

Marine Protected Area (MPA) Watch Regional Report

Los Angeles County

January 1, 2026 - June 30, 2026

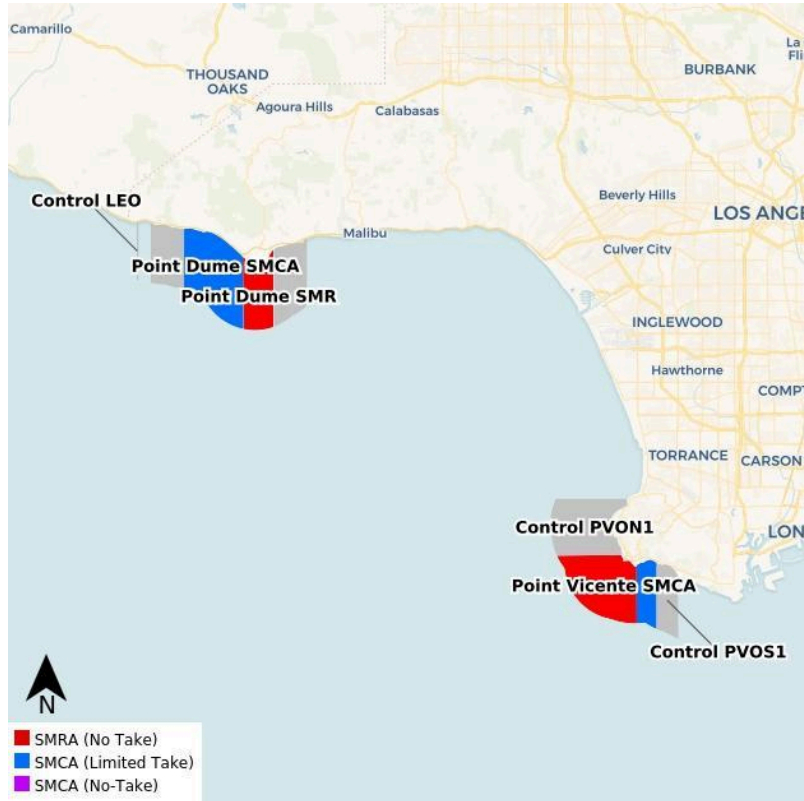


Figure 1: Map of Los Angeles County's MPAs

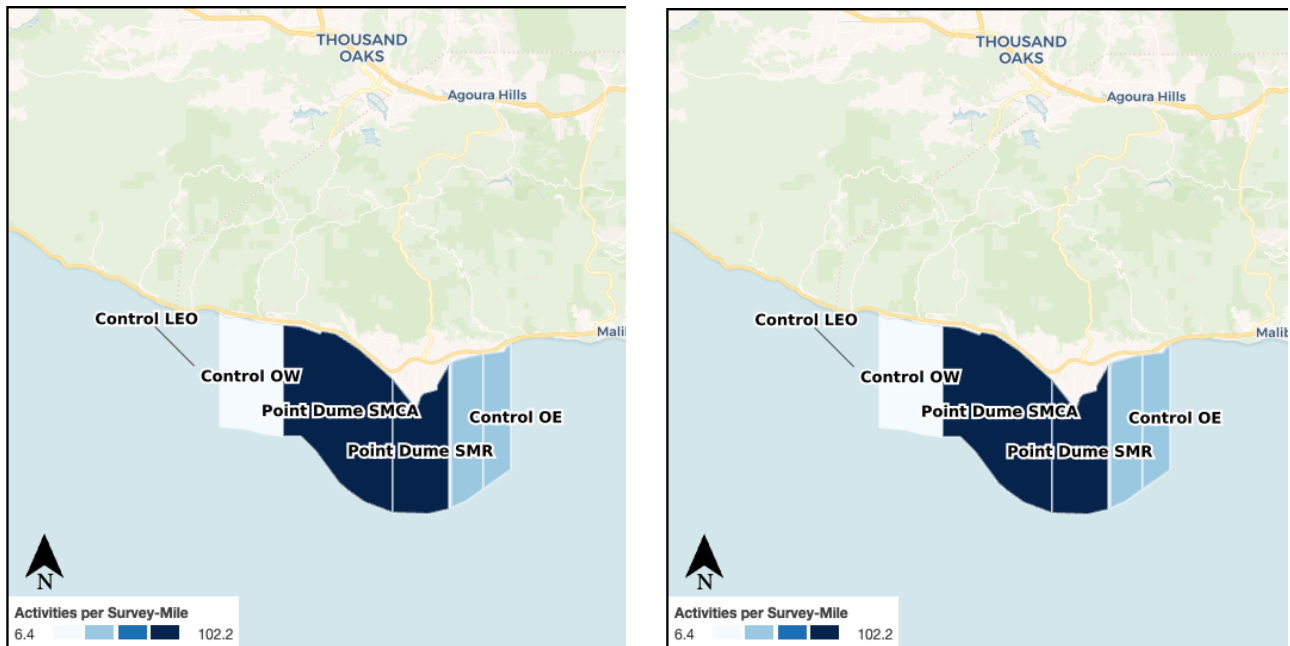
MPA Watch is a statewide collaborative effort to collect critical human use data to enhance the management and conservation of California's marine protected areas (MPAs). MPA Watch collects data inside and outside of MPAs along California's coast, and data is compiled in a statewide database that allows us insight on how human uses change over time. MPA Watch trains volunteers to observe and collect unbiased data on coastal and marine resource use through standardized survey techniques. By involving local communities in this important work, MPA Watch programs inspire and empower stewardship, educate California communities about ocean ecosystems, and increase awareness of marine conservation.

