

# SNAPSHOT REPORT SOUTH COAST



Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) are underwater parks that conserve marine life, habitats, and cultural resources while supporting recreation. Globally, MPAs protect habitats, support fisheries, conserve marine biodiversity, preserve cultural sites, provide economic, recreational, and learning opportunities, and strengthen the ocean’s resilience to stressors like climate change.

California has a network of 124 MPAs with varying levels of protection. Understanding how people interact with these areas is key to assessing their benefits and impact.

MPA Watch, a statewide community science initiative, collects data on human activity in and around MPAs to support ocean conservation.

MPA Watch provides valuable insights for managing, enforcing, and studying California’s MPAs by monitoring over 115 sites along the coast, including areas outside the MPA network for comparison. Volunteers are trained in standardized survey techniques. They collect unbiased data as they walk beaches to record human activities. The long-term data is compiled in a statewide database and reflects changes in resource use over time.

Founded in 2010 and with nearly 53,000 completed surveys, our valuable data shows trends over time that help us understand how to protect our coastlines. This program not only informs MPA management but also fosters community engagement, empowering Californians to become stewards of ocean ecosystems and increasing awareness of the importance of marine conservation.

## Humans on the South Coast: The Last 10 Years in Data\*

- There were 945,776 observed activities in 35 MPAs or control sites in Southern California.
- Activities are categorized into two types based on whether they remove resources from the marine protected area (MPA): non-consumptive and consumptive. Non-consumptive activities, such as beach recreation and surfing, do not involve removing anything. Consumptive activities, like fishing, do involve removal. 99% of activities observed in Southern California were non-consumptive (936,590) and 5,580 activities were consumptive (Figure 2).
- The top 3 activities for the Southern California region were: “beach recreation” (74% of all activities), “surfing” (10%), and “offshore recreation” (7%).

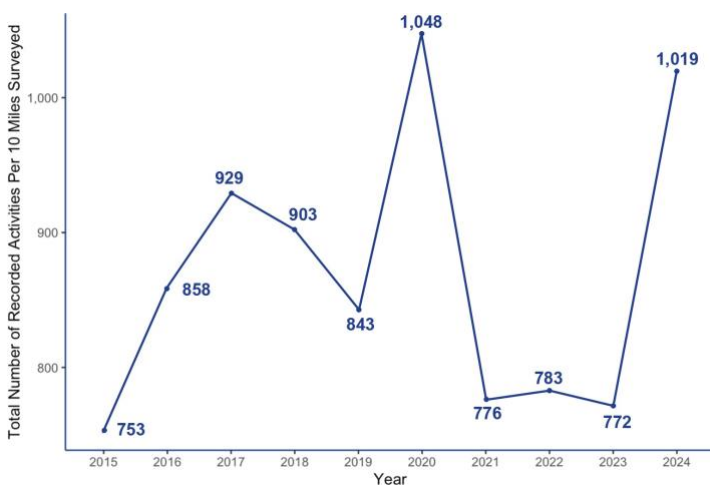


Figure 1. Total activities observed per 10 miles surveyed by MPA Watch volunteers from 2015-2024 in Southern California.

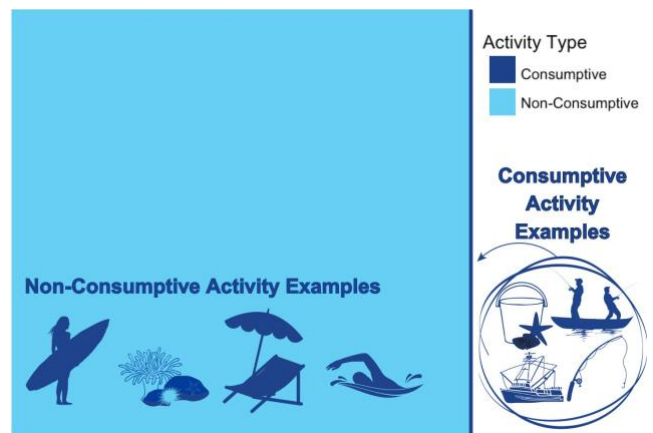


Figure 2. Proportion of consumptive and non-consumptive activities observed by MPA Watch volunteers from 2015-2024 in Southern California. Examples of consumptive and non-consumptive activities are shown on the figure.

\*Observational MPA Watch data for 2015-01-01 to 2024-12-31 pulled from mpawatch.org

In Southern California, MPA Watch conducts boat-based surveys, complementing land-based efforts, to record all marine activities and report potential non-compliance live to managing agencies, like the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW). These surveys provide a different lens of MPA Watch that assists CDFW and provides outreach on the water. There are over 60 boat-based surveys completed each year by MPA Watch partners in Santa Barbara, Los Angeles, and San Diego.

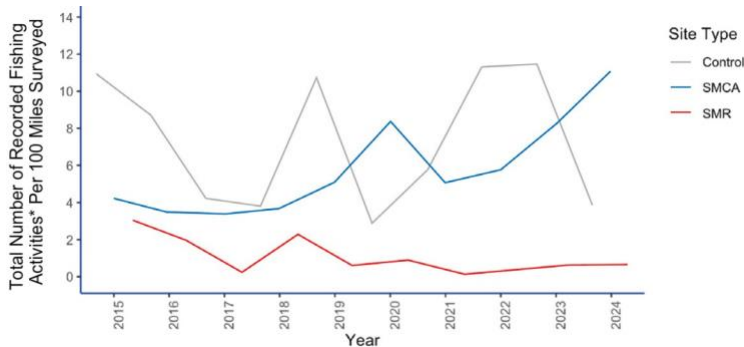


Figure 3. Total fishing activities observed per 100 miles surveyed by MPA Watch volunteers from 2015-2024 grouped by site type in Southern California. \*Note that “hand collection of biota” (when someone takes something living by hand out of the environment) is not included. All these activities were observed in either MPAs (SMRs or SCAs) or comparison (“control”) sites.

