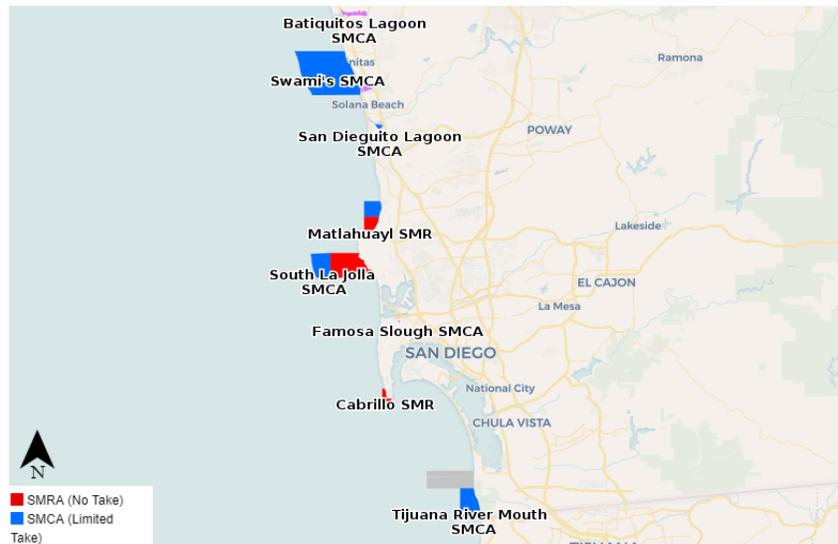


Marine Protected Area (MPA) Watch Regional Report

San Diego County

January 1, 2025 - December 31, 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

- In 2025, WILDCOAST trained 16 MPA Watch volunteers through 3 training sessions.
- From January to December of 2025 in San Diego County, 238 land-based surveys were conducted by 23 volunteers with 25,074 activities observed, 58 of which were potential violations (25 at Swami's, 5 at Scripps, 28 at South La Jolla). 21 boat-based surveys were conducted by the WILDCOAST Oceans Team observing 205 vessels. Surveys were conducted in the Swami's SMCA, San Diego Scripps-Coastal SMCA, Matlahuayl SMR, and South La Jolla SMR.

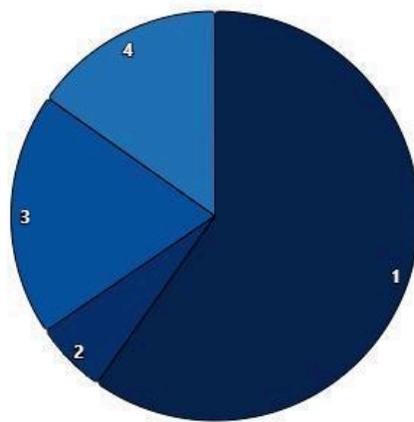


- Non-consumptive activities (on and offshore) account for 99.3% (24,910 / 25,074) of observations in four of the five MPAs listed above¹. Top activities include beach recreation (sandy), surfing, offshore recreation, board sports (other), and animals on leash (sandy).
- Consumptive activities (on and offshore) account for <1% (164 / 25,074) of observations in the 4 MPAs listed above. Top activities include hook fishing (sandy and rocky), hand collection of biota (sandy and rocky), and unknown fishing.
- 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 - December 31, 2025

Top 4 MPAs by All Activity

January 1, 2025 - December 31, 2025
25,074 total activity events

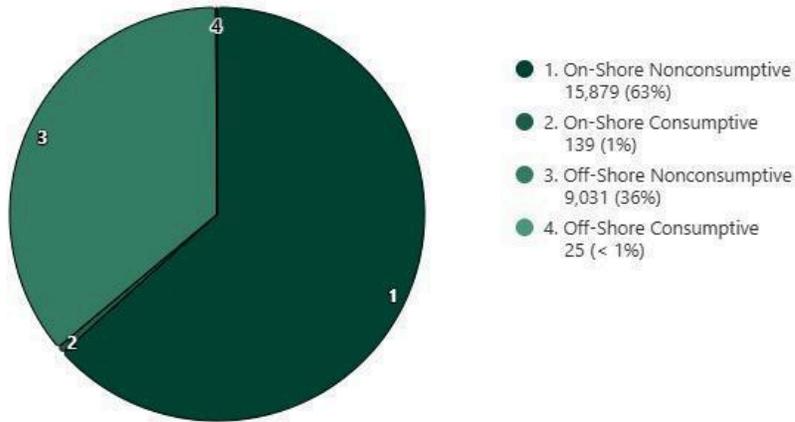


- 1. Swami's SMCA
14,994 (60%)
- 2. San Diego-Scripps Coastal SMCA
1,436 (6%)
- 3. Matlahuayl SMR
4,825 (19%)
- 4. South La Jolla SMR
3,819 (15%)

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 - December 31, 2025
25,074 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.