Executive Summary

1. Consistent with previous years, 2026 mid-year consumptive activity rates in MPAs are very low at 0.3% of all observed activities, indicating strong compliance rates.
2. MPA Watch volunteer CalTIP reporting rates (88%) are very high, up from 25% in mid-year 2025.
3. Across all MPAs, observations of domestic animals on the beach have increased from the previous year's mid-year incidence rates, despite being a municipal violation.

HUMAN USE OF MPAS, January 1, 2026 - June 30, 2026

OVERVIEW



Figures 2&3: Map of MPAs in the region colored by activities per survey-mile for 2026. Control OW, 6.4; Point Dume SMCA, 102.2; Point Dume SMR, 44.8; Control OE, 17.0; Control PVON1, 11.3; Point Vicente SMCA, 14.8; Abalone Cove SMCA, 36.1.

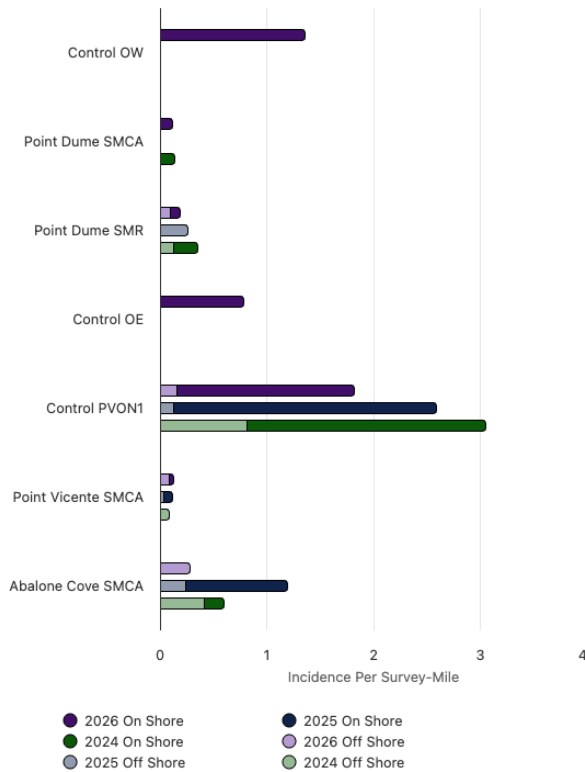
MPA	Total	
	Combined	
	January 1 June 30 All Years	January 1, 2026 through June 30, 2026
Control OW	8.6	6.4
Point Dume SMCA	61.9	102.2
Point Dume SMR	58.1	44.8
Control OE	76.4	17.0
Control PVON1	4.5	11.3
Point Vicente SMCA	8.5	14.8
Abalone Cove SMCA	25.4	36.1
All MPAs Combined	33.4	39.9

Table 1: Total Combined Activity Incidence by MPA.

