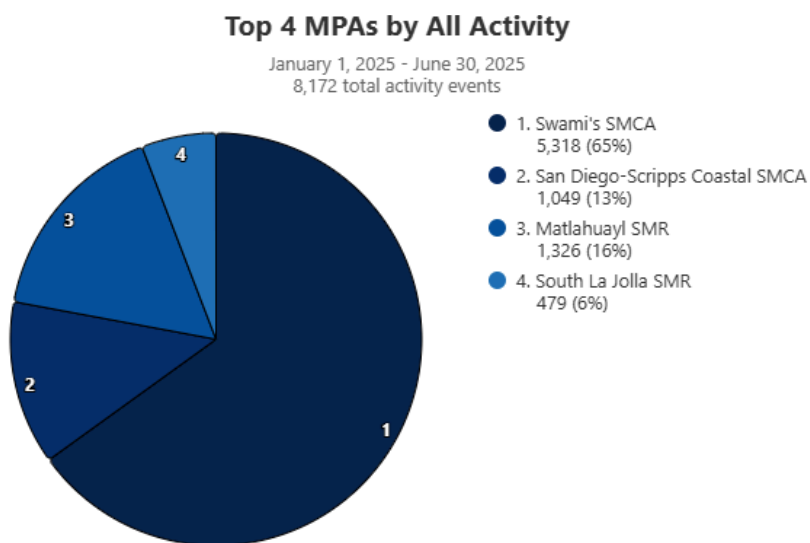
Executive Summary

- From January to June of 2025 in San Diego County, 129 land-based surveys were conducted by 13 volunteers with 8,172 activities observed, 26 of which were potential violations (23 at Swami's, 3 at Scripps). 10 boat-based surveys were conducted by the WILDCOAST Oceans Team observing 133 activities. Surveys were conducted in the Swami's SMCA (74 surveys) and San Diego Scripps-Coastal SMCA (32 surveys), Matlahuayl SMR (17 surveys), and South La Jolla SMR (6 surveys).



- Non-consumptive activities (on and offshore) account for 99.1% (8,100 / 8,172) of observations in four of the five MPAs listed above¹. Top activities include beach recreation (sandy), surfing, tidepooling, offshore recreation, and animals on leash (sandy).
- Consumptive activities (on and offshore) account for 1% (72 / 8,172) of observations in the 4 MPAs listed above. Top activities include hook fishing (sandy), hand collection of biota, unknown fishing, and consumptive diving.
- A significant issue was the high concentration of domoic acid from *Pseudo Nitzschia* blooms, causing numerous California Sea Lion and dolphin strandings and deaths. This occurred through most of Jan-June 2025 throughout San Diego, possibly impacting beach goers.

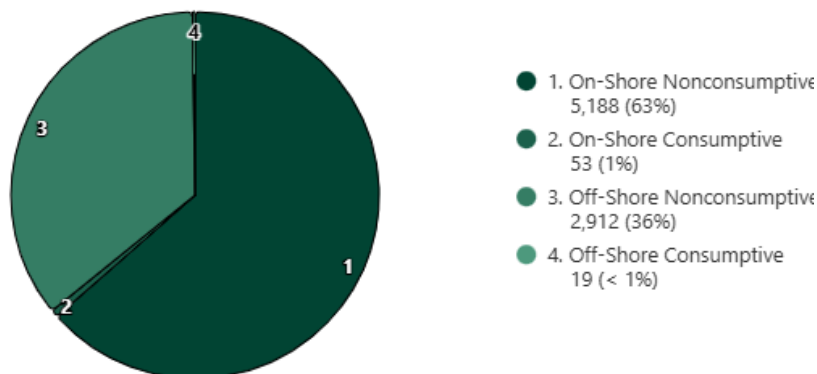
HUMAN USE OF MPAS January 1, 2025 - June 30, 2025



¹ Due to health and safety concerns, volunteers were asked to not survey the Tijuana River Mouth SMCA. There have been recurring issues with beach closures at the Tijuana River Mouth SMCA due to poor water quality resulting from sewage contamination.

All MPAs Combined

January 1, 2025 - June 30, 2025
8,172 activity events



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.

