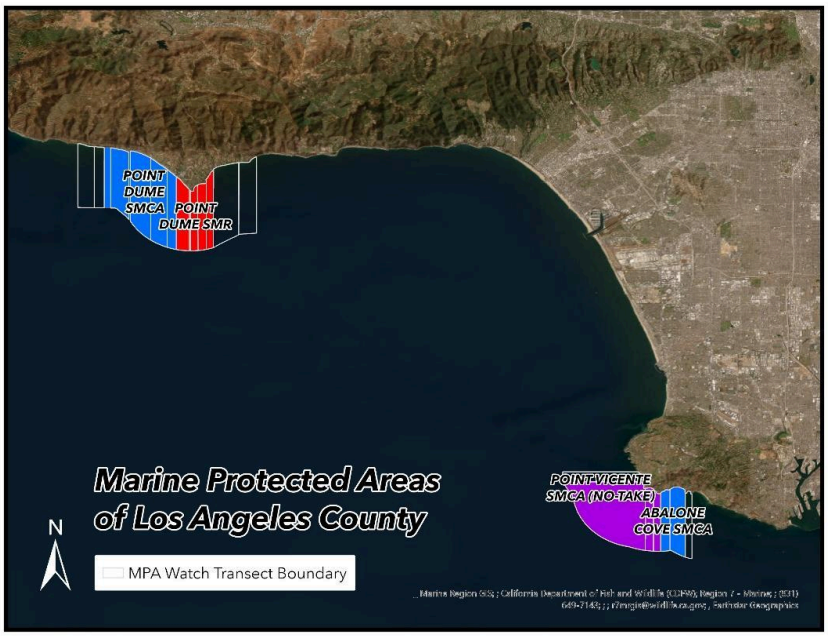
Marine Protected Area (MPA) Watch Regional Report

LA County Shore-Based
January 1, 2025 – December 31, 2025



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 four 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. Each MPA also has a concurrent control site outside the state boundary. Historically, Heal the Bay has also managed MPA Watch on Catalina Island, though management of these transects has shifted to an on-island NGO, Bleu World, in 2025.

Executive Summary

- In 2025, 30 active MPA Watch surveyors conducted a total of 264 surveys across 143 total survey miles and recorded a total of 3,785 activities.
- Malibu transects saw steep decreases in overall activity incidence, potentially due to impacts from the Los Angeles wildfires in early 2025. In Rancho Palos Verdes, many transects remain closed for a second year as a result of rock falls and mudslides, presenting a gap in data collection.
- Consumptive activity continues to remain low in LA County MPAs. Volunteers observe high rates of domestic animals on the beach.

HUMAN USE OF MPAS JANUARY - DECEMBER 2025

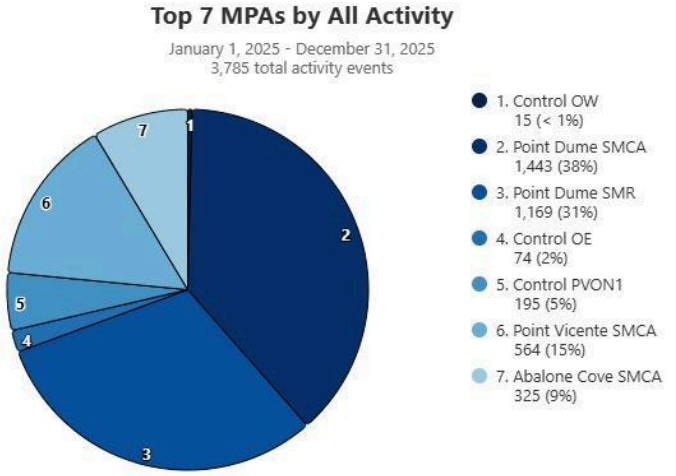


Figure 1a: All activity observations divided by MPA or control site.

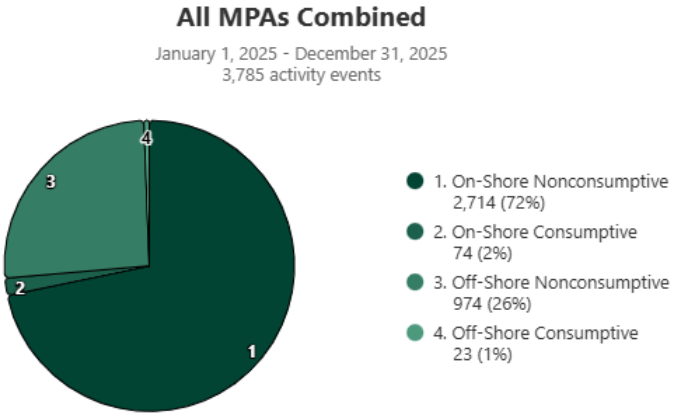


Figure 1b: All activity observations divided by activity category.