CONSUMPTIVE VS. NON-CONSUMPTIVE ACTIVITY BY MPA, THREE YEAR COMPARISON

Standardized Consumptive Activity Incidence by MPA

By Survey-Mile, January 1 - June 30, Last Three Years



Standardized Nonconsumptive Activity Incidence by MPA

By Survey-Mile, January 1 - June 30, Last Three Years

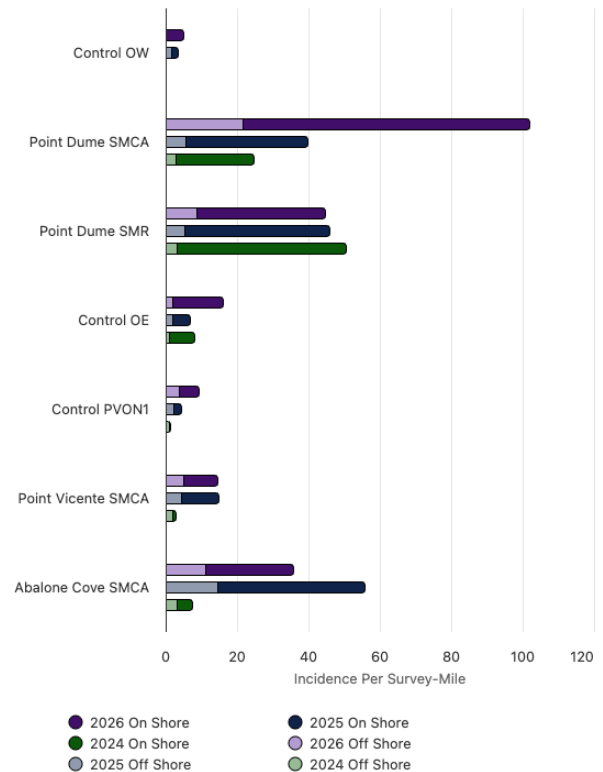


Figure 4: Standardized Consumptive Activity Incidence by MPA, By Survey-Mile, Last Three Years.

Figure 5: Standardized Nonconsumptive Activity Incidence by MPA, By Survey-Mile, Last Three Years.

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.



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 was summed together to get the total miles surveyed within that MPA.

NOTES ON SURVEY BOUNDARY

Historically, Heal the Bay has instructed volunteers to only record onshore activities up to the mean high tide line, or, where the wet sand meets the dry sand. This year, in an effort to standardize survey methods across the state, our protocol is shifting to count onshore activities up to the first man-made or geologic boundary (typically, either a cliffside or parking lot). The first round of volunteers trained in this protocol began their surveying on June 20th, and the retraining process will take place between June and December 31st of 2026. Beginning on January 1st, 2027, all surveys will be submitted using this uniform protocol. This will significantly alter the onshore activity incidence rates. Our team conducted an impact analysis and determined that transects at Palos Verdes SMCA will be relatively unimpacted by this change, while transects within Point Dume SMR, Point Dume SMCA, and Abalone Cove SMCA will be highly impacted. All offshore and boating activities are unimpacted.