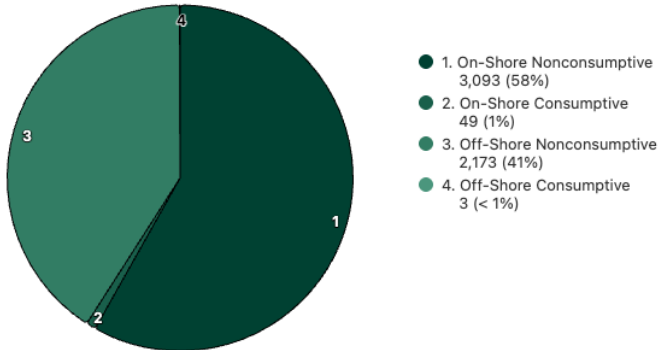
Consumptive - An activity in which a natural resource (i.e. fish, kelp, shells) is being collected.

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

ACTIVITY BY MPA

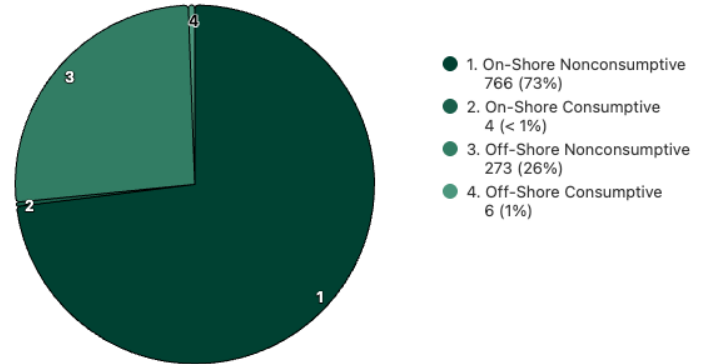
Swami's SMCA

January 1, 2025 - June 30, 2025
5,318 activity events



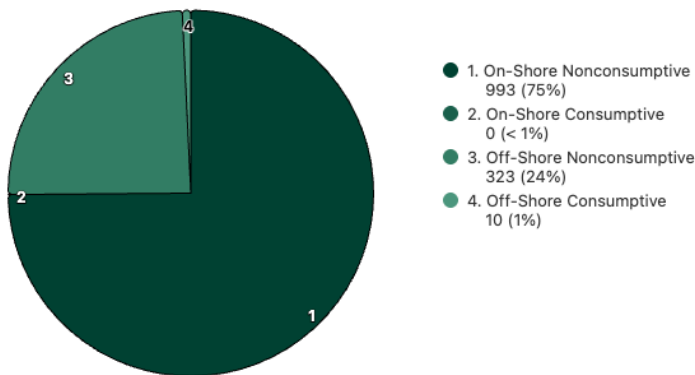
San Diego-Scripps Coastal SMCA

January 1, 2025 - June 30, 2025
1,049 activity events