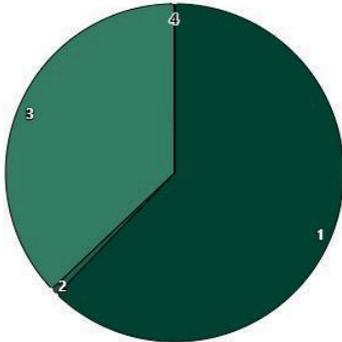
Consumptive - An activity in which a natural resource (i.e. fish, kelp, shells) is being collected.

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

ACTIVITY BY MPA

Swami's SMCA

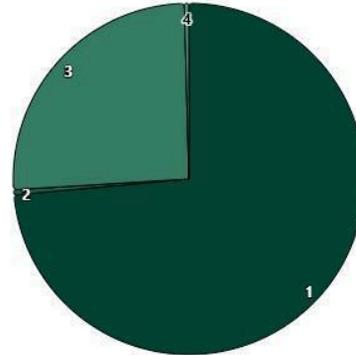
January 1, 2025 - December 31, 2025
14,994 activity events



- 1. On-Shore Nonconsumptive
9,330 (62%)
- 2. On-Shore Consumptive
105 (1%)
- 3. Off-Shore Nonconsumptive
5,555 (37%)
- 4. Off-Shore Consumptive
4 (< 1%)

San Diego-Scripps Coastal SMCA

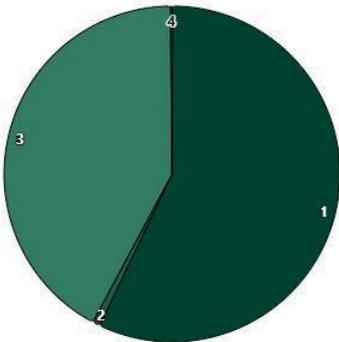
January 1, 2025 - December 31, 2025
1,436 activity events



- 1. On-Shore Nonconsumptive
1,056 (74%)
- 2. On-Shore Consumptive
7 (< 1%)
- 3. Off-Shore Nonconsumptive
367 (26%)
- 4. Off-Shore Consumptive
6 (< 1%)

South La Jolla SMR

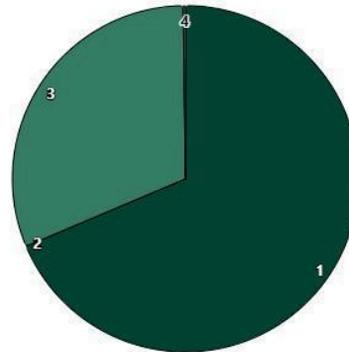
January 1, 2025 - December 31, 2025
3,819 activity events



- 1. On-Shore Nonconsumptive
2,181 (57%)
- 2. On-Shore Consumptive
27 (1%)
- 3. Off-Shore Nonconsumptive
1,606 (42%)
- 4. Off-Shore Consumptive
5 (< 1%)