ACTIVITY BY MPA

Point Dume State Marine Conservation Area

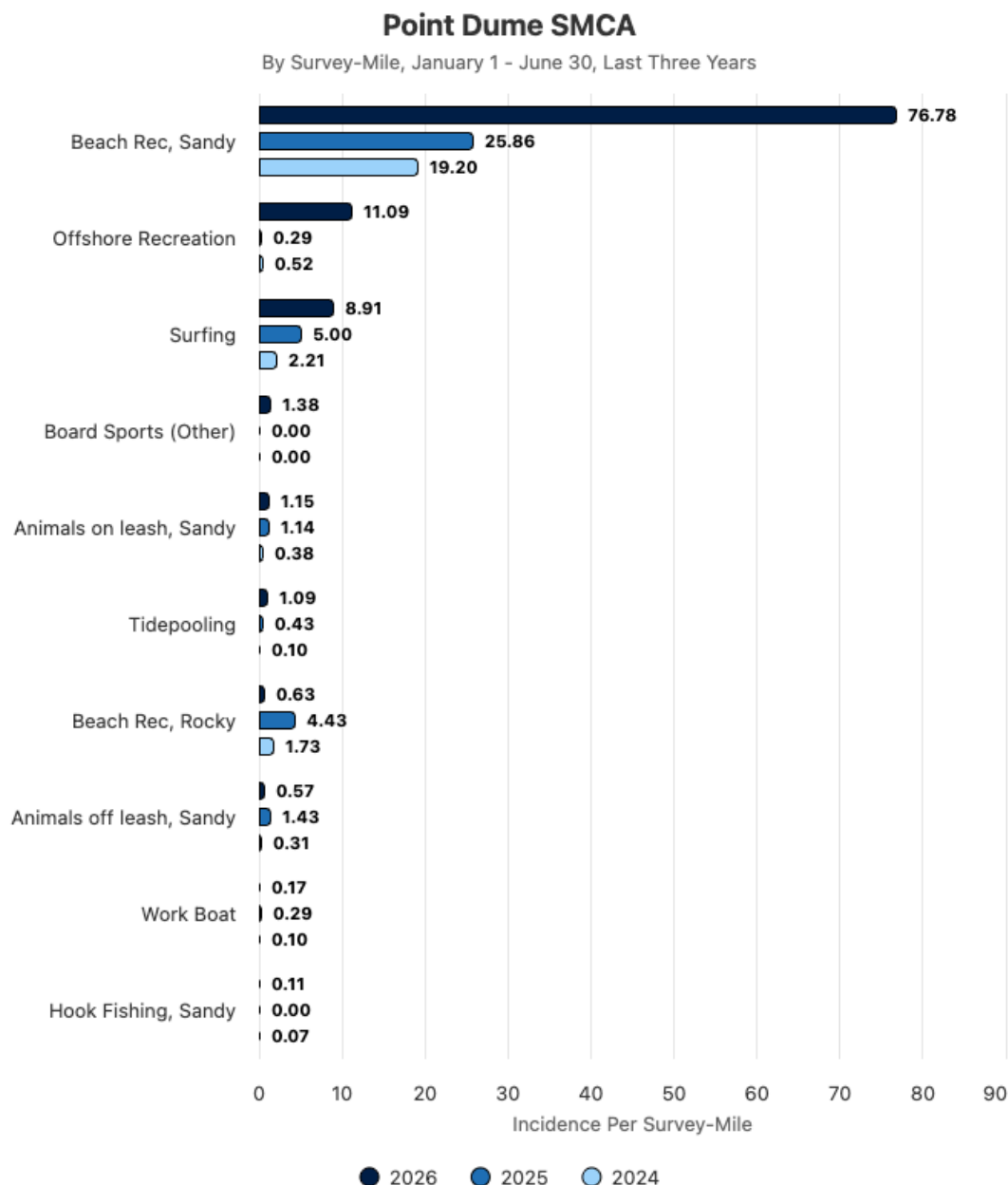


Figure 6: Top 10 Activities for Point Dume SMCA, By Survey-Mile, Last Three Years.

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.