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 INCIDENCE BY SITE

Figure 2a

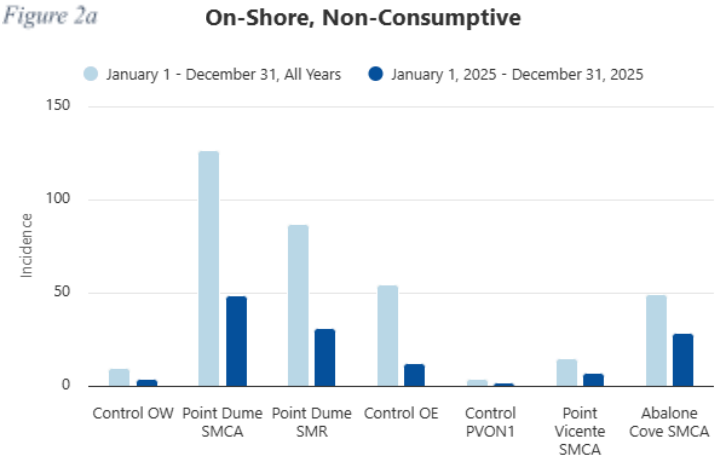


Figure 2b

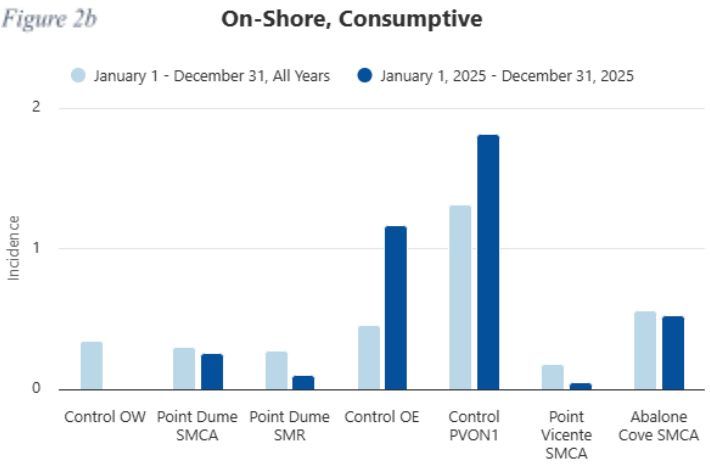


Figure 2c

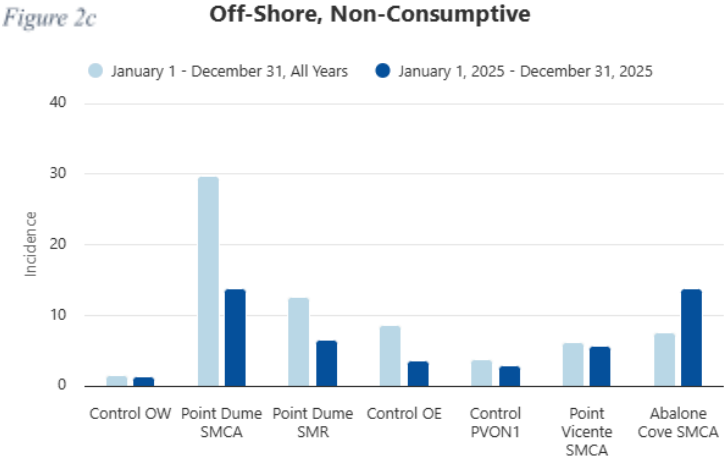


Figure 2d

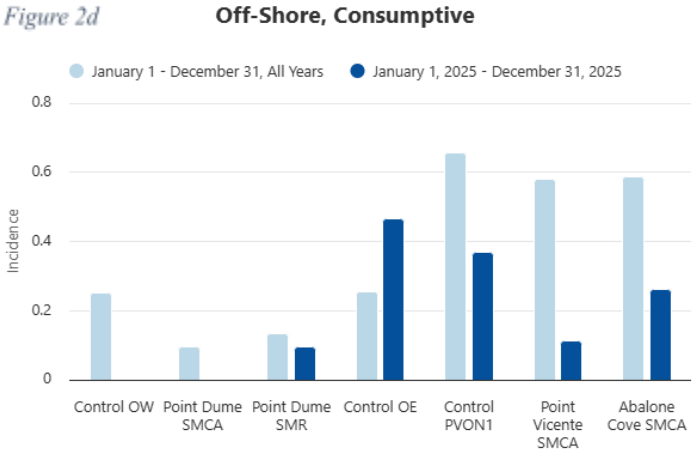
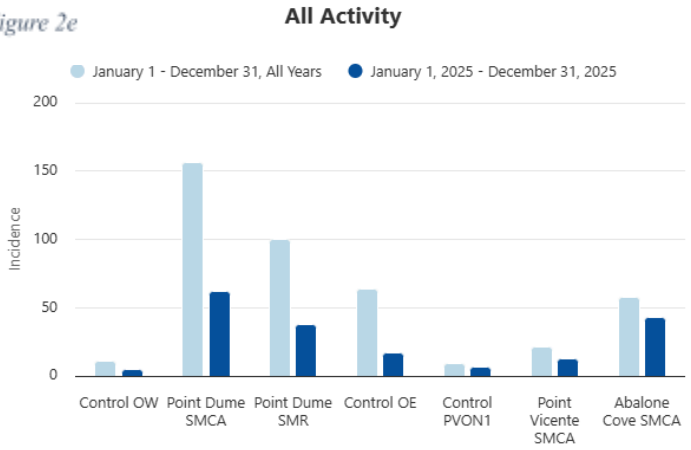


Figure 2e



Figures 2a-e in order of left to right and top to bottom: activity rate bar charts for 2025 compared to all years since 2011. ***Incidence is calculated as the number of activities recorded divided by total survey miles.***