Matlahuayl SMR

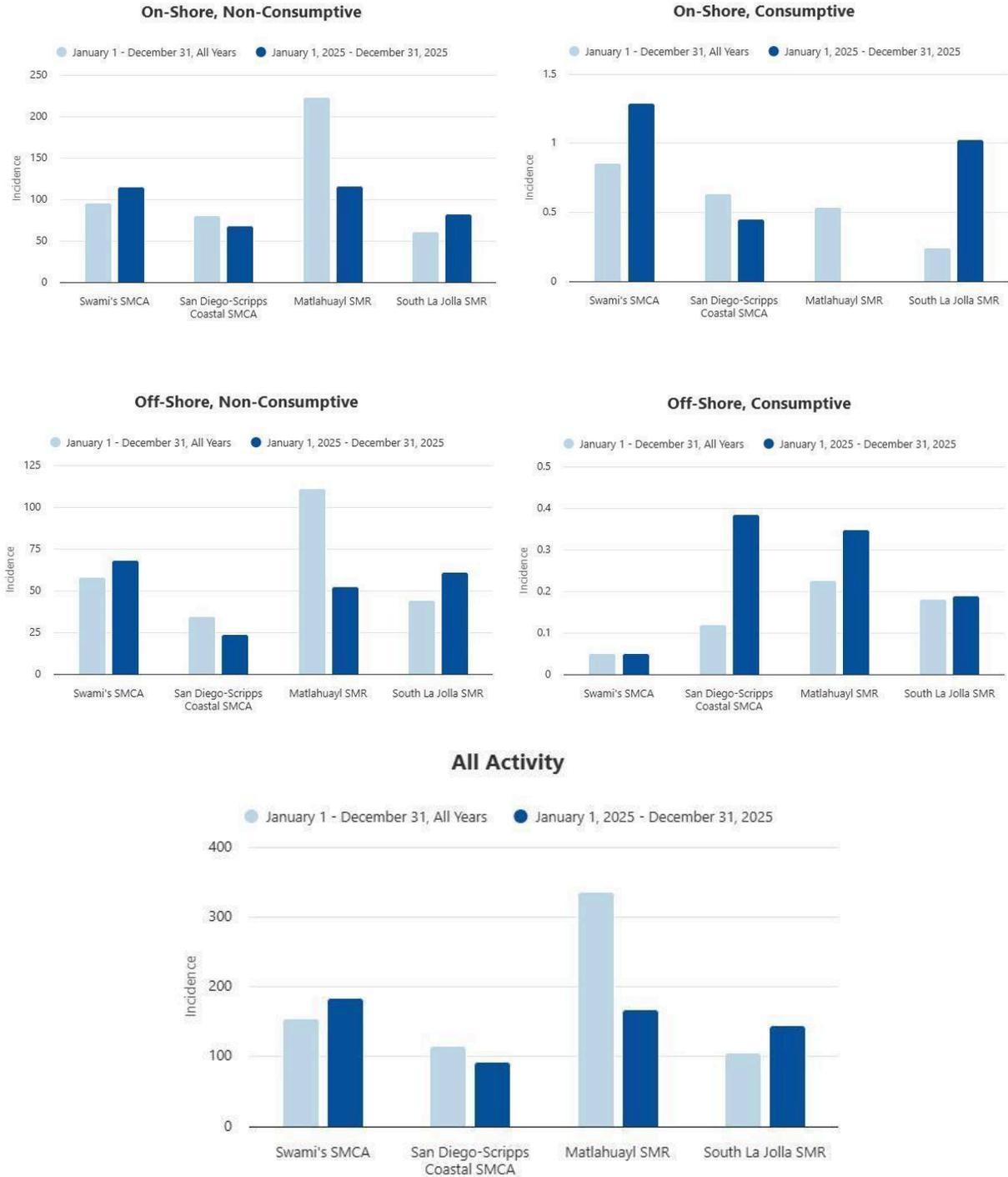
January 1, 2025 - December 31, 2025
4,825 activity events



- 1. On-Shore Nonconsumptive
3,312 (69%)
- 2. On-Shore Consumptive
0 (< 1%)
- 3. Off-Shore Nonconsumptive
1,503 (31%)
- 4. Off-Shore Consumptive
10 (< 1%)



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	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
Swami's SMCA	57.8	68.1	0.0	0.0
San Diego-Scripps Coastal SMCA	34.2	23.5	0.1	0.4
Matlahuayl SMR	110.7	52.4	0.2	0.3
South La Jolla SMR	44.2	60.8	0.2	0.2
All MPAs Combined	47.0	59.3	0.2	0.2

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
Swami's SMCA	95.7	114.3	0.9	1.3
San Diego-Scripps Coastal SMCA	80.4	67.7	0.6	0.4
Matlahuayl SMR	223.4	115.4	0.5	0.0
South La Jolla SMR	60.3	82.6	0.2	1.0
All MPAs Combined	89.6	104.3	1.0	0.9

MPA	Total Combined	
	January 1 December 31 All Years	January 1, 2025 through December 31, 2025
Swami's SMCA	154.4	183.8
San Diego-Scripps Coastal SMCA	115.4	92.1
Matlahuayl SMR	334.9	168.1
South La Jolla SMR	104.9	144.7
All MPAs Combined	137.7	164.6

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 December 2025

- 130 surveys collected
- 14,994 activity events recorded
- 25 potential violations recorded (hand collection of biota- rocky and sandy and unknown fishing)

People observed in the MPA were primarily taking part in non-consumptive activities (99% of all 14,994 activity events): both on-shore (62% = 9,330 activity events) and off-shore (37% = 5,555 activity events) including:

- Beach recreation (58% = 8,751 activity events), surfing (30% = 4,524 activity events), offshore recreation (5% = 803 activity events), animals on leash, sandy (3% = 384 activity events), and tidepooling (1% = 138 activity events).

The remaining observations recorded were consumptive activities (1% of 14,994 activity events): both on-shore (1% = 105 activity events) and off-shore (<1% = 4 activity events) including:

- Hook fishing, sandy (1% = 79 activity events), hand collection of biota, sandy (<1% = 21 activity events), hook fishing, rocky (<1% = 3 activity events), hand collection of biota, rocky (<1% = 2 activity events), and unknown fishing (<1% = 2 activity events).

Notes from State Parks at Swami's:

- Surfing is the primary offshore recreational activity, and beachgoers contribute significantly to all Swami's transects.