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

Point Dume SMCA saw an increase in overall activity incidence; the average activity incidence from January 1—June 30 across all years was 61.9, but in 2026 it increased to 102.2 (Table 1). This uptick in overall incidence could be due to the protocol corrections beginning in June, which is supported by an increase in onshore, non-consumptive activity incidence. There was, however, an increase in incidence rates for offshore, non-consumptive activity incidence as well, which is unaffected by the protocol shifts. In the past, Point Dume SMCA has been the most heavily utilized of all 4 mainland MPAs, which remains true so far in 2026. In keeping with previous years and the all-years mid-year trend, Point Dume SMCA had the most recorded activity of all survey sites in LA County with 51% of all recorded activities in 2026 (Table 2).

The most common activities in this MPA in 2026 were largely unchanged from previous years and included sandy beach recreation (75%), offshore recreation (11%), surfing (9%), and other board sports (1%) (Figure 6). There is also a continued slight upward trend of animals on the beach, with an incidence rate of 1.15 observations per survey mile for on-leash animals, up from 1.14 observations per survey mile during the mid-year period of 2025 (Figure 6). Seeing as no transect within our MPA Watch program allows dogs, this represents a potentially alarming infraction rate.

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; take pursuant to beach nourishment and sediment management practices is also permissible. Consumptive activity remains very low in this MPA and accounted for only 0.1% of all recorded activities in 2026. These consumptive activities included 2 counts of sandy beach hook and line fishing. No consumptive activities constituted the top 10 activities in this MPA.

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)