## MPA DESIGNATIONS

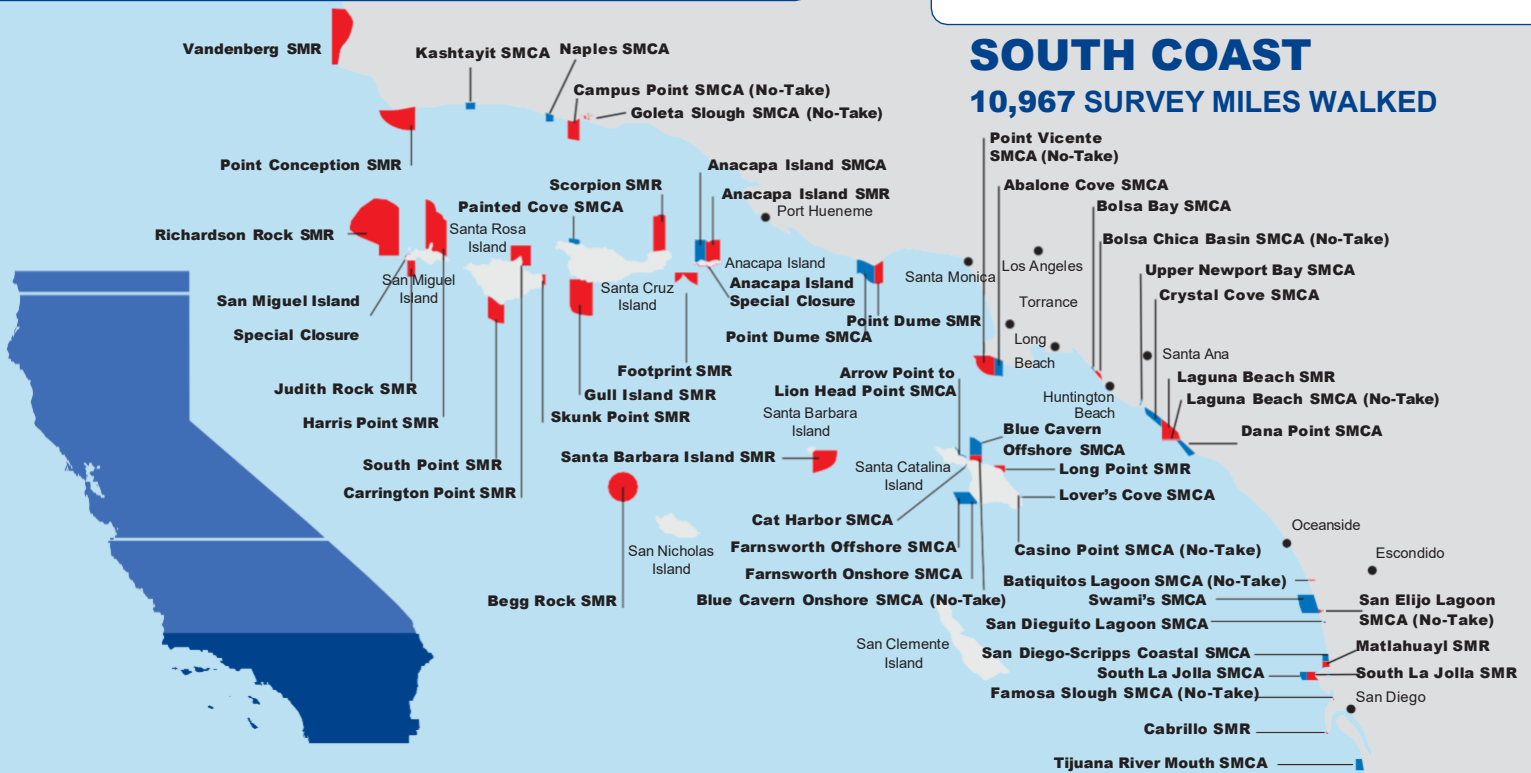
The California MPA Network includes different types of MPAs as well as other designations.

Each area is unique in its purpose and allowed uses.

- State Marine Reserve (SMR) (5\*)
- State Marine Conservation Area (SMCA) (16\*)
- No-Take State Marine Conservation Area (No-Take SMCA) (0)
- State Marine Park (SMP) State Marine Recreational (0)
- Management Area (SMRMA) (0)
- Special Closure (0)

\*Number of sites monitored by MPA Watch in the region. 17 control sites also monitored by MPA Watch

For more information please visit <https://wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Marine/MPAs>



**SOUTH COAST**  
10,967 SURVEY MILES WALKED

Figure 4. Map of all marine protected areas, by designation, in Southern California.



Over a decade’s worth of data and counting! Visit [mpawatch.org](http://mpawatch.org) to learn more about MPA Watch data and how to support a MPA Watch program nearest you!