Activity Incidence by Site Tables

MPA	On-Shore			
	Non-Consumptive		Consumptive	
	January 1 December 31 All Years	January 1, 2025 through December 31, 2025	January 1 December 31 All Years	January 1, 2025 through December 31, 2025
Control OW	9.1	3.4	0.3	0.0
Point Dume SMCA	126.3	48.1	0.3	0.3
Point Dume SMR	86.8	31.1	0.3	0.1
Control OE	54.4	12.1	0.5	1.2
Control PVON1	3.7	1.5	1.3	1.8
Point Vicente SMCA	14.3	7.0	0.2	0.0
Abalone Cove SMCA	49.2	28.3	0.6	0.5
All MPAs Combined	64.6	18.9	0.5	0.5

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 December 31 All Years	January 1, 2025 through December 31, 2025	January 1 December 31 All Years	January 1, 2025 through December 31, 2025
Control OW	1.4	1.3	0.3	0.0
Point Dume SMCA	29.6	13.8	0.1	0.0
Point Dume SMR	12.6	6.4	0.1	0.1
Control OE	8.6	3.5	0.3	0.5
Control PVON1	3.7	2.9	0.7	0.4
Point Vicente SMCA	6.2	5.6	0.6	0.1
Abalone Cove SMCA	7.6	13.7	0.6	0.3
All MPAs Combined	13.0	6.8	0.3	0.2

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 December 31 All Years	Total Combined January 1, 2025 through December 31, 2025
Control OW	11.1	4.7
Point Dume SMCA	156.3	62.2
Point Dume SMR	99.9	37.7
Control OE	63.7	17.2
Control PVON1	9.3	6.6
Point Vicente SMCA	21.2	12.7
Abalone Cove SMCA	58.0	42.8
All MPAs Combined	78.4	26.4

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.

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

Despite the many obstacles faced in 2025, Heal the Bay's chapter of MPA Watch has demonstrated the program's overall resilience, and our team is proud of our accomplishments across the program and beyond.

One key obstacle is an increase in access barriers. The 2025 LA wildfires made international headlines, and as shown in Figure 3, our MPA Watch transects were so close to the burn zone that we were forced to completely close all Malibu transects from December 2024 to March of 2025. Even after these transects were deemed safe to survey and reopened, Pacific Coast Highway, the primary access route to these sites, remained closed until late May, which significantly limited access to surveyors who live outside of Malibu. Additionally, the record land movement in Rancho Palos Verdes beginning in 2024 has not abated, and the safety hazards due to these landslides have kept three of our seven Palos Verdes transects closed through the entirety of 2025 (Figure 4), with no definite end in sight. Under these combined circumstances,

only four of our nineteen MPA Watch transects were open to survey for several months of 2025. We foresee similar challenges persisting into the future as climate change alters coastal landscapes and makes them more vulnerable to wildfire and increases the likelihood of extreme weather events.

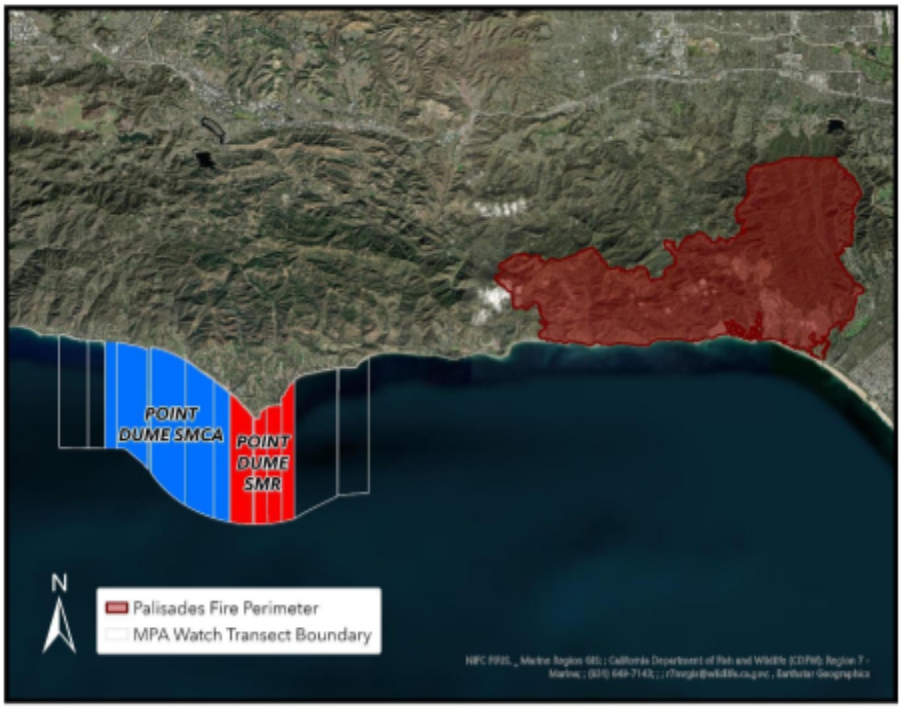


Figure 3: Map of MPA Watch transects in relation to the Palisades fire burn scar.