Point Dume State Marine Reserve

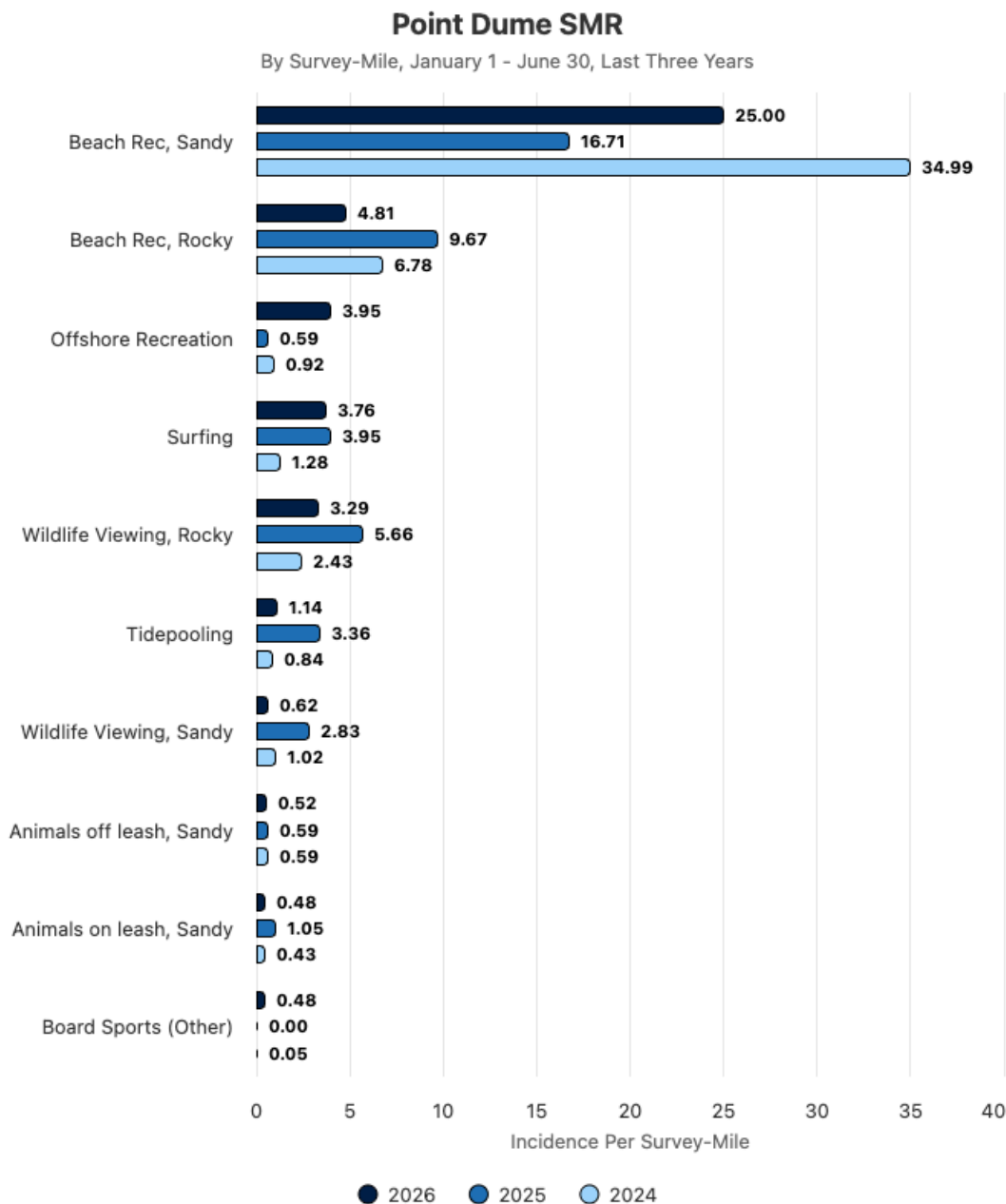


Figure 7: Top 10 Activities for Point Dume SMR, By Survey-Mile, Last Three Years.

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, adjacent to the Point Dume State Marine Conservation Area, 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. Similar to the Point Dume SMCA, 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.

In contrast to the increase at Point Dume SMCA, we observed a below-average overall activity incidence in 2026 thus far, with an all-year average of 58.1 observations per survey mile between January 1 and June 30, and 2026 falling at 44.8 (Table 1). Both onshore and offshore consumptive activity remained very low at 0.1 incidences per survey mile, consistent with previous years (Figure 4). Consumptive activities, only making up 0.4% of all activity in this MPA, included 2 counts of rocky beach hook and line fishing and 2 counts of recreational hook and line boat fishing. No consumptive activities constituted the top 10 activities in this MPA. Consistent with previous years, the most common activities in this MPA in 2025 were sandy beach recreation (56%), rocky beach recreation (11%), offshore recreation (9%), surfing (8%), and rocky beach wildlife viewing (7%) (Figure 7).