- Minor instances of shell collecting and leash law infractions occurred, though individuals generally became compliant after being informed of regulations.
- The majority of dog walkers along the MPA utilize leashes and remain in designated areas.
- Public observations show a high level of respect for the coastline and consistent use of "pack-in, pack-out" waste practices.
- The coast experienced several migrant beach landings, including an abandoned panga boat.
- An assessment for additional regulatory signage near the Highway 101 bridge over the San Elijo Lagoon river mouth began in July 2025 and is ongoing with DPR and City of Encinitas leadership.
- Sand build-up restricted water flow at the San Elijo Lagoon mouth for several months, necessitating partial dredging in February and April.
- A major State Parks-approved dredge and sand replenishment project took place from June through August, with sand retention succeeding through the winter storms.
- High tide cycles in March led to increased coastal bluff erosion and small block falls along San Elijo State Beach.
- A new Junior Ranger program regarding MPA messaging was created, resulting in educational posters designed by youth participants.
- Interpreter teams educated the public at tide pools on MPA preservation and marine mammal strandings via campfire sessions and Junior Ranger programs.
- Visitation to the rocky reef at the south end of Swami's SMCA doubled during the recent king tide season compared to the previous year.

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 December 2025

- 39 surveys collected

- 1,436 activity events recorded
- 5 potential violations recorded (hand collection of biota, sandy)

People observed in the MPA were primarily taking part in non-consumptive activities (99% of all 1,436 observation): both on-shore (74% = 1,056 activity events) and off-shore (26% = 367 activity events) including:

- Beach recreation, sandy, (50% = 723 activity events), surfing (18% = 265 activity events), tidepooling (12% = 171 activity events), beach recreation, rocky, (9% = 130 activity events), and board sports (other) (4% = 56 activity events).

The remaining observations recorded were consumptive activities (<1% of 1,436 activity events): both on-shore (<1% = 7 activity events) and off-shore (< 1% = 6 activity events) including:

- Unknown fishing (<1% = 6 activity events), hand collection biota, sandy (<1% = 5 activity events), and hook fishing, sandy (<1% = 2 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 December 2025

- 27 surveys collected
- 4,825 activity events recorded
- 0 potential violations recorded

People observed in the MPA were primarily taking part in non-consumptive activities (99% of all 4,825 observation): both on-shore (69% = 3,312 activity events) and off-shore (31% = 1,503 activity events) including:

- Beach recreation, sandy, (67%=3,248 activity events), surfing (17%=838 activity events), offshore recreation (6% = 283 activity events), other board sports (6% = 277 activity events), and kayaking (1%= 65 activity events).

The remaining observations recorded were off-shore consumptive activities (<1% of 4,825 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 December 2025

- 42 surveys collected
- 3,819 activity events recorded
- 28 potential violations recorded

People observed in the MPA were primarily taking part in non-consumptive activities (99% of all 3,819 observation): both on-shore (57% = 2,181 activity events) and off-shore (42% = 1,606 activity events) including

- Beach recreation, sandy, (52% = 1,987 activity events), surfing (26% = 1,012 activity events), other board sports (8% = 309 activity events), offshore recreation (5% = 195 activity events), beach recreation, rocky (3% = 122 activity events).

The remaining observations recorded were consumptive activities (<1% of 3,819 activity events): both on-shore (<1% = 27 activity events) and off-shore (< 1% = 5 activity events) including:

- Unknown fishing (<1% = 4 activity events), hand collection biota, sandy (<1% = 27 activity events), and boat fishing, line, recreational, active (<1% = 1 activity event).

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 December 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 – December 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, when visible. WILDCOAST staff are present and conduct all surveys.

From January to December 2025, WILDCOAST completed 21 coastal boat MPA Watch surveys of South La Jolla SMR, Matlahuayl SMR, and Scripps SMCA - observing 205 vessels.

Along the transects (including MPAs and non-MPAs), recreational activity was the most common activity observed (85%), with the remaining activities being commercial: commercial fishing (11%), commercial net boat (1%), and commercial work boat (2%).

The most common vessels observed were sport fishing vessels (59%), followed by kayaks (15%), dive boats (8%), commercial lobster boats (6%), commercial party fishing vessels (4%), research/military/enforcement (2%), jet skis (2%), purse seiners (1%), and other (1%).

Note that in the Matlahuayl SMR, recreational kayakers are a constant and are not counted in the MPA Watch survey as it would skew vessel counts. Thousands of kayakers recreate in the La Jolla Cove yearly, and while conditions allow for MPA Watch surveys, it is almost guaranteed conditions allow for kayaking.

There were three potential violations observed during the coastal boat-based surveys conducted during January to December 2025 time period, all of which were reported to CalTIP.

May 1, 2025 (11:12 AM): A recreational fishing vessel (CF 2422 HJ) with four people on board was potentially fishing illegally in the South La Jolla SMR.