Despite these obstacles, our program received 264 surveys from 30 volunteers and 47 individuals that completed the MPA Watch training during 2025. This number of surveys and an increase in the amount of trained volunteers represents the continued interest in our program and the strength of our volunteer base in spite of challenges. We have invested resources in strengthening volunteer engagement through incentive competitions and volunteer enrichment activities. We hosted a “Surveypalooza” event that awarded prizes to volunteers who collected the highest amount of surveys in a year through collaborations with our corporate sponsors. Though this year saw the sunset of the environmental DNA (eDNA) sample collection community science events, our volunteers have enjoyed regular bioblitz events that use iNaturalist to catalog species observations into an international database. We also continue to send monthly MPA Watch newsletters, check-in with newly trained volunteers on training prerequisites, and conduct direct outreach to volunteers if they have not completed a survey within the last 3-5 months.

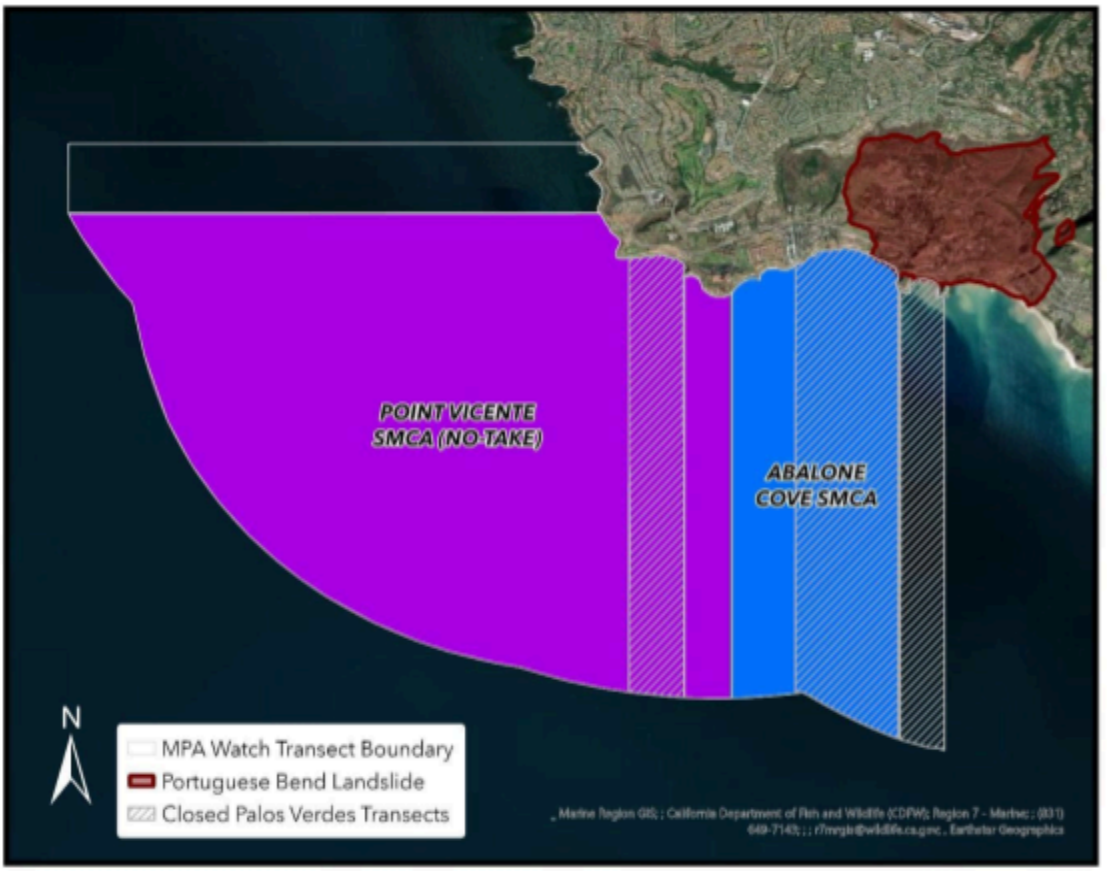


Figure 4: Map of Palos Verdes MPA Watch transect closures, with an outline of the greatest landslide activity areas.

During the summer of 2025, our chapter piloted the MPA Watch Intercept Survey, which trains volunteers to interview beachgoers about their use and knowledge of MPAs as well as barriers to access them. This pilot study, led by two undergraduate interns, collected 49 interviews and produced both exciting preliminary results and invaluable insights for the principal investigators. Pending funding opportunities, we hope to continue exploring ways to expand our program's reach. This year, our intern program has also explored new ways to interpret and utilize MPA Watch data through a project exploring links between offshore recreation and water quality health advisories, opening new possibilities for MPA Watch data analysis that we hope to continue exploring.

As previously reported, the statewide network continues to work through discrepancies in training protocols. Since approximately 2019, our staff had been training our volunteers to survey using the mean high tide line (MHTL) as a shoreward boundary. The shoreward boundary should have been the first human-made infrastructure or where the beach naturally ended e.g. a road, sidewalk, or bluff to remain consistent with statewide protocol. This indicates a significant underrepresentation of shore-based recreation at a handful of sites and explains the continued lowered activity incidence rates for the past 5 years at sites such as the Point Dume SMCA where large sandy beaches are prevalent. Though further field truthing is required, we estimate 13 of 19 sites will be impacted. All potential violation data is unimpacted, Thus, it

should be noted that certain observations, specifically observations of sandy beach recreation, may be under-representative in this reporting. During 2024, a handful of new volunteers were pre-maturely trained in the updated methodology, which increased activity incidence rates from 2023 to 2024. However, this updated training was stalled to ensure a standardized statewide program refresh, so our MPA Watch team has temporarily returned to the MHTL boundary training protocols to ensure the data remain consistent until a collective program refresh can be complete in 2026. We look forward to providing updates on our program's data analysis and remediation, the steps for which are outlined in the "Next Steps" section below. In the interim, our data from 2025 is synthesized 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]