Point Vicente No-Take State Marine Conservation Area

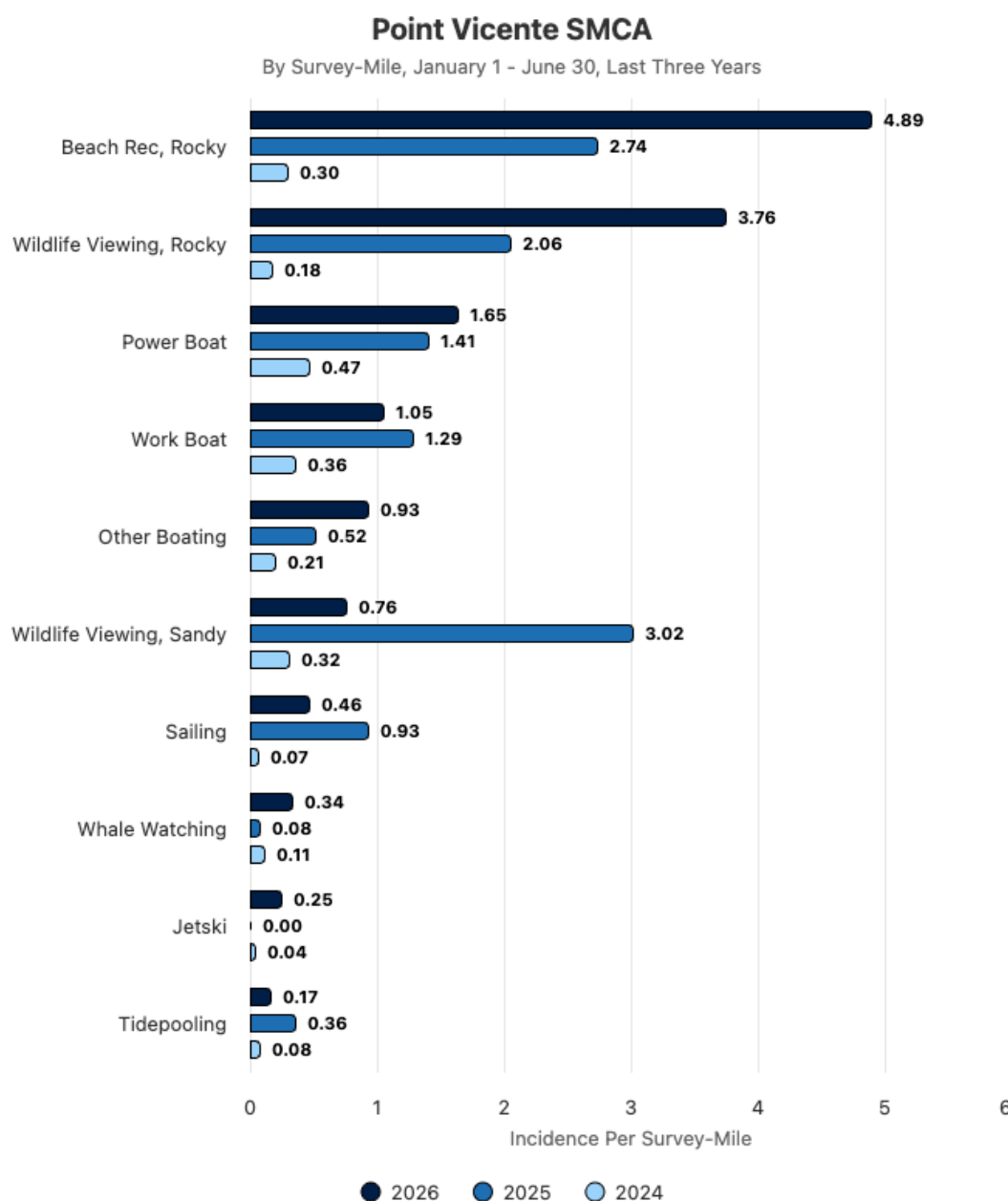


Figure 8: Top 10 Activities for Point Vicente SMCA, By Survey-Mile, Last Three Years.

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

As with the last few years, volunteers surveyed Point Vicente SMCA the most out of all the MPAs in 2026 with a total of 61 surveys, making up 47% of the total number of surveys conducted in MPAs and accounting for 11% of the total activities observed across all 4 MPAs (Table 2). The mid-year total activity incidence rate of 14.8 observations per survey mile is above the all-years average of 8.5 (Table 1). Point Vicente SMCA has a high percentage of offshore activity observations, at 34% of all observations. Across all activity types, the most common activities included rocky beach recreation (33%), rocky beach wildlife viewing (25%), power boating (11%), work boating (7%), and other boating (6%) (Figure 8). This year represents a significant increase from the all-years average in rocky beach wildlife viewing and an increase in rocky beach recreation.

The percentage of consumptive activity observations out of all observations in this MPA was 0.8%, which is lower than the all-years average of 3.8%. No consumptive activities constituted the top 10 activities in this MPA. We have seen consumptive activity rates decline steadily in the past five years, indicative of higher compliance rates. Historically, Point Vicente SMCA has had the highest offshore consumptive activity rate of all the MPAs in the LA region, which has been superseded by Abalone Cove SMCA since 2024 to present day. The consumptive activity observations in 2026 were 1 count of a commercial vessel fishing with nets, 1 count of unknown fishing, and 1 count of rocky beach hook and line fishing.