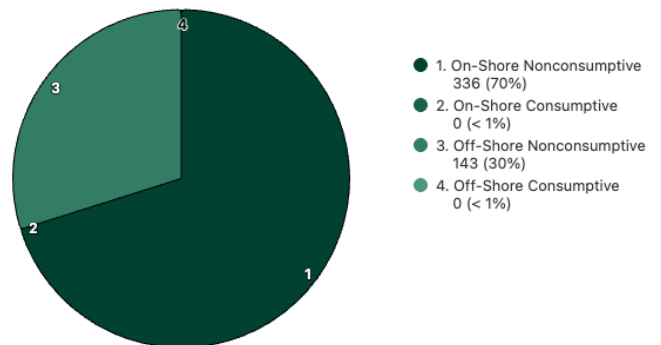
Matlahuayl SMR

January 1, 2025 - June 30, 2025
1,326 activity events

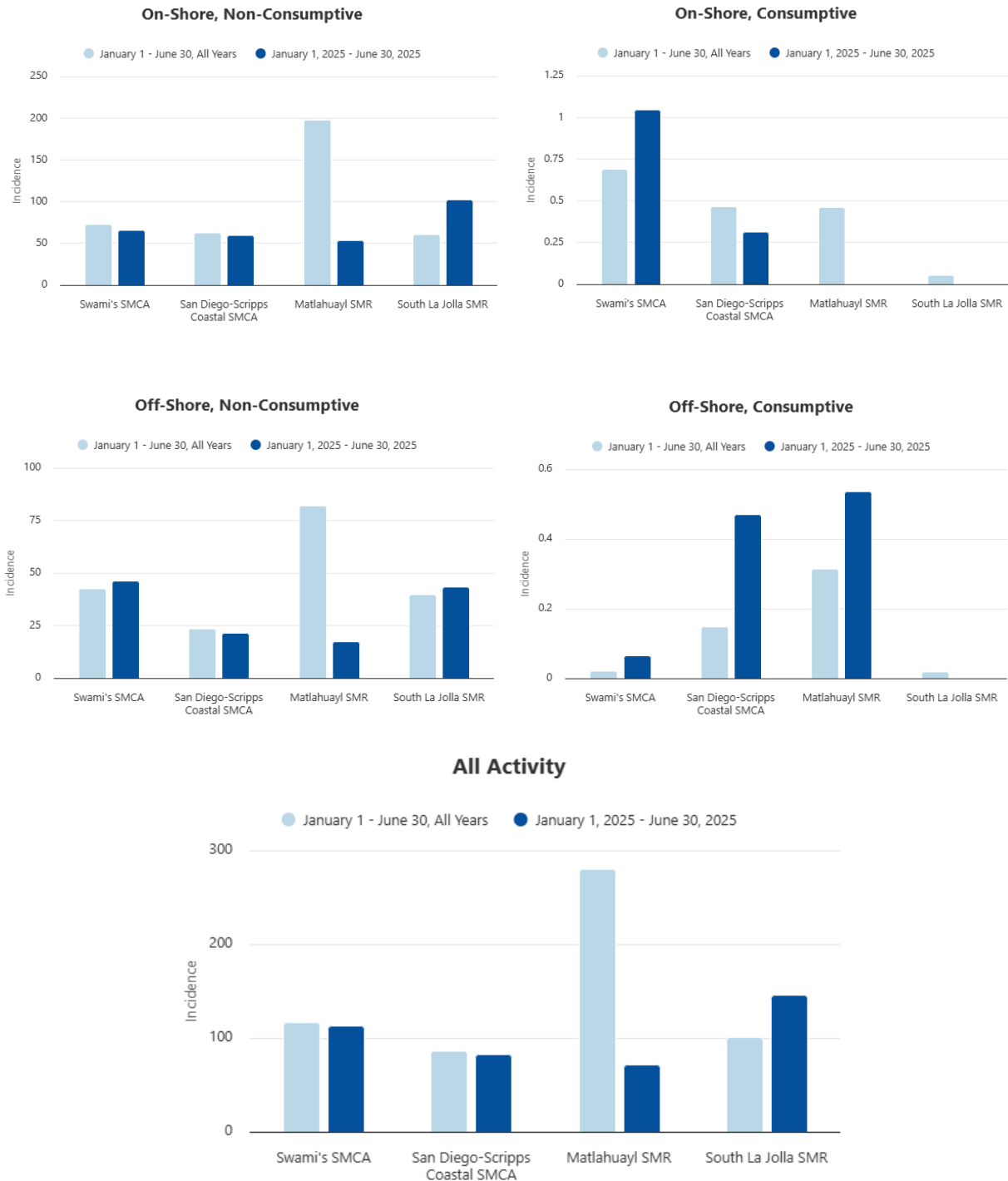


South La Jolla SMR

January 1, 2025 - June 30, 2025
479 activity events



ACTIVITY INCIDENCE BY MPA



The above charts show incidence values for each MPA monitored by MPA Watch in San Diego County. Incidence is calculated as the number of activities recorded divided by total survey-miles.