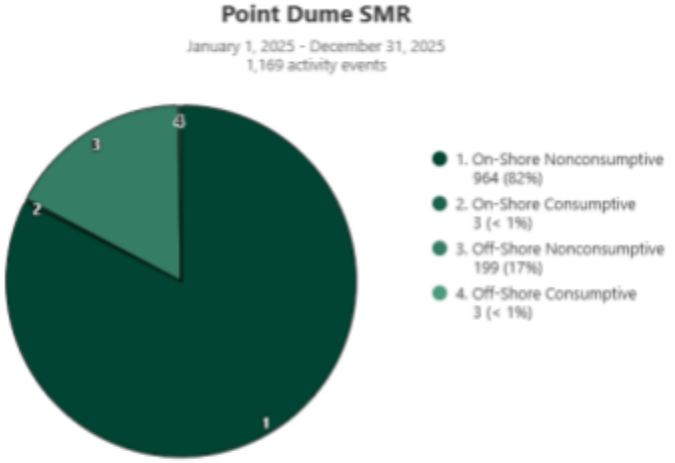


Figure 4a. Pie chart of activity type in Point Dume SMR. Shows raw number of activities observed by the MPA Watch Program in Los Angeles County and are not standardized for the number of surveys performed.

We observed a 46% decrease in overall activity incidence from 2024 to 2025 (Table 3), potentially due to access constraints from the wildfires. Offshore consumptive activity remained very low at 0.1 incidences per survey mile (Table 2), the same as 2022, 2023, and 2024. There was a slight decrease in onshore consumptive activity from 0.2

[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

incidences per survey mile in 2024 to 0.1 in 2025 (Table 1). Consumptive activities, only making up 0.5% of all activity in this MPA (Figure 4a), included 2 counts of sandy beach hand collection of biota, 2 counts of unknown fishing, 1 count of rocky beach hand collection of biota, and 1 count of recreational boat fishing using hook and line gear. The most common activities in this MPA in 2025 were sandy beach recreation (51%), rocky beach recreation (10%), surfing (10%), rocky beach wildlife viewing (9%), and offshore recreation (5%). These activity trends were similar to those seen in 2024, with increases in observations of surfing and offshore recreation.

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.

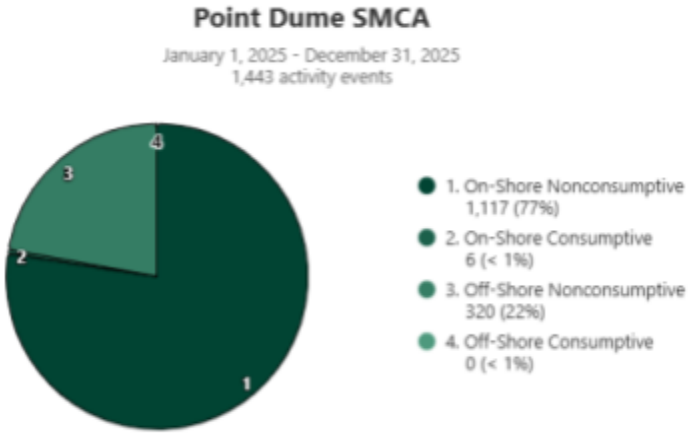


Figure 4b. Pie chart of activity type in Point Dume SMCA. Shows raw number of activities observed by the MPA Watch Program in Los Angeles County and are not standardized for the number of surveys performed.

As with Point Dume SMR, Point Dume SMCA saw a 63% decrease in overall activity incidence (Table 3), which could again be a result of access issues during and after the Los Angeles wildfires. The same trend can be observed for the onshore non-consumptive activity incidence rate which also decreased from 70.8 in 2023 to 48.1 activities observed per survey mile in 2025 (Table 1). Nonetheless, in keeping with previous years and the all-year trend, Point Dume SMCA had the most recorded activity of all survey sites in LA County in 2025 with 38% of recorded activities (Figure 1a). Similar to previous years and the all-year average, Point Dume SMCA had the highest activity incidence rates across all activities of the 4 MPAs, totaling 62.2 activities observed per survey mile. This indicates this MPA is the most heavily

utilized of the four in LA County. There is a continued trend of decreases in offshore non-consumptive activity incidence rate, from 30.8 in 2023, to 18.4 in 2024, and now 13.8 instances observed per survey mile in 2025 (Table 2).

Consumptive activity remains very low in this MPA and accounted for only 0.4% of all recorded activities in 2025 (Figure 4b). Onshore consumptive activity incidence increased slightly from 0.2 observations in 2024 to 0.3 observations per survey mile in 2025 (Table 1) while offshore consumptive activity incidence remained at zero (Table 2). These consumptive activities included 4 counts of sandy beach hook and line fishing and 2 counts of sandy beach hand collection of biota. The most common activities in this MPA in 2025 were largely unchanged from previous years and included sandy beach recreation (65%), offshore recreation (14%), surfing (7%), and rocky beach recreation (3%). There was a notable increase in observations of sandy beach animals off leash, accounting for 5% of all observations in this MPA. Seeing as no transect within our MPA Watch program allows dogs, this represents a potentially alarming infraction rate.