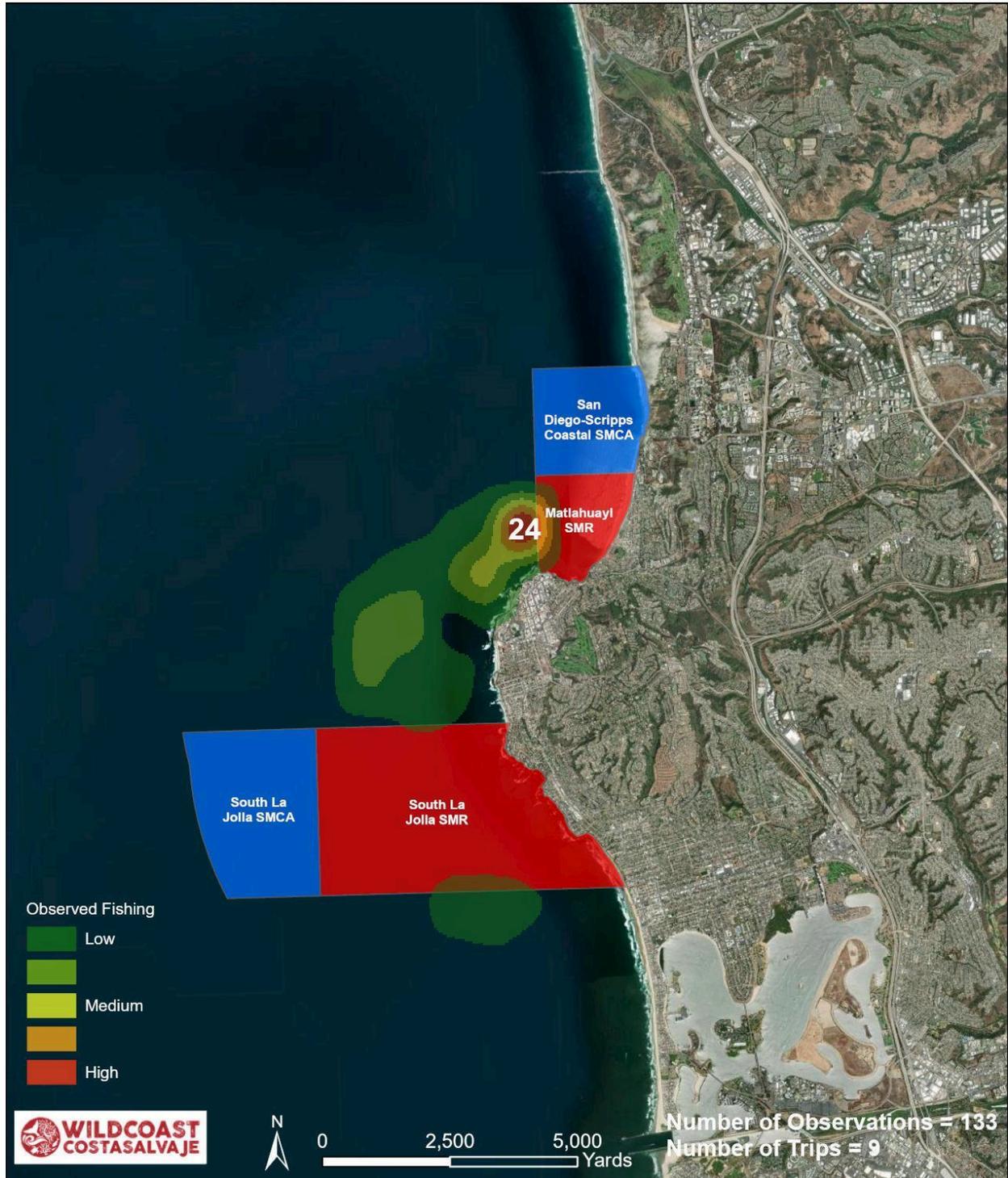
September 5, 2025 (9:06 AM): A recreational sport fishing jet ski was potentially fishing illegally in the South La Jolla SMR.

October 3, 2025 (9:44 AM): A recreational sport fishing vessel was potentially fishing illegally in the South La Jolla SMCA. Following a report, a CDFW Warden boarded the vessel within 40 minutes.