ACTIVITY INCIDENCE BY MPA

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
Swami's SMCA	72.8	65.8	0.7	1.0
San Diego-Scripps Coastal SMCA	62.4	59.8	0.5	0.3
Matlahuayl SMR	197.8	53.1	0.5	0.0
South La Jolla SMR	60.6	101.8	0.1	0.0
All MPAs Combined	69.6	63.4	1.0	0.6

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
Swami's SMCA	42.6	46.2	0.0	0.1
San Diego-Scripps Coastal SMCA	23.3	21.3	0.1	0.5
Matlahuayl SMR	81.8	17.3	0.3	0.5
South La Jolla SMR	39.5	43.3	0.0	0.0
All MPAs Combined	32.5	35.6	0.2	0.2

Total			
Combined			
MPA	January 1 June 30 All Years	January 1, 2025 through June 30, 2025	
Swami's SMCA	116.1	113.1	
San Diego-Scripps Coastal SMCA	86.3	82.0	
Matlahuayl SMR	280.4	70.9	
South La Jolla SMR	100.2	145.2	
All MPAs Combined	103.3	99.9	

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.

BREAKDOWN BY MPA

Swami's State Marine Conservation Area

In the Swami's SMCA, it is unlawful to injure, damage, take, or possess any living, geological, or cultural marine resource for commercial and/or recreational purposes, with the following specified exceptions:

- a. Recreational take by hook-and-line from shore is allowed.*
- b. The recreational take by spearfishing of white seabass and pelagic finfish is allowed.*
- c. Take pursuant to beach nourishment and other sediment management activities and operation and maintenance of artificial structures inside the conservation area is allowed pursuant to any required federal, state and local permits, or as otherwise authorized by the Department.*

Between the months of January and June 2025

- 74 surveys collected
- 5,318 activity events recorded.
- 23 potential violations recorded (hand collection of biota- rocky and sandy and consumptive diving of unknown species)

People observed in the MPA were primarily taking part in non-consumptive activities (99% of all 5,318 activity events): both on-shore (58% = 3,093 activity events) and off-shore (41% = 2,173 activity events) including:

- Beach recreation (53% = 2,840 activity events), surfing (36% = 1,929 activity events), animals on leash, sandy (3% = 161 activity events), offshore recreation (2% = 120 activity events), and other board sports (2% = 86 activity events).

The remaining observations recorded were consumptive activities (1% of 5,318 activity events): both on-shore (1% = 49 activity events) and off-shore (< 1% = 3 activity events) including:

- Hook fishing, sandy, (1% = 27 activity events), hand collection of biota, sandy, (1% = 20 activity events), hand collection of biota, rocky (<1% = 2 activity events), unknown fishing (<1% = 2 activity events), and consumptive diving (<1% = 1 activity event).

Notes from State Parks at Swami's:

- The all parks graph for each category (not included in this report, but can be provided per request) reflects that Swami's MPA contributes a significant amount of activities across the board.

- Surfing leads all other offshore recreation and beachgoers contribute significantly to all of the Swami's' transects.
- There is some shell collecting and a few dog infractions, but for the most part these people became compliant after being informed of the rules. We have a lot of dog walkers along our MPA and I am happy to report that the majority are on a leash in the proper area.
- Observations made on our MPA walks show that the folks have respect for their beach and use good pack in pack out practices.
- The San Elijo Lagoon mouth remained closed for months due to sand accumulation, impacting water flow, though partial dredging efforts began in February and April, with a major project starting in June.
- High tide cycles in March led to increased coastal bluff erosion and small block falls along San Elijo State Beach.
- Interpreter teams actively engaged the public in tide pools, educating them on MPA preservation and marine mammal strandings through programs like Junior Rangers and campfire sessions.
- The coast experienced several migrant beach landings, including an abandoned panga boat.

San Diego-Scripps Coastal State Marine Conservation Area

In the San Diego-Scripps SMCA, It is unlawful to injure, damage, take, or possess any living, geological, or cultural marine resource for commercial and/or recreational purposes, with the following specified exceptions:

a. The recreational take of coastal pelagic species, except market squid, by hook-and-line is allowed.

b. Take pursuant to the operation and maintenance of artificial structures inside the conservation area is allowed pursuant to any required federal, state, and local permits, or as otherwise authorized by the Department.

c. Licensees of the Regents of the University of California and all officers, employees, and students of such university may take, for scientific purposes, invertebrates, fish, or specimens of marine plant or algae under the conditions prescribed in a scientific collecting permit issued by the Department.