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.

The Palos Verdes peninsula is a site with a rich cultural history. This land was stewarded by the Tongva people, who inhabited all of Tovaangar which extended from Palos Verdes to San Bernardino. The Tongva supported many villages in this range, including the Chaawvenga, Toveemonga, Kunkenga, and more.[2] The Palos Verdes peninsula served as an important launch site to Catalina Island, known as Pimu, which is an important ceremonial center connected to Povuu'nga, the "place of emergence" where the Tongva believed their world and lives began.[3]

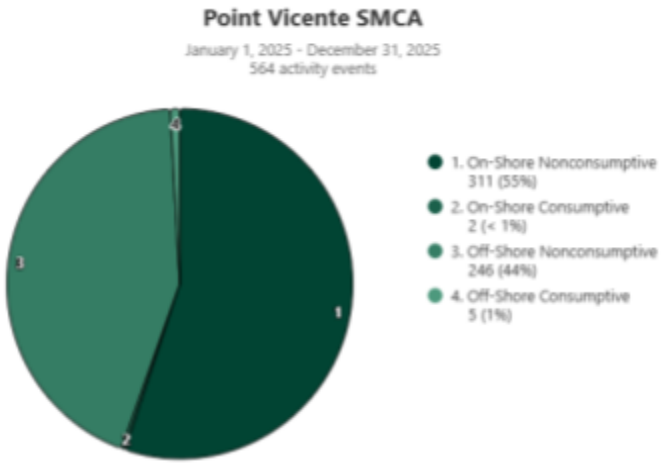


Figure 4c. Pie chart of activity type in Point Vicente SMCA. Shows raw number of activities observed by the MPA Watch Program in Los Angeles County and are not standardized for the number of surveys performed.

[2] https://www.tongvapeople.org/?page_id=696
[3] https://www.latimes.com/projects/la-me-tongva-map/

As with the last few years, volunteers surveyed Point Vicente SMCA the most out of all the MPAs in 2025 with a total of 116 surveys, making up 44% of the total number of surveys conducted. Conversely, only 15% of the total activities observed were recorded in this MPA (Figure 1a), an increase from 5% in 2024. Total activity incidence increased in this MPA from 8.8 in 2024 to 12.7 observations per survey mile in 2025 (Table 3). Consistent with trends from recent years and the all-year totals, Point Vicente SMCA had a higher percentage of observed offshore activity than any other LA MPA in 2025, making up 45% of the total observed activity (Figure 4c). This is relatively consistent with annual trends, with offshore activity accounting for 56% of activity in 2024, 45% in 2023 and 34% in 2022. Across all activity types, the most common activities remain relatively unchanged in this MPA and included power boating (16%), sandy beach wildlife viewing (15%), rocky beach recreation (15%), rocky beach wildlife viewing (13%), and work boating (9%).

From 2021 to 2023, Point Vicente SMCA accounted for the highest percentage of consumptive activity observations of all LA County, though this percentage has decreased in recent years. In 2024, consumptive activity rates decreased from 5% in 2023 to 1% (Figure 3c). This trend continued in 2025, with consumptive activity making up only 1.2% of total activity events. Onshore consumptive activity stayed consistent with 2024 at 0 activities observed per survey mile (Table 1). Offshore consumptive activity also remained consistent with 2024 at 0.1 activities per survey mile in 2025 (Table 2). Historically, Point Vicente SMCA has consistently the highest offshore consumptive activity rate of all the MPAs in the LA region, which in 2024 and 2025 was superseded by Abalone Cove SMCA (Table 2). The consumptive activity observations in 2025 were 3 counts of unknown fishing, 2 counts of rocky beach hook and line fishing, 1 count of commercial boat fishing using traps, and 1 count of commercial boat fishing using nets. These activities are consistent with those seen in 2024.

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 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.

As previously described, 2024 began a remarkably long period of closure in the Abalone Cove SMCA due to landslides in Rancho Palos Verdes. After a winter season with heavy rains, several rock falls and mudslides rendered multiple sites unsafe to survey and were closed by the city. These closures continue to date; such a long period without surveys will create blind

spots in the data and impact the activity incidence rates for this area, though there is no permissible shoreline access in the area so activity is presumably very low. Offshore boating remains a popular activity in this area, and data from LA Waterkeeper's boat-based surveys can provide critical on-the-water context for this MPA.

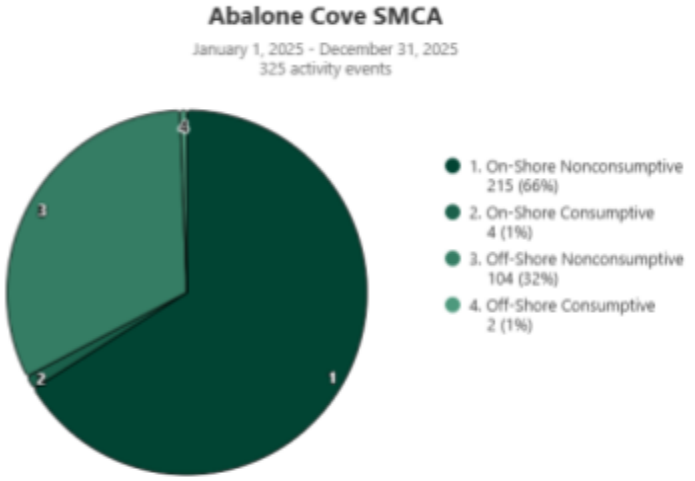


Figure 4d. Pie chart of activity type in Abalone Cove SMCA. Shows raw number of activities observed by the MPA Watch Program in Los Angeles County and are not standardized for the number of surveys performed.