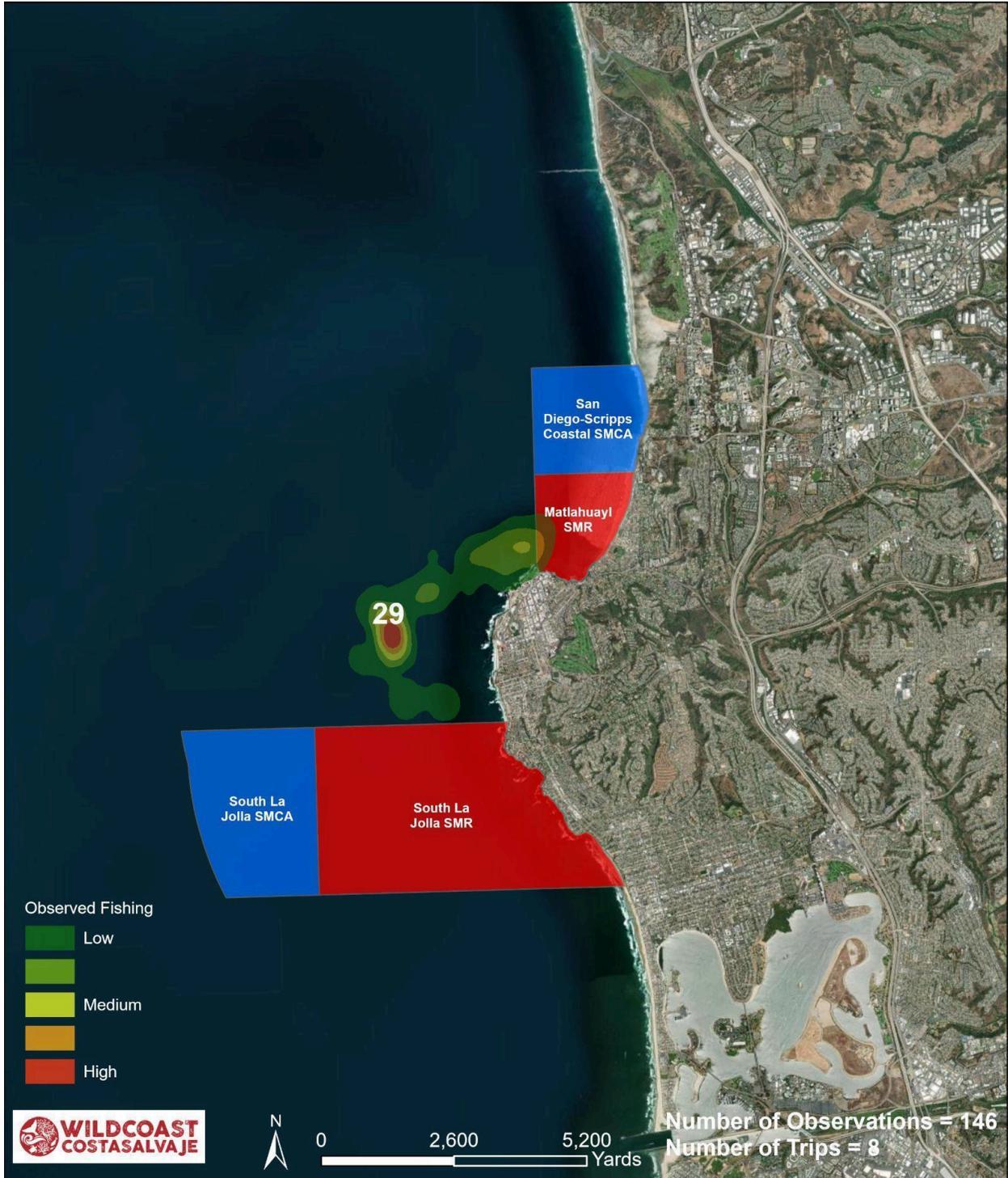
Marine Monitor (M2) RADARs

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. 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