Between the months of January and June 2025

- 32 surveys collected
- 1,049 activity events recorded.
- 3 potential violations recorded (hand collection of biota, sandy)

People observed in the MPA were primarily taking part in non-consumptive activities (99% of all 1,049 observation): both on-shore (73% = 766 activity events) and off-shore (26% = 273 activity events) including:

- Beach recreation, sandy, (47% = 493 activity events), surfing (21% = 224 activity events), tidepooling (14% = 143 activity events), beach recreation, rocky, (10% = 110 activity events), and offshore recreation (3% = 32 activity events).

The remaining observations recorded were consumptive activities (1% of 1,049 activity events): both on-shore (<1% = 4 activity events) and off-shore (< 1% = 6 activity events) including:

- Unknown fishing (<1% = 6 activity events), hand collection biota, sandy (<1% = 3 activity events), and hook fishing, sandy (<1% = 1 activity event).

Matlahuayl State Marine Reserve

In the Matlahuayl SMR, it is unlawful to injure, damage, take, or possess any living, geological, or cultural marine resource.

Between the months of January and June 2025

- 17 surveys collected
- 1,326 activity events recorded.
- 0 potential violations recorded

People observed in the MPA were primarily taking part in non-consumptive activities (99% of all 1,326 observation): both on-shore (75% of all 993 observations) and off-shore (24% of all 323 observations) including:

- Beach recreation, sandy, (72%), surfing (16%), offshore recreation (4%), and kayaking (2%).

The remaining observations recorded were off-shore consumptive activities (1% of 1,326 activity events): including:

- Unknown fishing (1% = 10 activity events)

South La Jolla State Marine Reserve

In the South La Jolla State Marine Reserve (SMR), it is unlawful to injure, damage, take, or possess any living, geological, or cultural marine resource.

Between the months of January and June 2025

- 6 surveys collected

- 479 activity events recorded.
- 0 potential violations recorded

People observed in the MPA were only taking part in non-consumptive activities (100% of all 479 observation): both on-shore (70% = 336 activity events) and off-shore (30% = 143 activity events) including

- Beach recreation, sandy, (68% = 327 activity events), surfing (22% = 107 activity events), other board sports (5% = 23 activity events), offshore recreation (3% = 13 activity events), and driving on the beach (1% = 5 activity events).

Tijuana River Mouth State Marine Conservation Area

In the Tijuana River Mouth SMCA, it is unlawful to injure, damage, take, or possess any living, geological, or cultural marine resource for recreational and/or commercial purposes, with the following specified exceptions:

- a. The recreational take of coastal pelagic species, except market squid, by hand-held dip net only and the commercial take of coastal pelagic species, except market squid, by round haul net only. Finfish by hook-and-line only is allowed.*

Between the months of January and June 2025, there were no land-based surveys conducted by San Diego MPA Watch in the Tijuana River Mouth SMCA. There have been recurring issues with beach closures at the Tijuana River Mouth SMCA due to poor water quality resulting from sewage contamination.

San Diego County MPAs Boat-based Surveys

January – June 2025

In addition to the shore-based MPA Watch surveys, WILDCOAST staff conducts offshore surveys from the Research Vessel *Under-See* of South La Jolla SMR, Matlahuayl SMR, and Scripps SMCA. As conditions permit, surveys are also conducted at the Swami's SMCA.

During boat MPA Watch surveys WILDCOAST documents all consumptive and non-consumptive boating activity, as well as all fishing and other consumptive activities observed taking place on or in the water, as well as all onshore fishing and any other consumptive activity occurring in and around the MPA's, including control areas. WILDCOAST staff are present and conduct all surveys.

From January to June 2025, WILDCOAST completed 9 coastal boat MPA Watch surveys of South La Jolla SMR, Matlahuayl SMR, and Scripps SMCA - observing 133 vessels.

Recreational activity was the most common activity observed (87.04%), with the remaining activities being commercial: commercial fishing (8.33%), commercial net boat (1.85%), and commercial work boat (2.78%).