From 2020 to 2023, we noticed a consistent decline in consumptive activity in this MPA; in 2024, however, there was an increase from 0.3% to 1% of all observed activities. In 2025, this increase has continued and Abalone Cove SMCA now has the highest percentage of consumptive activity recorded across all MPAs at 2% of all observations. Onshore consumptive activity increased from 0 in 2024 to 0.5 incidences per survey mile in 2025 (Table 1). Offshore consumptive activity remained consistent with 2024 at 0.3 observations per survey mile (Table 2). Total activity in this MPA remains relatively consistent at 42.8 observations per survey mile, with a slight 14% increase from 2024 (Table 3). The consumptive activity in this MPA included 4 counts of rocky beach spear fishing, 1 count of recreational boat fishing with rod and reel, and 1 count of commercial boat fishing with rod and reel. The 4 counts of spear fishing significantly inflated the overall percentage of consumptive activities, though this activity is allowed within MPA boundaries and is likely not a violation. The most common activities observed in Abalone Cove in 2025 were rocky and sandy beach recreation (36% and 24%, respectively), kayaking (14%), power boating (5%), and work boating (5%).

Catalina Island: Lover's Cove SMCA and Casino Point No-Take 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 any take of any kind, including all fishing activities. This MPA does allow, however, 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 of fish for marine life viewing, similarly to Casino Point, is allowed.

Excitingly, Catalina-based nonprofit organization Bleu World assumed management of the island's MPA Watch program in 2025, which will increase the amount of direct outreach with island dwellers and open possibilities to expand the program that are unavailable from a satellite management perspective. We look forward to working with Bleu World in 2026 to support the implementation and expansion of the island's anthropogenic use research. Heal the Bay's reports will no longer include Catalina data as a result of this shift in management. Please see Bleu World's Catalina Island 2025 MPA Watch report at mpawatch.org/reports for details.

POTENTIAL VIOLATIONS

The rate of consumptive activities across all LA MPAs surveyed by MPA Watch remains relatively low in LA County main-shore MPAs, consistent with previous reporting. From 2022 to 2024, consumptive activities accounted for only 1% of total activities, which was down from 2% in both 2021 and 2020. In 2025, consumptive activity rose to 2% once more. The highest rates of consumptive activity in mainland LA County occurred at control sites PVON1 and OE1, located at the northern boundary of Point Vicente SMCA and the East boundary of Point Dume SMR. It is worth noting that PVOS1, located at the southern boundary of Abalone Cove SMCA is a typical hotspot of consumptive activity that is now closed due to landslides. At these control sites, consumptive activity is permitted within the greater confines of CDFW fishery regulations.

As reported above, consumptive activity incidence rates remained low, which is a good indication of compliance in our protected areas. This year did see slight increases in on-shore consumptive activity observations per survey mile in Point Dume SMR and Abalone Cove SMCA. Offshore consumptive activity observations per survey mile remained consistent.

MPA	January 1 December 31 All Years	January 1, 2025 through December 31, 2025
Control OW	0	0
Point Dume SMCA	438	6
Point Dume SMR	583	4
Control OE	0	0
Control PVON1	0	0
Point Vicente SMCA	390	4
Abalone Cove SMCA	322	2
All MPAs Combined	1,733	16

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

During 2025, 16 observations were deemed potential violations, or about 0.42% of total observations, a slight increase from 0.2% of total observations during 2022-2024. Violations were observed in all of the 4 mainland MPAs monitored by MPA Watch in LA County (Table 4). Observations of violations were made across 10 surveys, accounting for about 4% of total surveys conducted, which is an upward tick from 2024 (2.5%).

In 2025, there were 5 observations of unknown fishing; 2 in Point Dume SMR and 3 in Point Vicente no-take SMCA. Due to lack of sufficient information, these observations cannot be definitively identified as a potential violation, although both of these MPAs do not allow any type of consumptive activity. These observations are marked as “Unknown Fishing” by volunteers because either the boat was too far to distinguish fishing gear or because of poor visibility. Because of these factors, volunteers did not feel confident in reporting a potential violation to CalTIP, and none of these 5 observations were called in and due to lack of confidence, are not included in the total violation count.

Of the 16 potential MPA violation observations made in 2025, 6 were formally reported to CalTIP. There were several special scenarios; 2 observations of seabass fishing were made at Point Dume SMCA, which is allowed in the area and thus deemed unlikely to be a violation despite being flagged as such in the database. 4 of the 16 potential violations were observations of children collecting seashells or from tidepools, which was not reported to CalTIP as is typical due in infractions involving minors. This means that 60% of potential violations not including infractions by minors were reported, which we deem a strong success in terms of CalTIP reporting during 2025. We continue to implement multiple measures to increase CalTIP reports for observed violations by our volunteers, including practice calls during trainings and sample call scripts for volunteers included in their training materials.