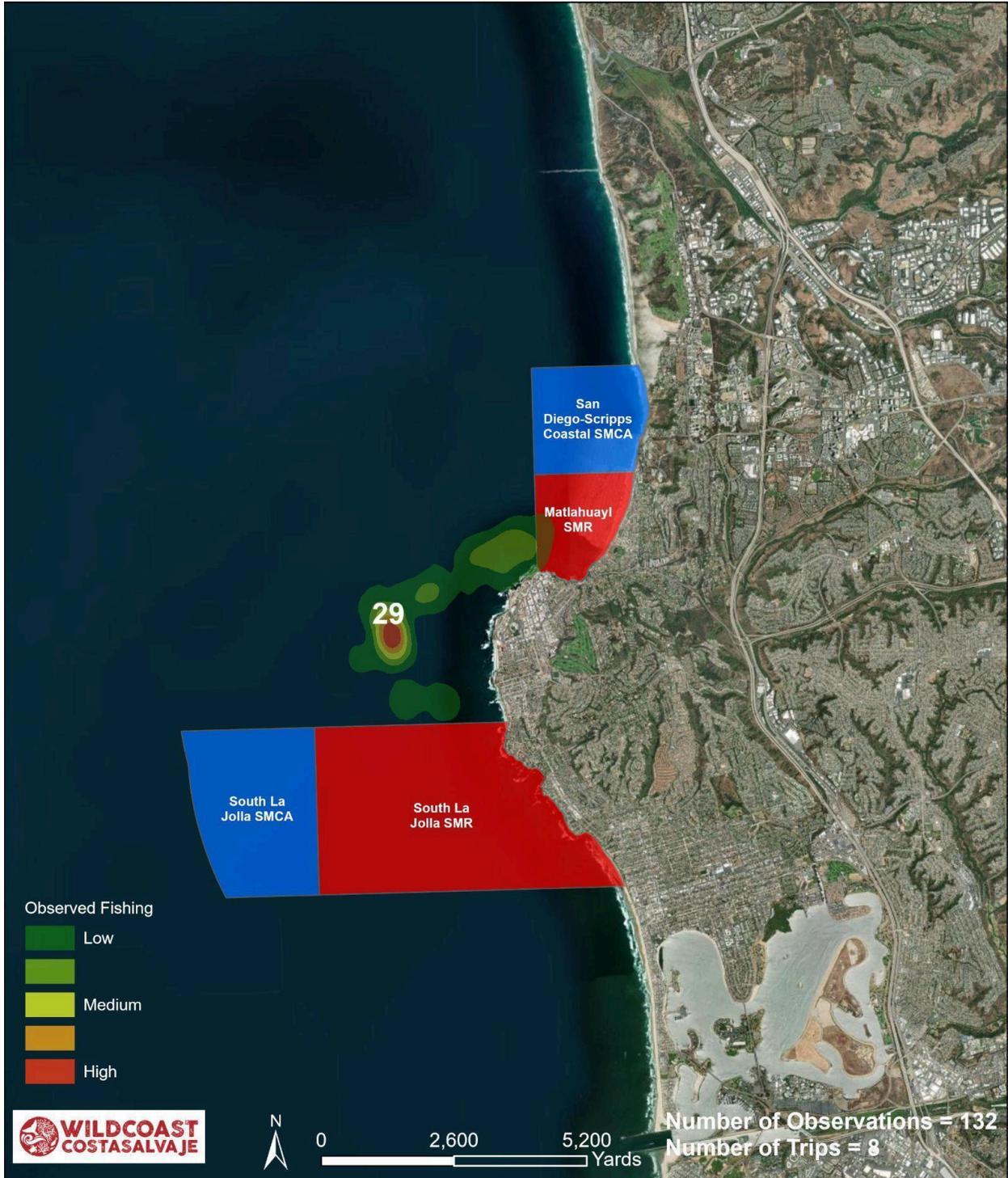
Jul - Dec 2025 All Fishing Activity San Diego



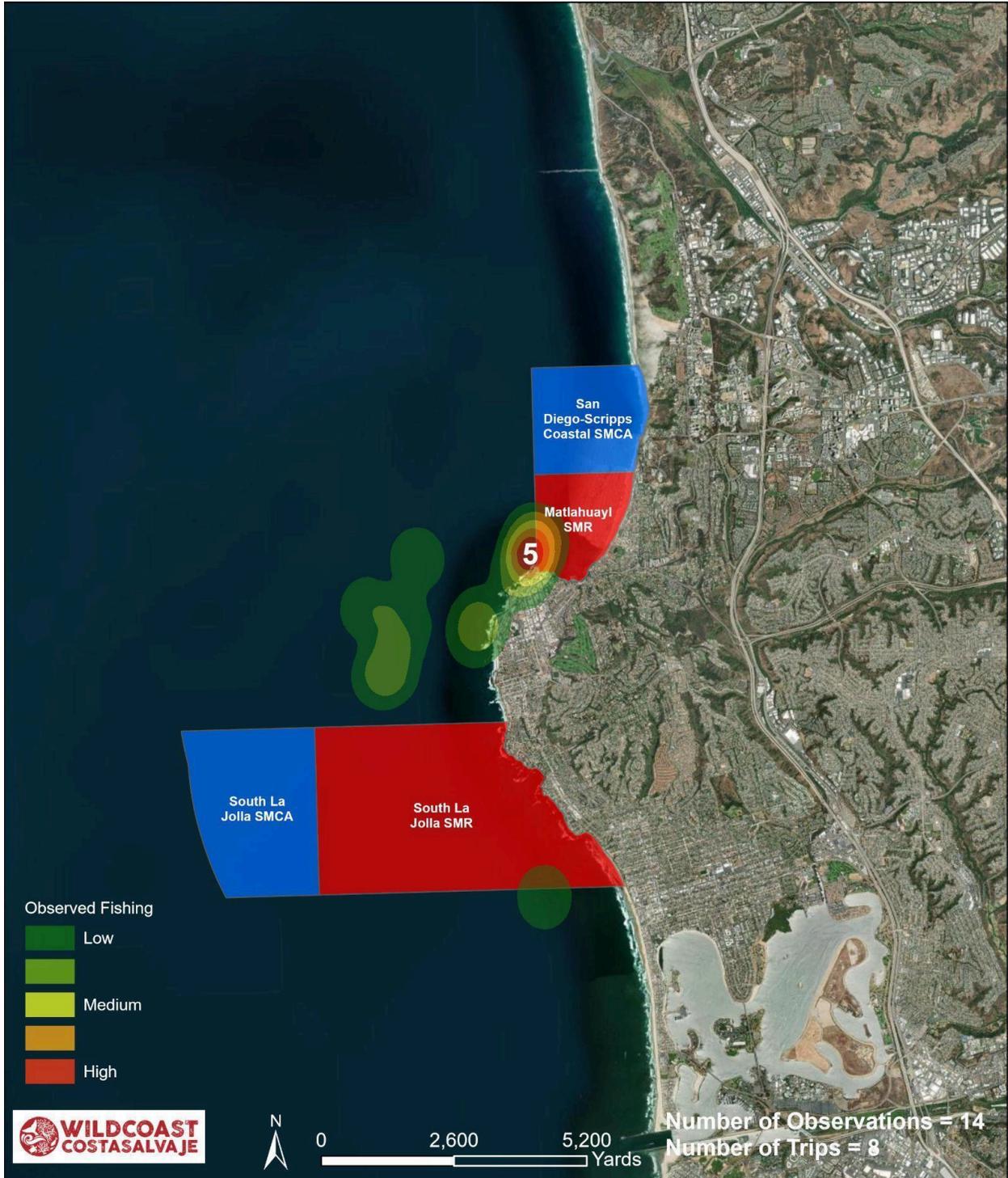
Jul - Dec 2025 Reported Violations San Diego