There was one potential violation observed during the coastal boat-based surveys conducted during January to June 2025 time period. This potential violation occurred on May 1, 2025 in the South La Jolla SMR. Four people were seen actively fishing on-board a recreational sport fishing vessel. The potential violation was reported to CalTIP.

For the coastal boat-based surveys, recreational sport fishing was the most observed activity (66.67% of vessels seen). The majority of fishing activity occurred on the western boundary of the Matlahuayl State Marine Reserve.

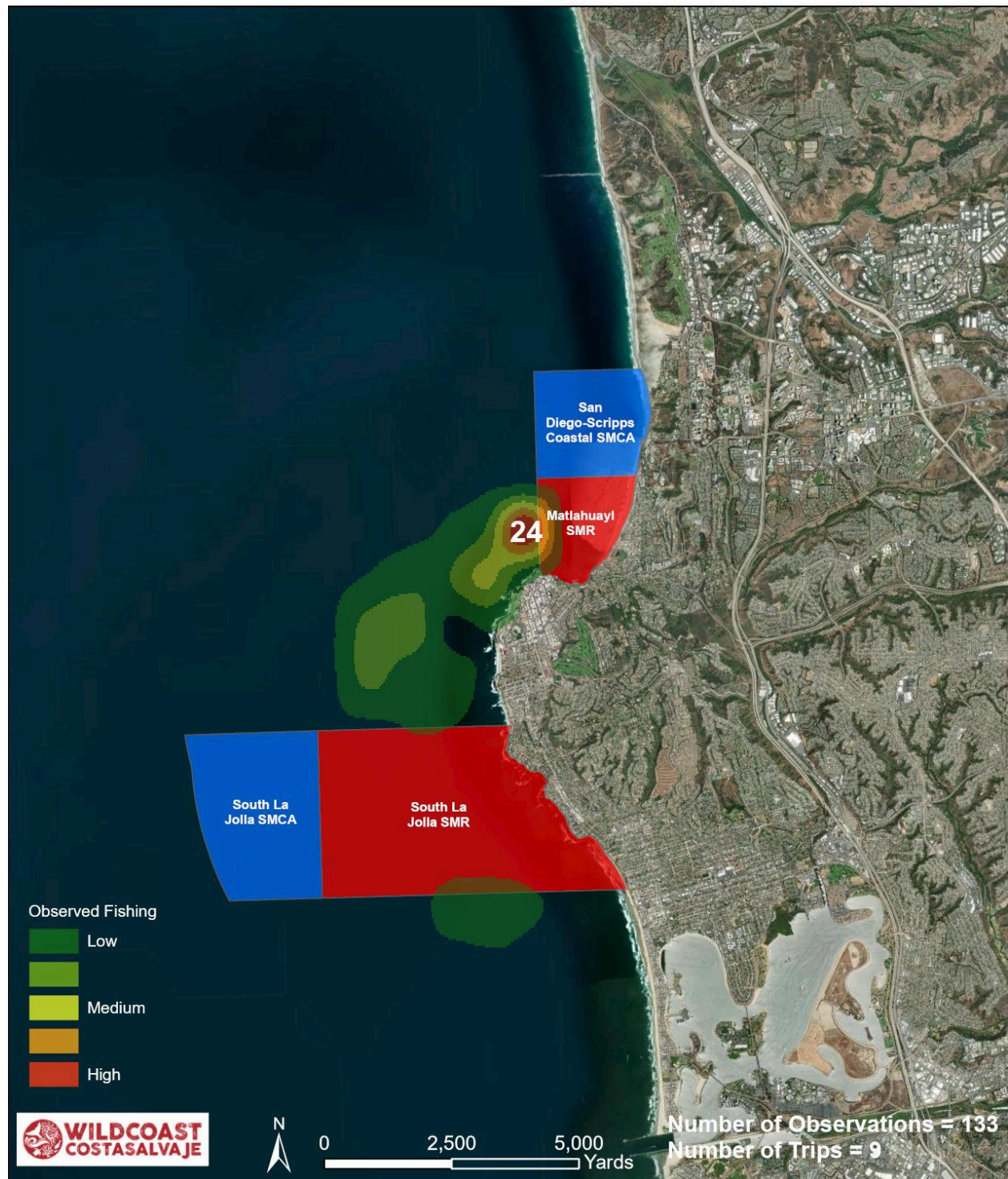
Marine Monitor (M2) RADARs

It is important to note that San Diego currently has two Marine Monitor (M2) RADARs overlooking the Matlahuayl SMR, Scripps SMCA, and Swami's SMCA, recording vessel activity 24/7. The data from the RADARs suggest that weekends are the most common time to see potential violations, so WILDCOAST makes an effort to conduct surveys at this time.