Domestic animals on and off leash are not documented as a potential violation as this activity is not a violation of MPA regulations, rather a municipal violation. It is notable, however, that across all transects no beach—either control site or MPA—allows for domestic animals. Presence of domestic animals can have impacts on local ecosystems such as nesting sites for the endangered Snowy Plover. In 2025, volunteers recorded 80 observations of animals on leash on sandy beaches and 21 observations of animals on leash on rocky beaches. There were 87 observations of animals off leash on sandy beaches and 11 observations of animals off leash on rocky beaches. These numbers are fairly striking and could prove the need for increased signage on beaches communicating the ecological impacts of domestic animals on the beach.

NEXT STEPS

Looking into 2026, Heal the Bay’s MPA Watch team will continue to host 4 public trainings and 1 private training using our two-part hybrid training model. We will continue to implement training tools to increase the percentage of observed violations reported to CalTIP during the virtual training itself and through materials disseminated therein. We look forward to continuing our bioblitz activations, as we believe them to be a strong method to foster connection between volunteers and increase a sense of belonging within the otherwise solitary program. We also found success in our “Surveypalooza” event that gave prizes to volunteers who completed the most surveys in October 2025. We have plans to work with corporate sponsors to continue this incentive program in 2026. We also plan to train at least 4 interns in 2026 to continue expanding our research and outreach efforts through the MPA Watch program.

Also in 2026, we anticipate relaunching an updated training protocol in conjunction with the statewide MPA Watch network. The network spent 2025 thoroughly scrutinizing every detail of MPA Watch protocols, and plans to launch a network-wide standardized refresh of the program, marking a new epoch of MPA Watch across the state of California. This will result in a refreshed training and will likely require a retraining of all existing volunteers, which will be a significant obstacle but ultimately strengthen the relevance of MPA Watch data. To better understand the ways our data has been impacted by the MHTL boundary protocol discrepancy, two staff members will walk each impacted MPA Watch transect, one completing a survey using the correct protocol and one completing a survey using the incorrect protocol. We will use this to calculate a correction degree that we can apply to the impacted surveys to understand the extent to which the onshore data is impacted. Future reporting will contain findings from this analysis.

Our training materials must also be updated to reflect the impacts of coastal erosion; numerous transect closures in Rancho Palos Verdes will remain closed to the public for an unforeseeable amount of time. These long-standing closures must be reflected in our field manual. Rising seas present a unique challenge to monitoring MPAs from the shore and we will need to regularly update our training information to ensure accuracy and volunteer safety.

We have also been working closely with Sacred Places Institute for Indigenous Peoples (SPI), an Indigenous-led, community-based organization located in the ancestral homelands of the Tongva, Chumash, and Acjachemen People and a participant in multiple statewide MPA management pillars. We have been collaborating with SPI to receive feedback on our program materials and complete an “Indigenization” of our MPA Watch program. This includes an updated land acknowledgement and improving the language in the manual to situate our transects within the rich Indigenous history of the region. In late 2025 we received finalized feedback from their team’s audit and we plan to integrate this feedback into the program refresh in 2026.

All of these elements combined will result in an updated manual and training materials that will contain transect specific updates, including updated photos, corrected shoreline boundaries, and more. It will have updated language to reflect the Indigenous history and stewardship of our transects and MPAs, and will be accompanied with a state-wide retraining of the updated and improved protocol.

We are also close collaborators with the LA MPA Collaborative, and hope to host additional educational MPA outreach events in 2026 to increase ocean conservation literacy. In September 2025, we collaborated with the LA MPA Collaborative, LA Rod and Reel Club, and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife’s Fishin’ in the City program to host a beach cleanup and pier fishing event. The activation was a great success and a new way to bridge barriers between historically conflicting interest groups and foster connection and coastal stewardship.

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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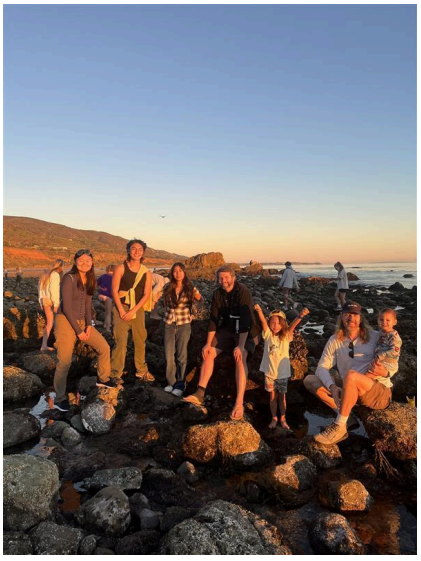
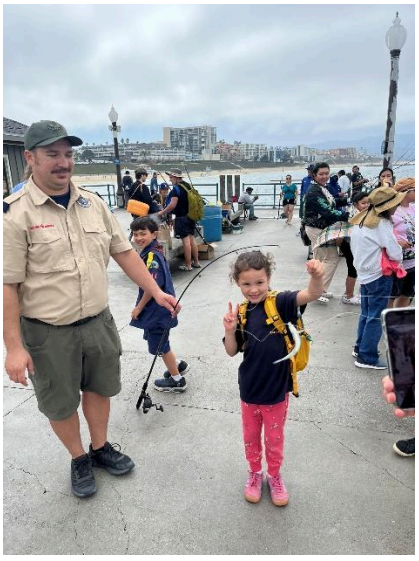

MPA Watch Engagements: Left – September 2025 field training; Middle – Leo Carrillo Tidepooling Event, December 2025; Right – Coastal Cleanup Day beach cleanup and pier fishing event at Redondo Pier, September 2025