Jul - Dec 2025 Recreational Fishing Activity San Diego



Jul - Dec 2025 Commercial Fishing Activity San Diego



POTENTIAL VIOLATIONS

From shore-based surveys, 58 potential violations were observed. The majority of which were hand collection of biota.

- Swami's: 25 potential violations recorded (hand collection of biota, sandy (21 activity events), hand collection of biota, rocky (2 activity events), and unknown fishing (2 activity events))
- Scripps: 5 potential violations recorded (hand collection of biota, sandy)
- South La Jolla: 28 potential violations recorded (hand collection of biota, sandy (27 activity events), boat fishing, line, recreational, active (1 activity event))

NEXT STEPS

WILDCOAST:

In San Diego County, WILDCOAST worked with a cohort of interns to increase the frequency and accuracy of our surveys. Throughout the latter half of 2025, we prioritized diversifying survey locations to capture a more comprehensive view of activity across all San Diego transects, an initiative that will remain a priority in 2026.

In 2026, WILDCOAST is excited to expand our reach by opening our community science initiatives to a wider network of volunteers beyond our intern cohort. We recognize that engaging the broader public in hands-on conservation is more vital now than ever, fostering a deeper community connection to our coastal resources. As we grow, we remain committed to maintaining the highest rigorous data standards; this includes implementing standardized protocols and refined training modules designed to prevent "data drift" and ensure every observation is accurate, consistent, and scientifically sound.

Throughout 2025, WILDCOAST successfully continued the second stage of the pilot project to implement intercept surveys in partnership with UC Davis. These surveys complement the existing MPA Watch protocol by providing deeper insights into beach-user demographics and their baseline understanding of Marine Protected Areas. Moving into 2026, WILDCOAST and Orange County Coastkeeper (OCCK) will transition this initiative from a seasonal pilot to a permanent, year-round program. This sustained monitoring will allow for the collection of critical data across all seasons, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of coastal activity 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.

WILDCOAST's Tidepool Ambassador program will continue outreach in tidepools through 2026, including the distribution of a English/Spanish tidepool pocket guide that is a tool to encourage best tidepool practices while providing identifications of important critters found statewide.

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 compliance 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.

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 WILD Coast does to conserve California's MPAs and other conservation projects please visit wildcoast.org.

PHOTOS



Photo 1: WILD Coast intern conducting MPA watch

Photo 2: WILD Coast crew aboard "Under-See" research vessel training new staff for a boat based MPA Watch survey.





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



Photo 5: Burying of the pipe from the San Elijo Lagoon to Cardiff state beach as a part of the ongoing dredging project

Photo 6: Crowded 4th of July beach at San Elijo

Photo 7: Junior Rangers learned about MPA rules and created some artwork to display for other visitors.





Photo 8/9: Left Covered dolphin carcass near tower 16 (just north of lagoon outlet). Right Close up view of dolphin carcass missing entire front region; Common Dolphin washed up upon our shore Aug 9, 2025. We reported this occurrence and authorities came out to measure and sample.