Four potential violations recorded on these RADARs were reported to CalTIP in real time. The WILDCOAST vessel was not present on the water at the time of the violations, but the M2 RADAR at the Swami's SMCA recorded clear fishing activity. This included a CPFV potentially fishing illegally in Swami's on May 15th, a recreational fishing vessel with two people clearly seen fishing in Swami's on May 22nd, a recreational fishing vessel potentially fishing in Swami's on May 24th, and a CPFV potentially fishing illegally in Swami's on June 6th.

Please contact lillie@wildcoast.org with questions regarding these RADARs and the compliance issues they have recorded.

Jan - Jun 2025 All Fishing Activity San Diego



POTENTIAL VIOLATIONS

From shore-based surveys, 26 potential violations were observed. The majority of which were hand collection of biota.

- Swami's: 23 potential violations recorded (hand collection of biota- rocky and sandy, and consumptive diving of unknown species)
- Scripps: 3 potential violations recorded (hand collection of biota, sandy)

NEXT STEPS

WILDCOAST:

We will make an effort to conduct more surveys in Matlahuayl SMR and South La Jolla SMR.

In San Diego County, WILDCOAST is working with selected interns to conduct more frequent and accurate surveys. An effort will be made to conduct more surveys in South La Jolla, Scripps, and Swami's as the M2 RADAR and MPA Watch data has shown a high number of potential violations so far this year.

In addition, WILDCOAST has begun the second stage of the pilot project to implement intercept surveys in partnership with UC Davis. These intercept surveys complement the MPA Watch original protocol and will be conducted year-round to better understand our beach users. As a part of the second stage of the intercept surveys, beach users will be surveyed on beaches where they are coming from and what they understand about MPAs. WILDCOAST is joining Orange County Coastal Keeper (OCCK) to lead the piloting of implementing these surveys year round to gather data in different seasons in Southern California.

WILDCOAST has been conducting public outreach to spread awareness surrounding tide pools that fall under MPA protections. These efforts are focused primarily on the tide pools located within MPA boundaries located at San Diego-Scripps SMCA and Swami's SMCA.

MPA Watch intends to continue to collaborate with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) to distribute MPA Watch reports to regional managers in order to improve the management and enforcement of MPAs. MPA Watch is always looking to expand its network of partner organizations to enhance the scale and scope of MPA monitoring across California whenever possible. MPA Watch's human use data is available on our website to make it accessible to partners, resource agencies, municipalities, and other interested parties. One of the hopes of MPA Watch is that volunteers and community members help spread knowledge and awareness of MPAs to the communities that surround them, inspiring marine stewardship in our populations.

STATE PARKS:

For next steps we are training another person for our team and are planning to incorporate our camp hosts to help do more MPA surveys during each month. State Parks will share the data from their reports with the rangers so they may be informed of any infractions. For high traffic days and holidays we purchased a clicker to help count the volumes of folks sitting in the sand.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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.

For additional information regarding MPAs and regulations specific to the various classifications of MPAs please visit wildlife.ca.gov/MPAs. If you see an activity that violates MPA regulations, please call CalTip to report the violation at (888) 334-2258.

For more information about the work WILDCOAST does to conserve California's MPAs and other conservation projects please visit wildcoast.org.

PHOTOS



Photos 1 and 2: Three WILDCOAST interns being trained on MPA Watch and celebrating the opening of the San Elijo Lagoon after being closed off from the ocean.



Photos 3 and 4: Photos from a WILDCOAST MPA Watch training with 10 new volunteers.