² https://www.tongvapeople.org/?page_id=696

³ <https://www.latimes.com/projects/la-me-tongva-map/>

Abalone Cove SMCA

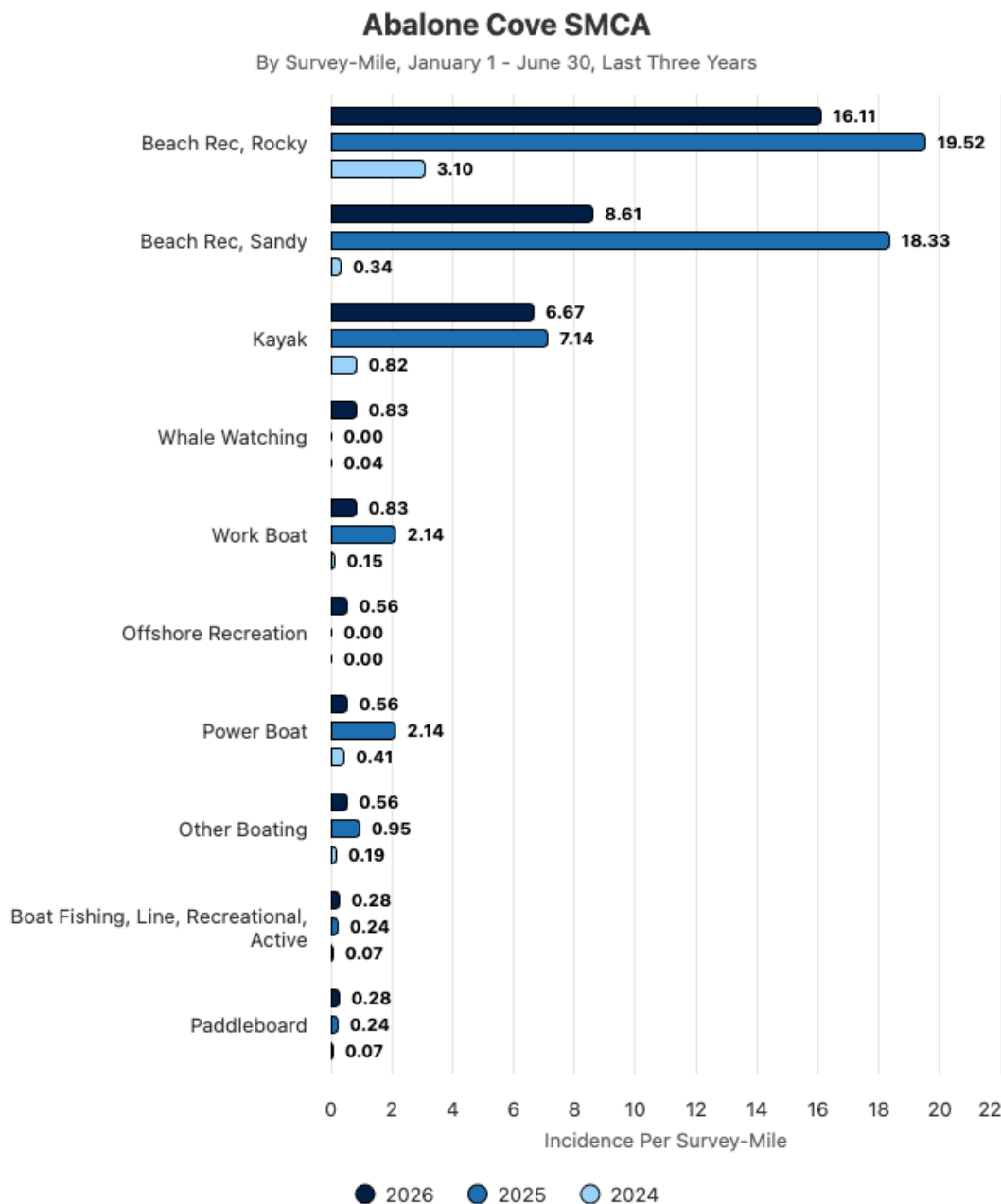


Figure 9: Top 10 Activities for Abalone Cove SMCA, By Survey-Mile, Last Three Years.

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.

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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.

During 2026, there was only one observed consumptive activity—recreational hook and line fishing from a boat—representing 0.7% of the total observed activities. This is lower than the all-years mid-year average of 3.6%. Onshore consumptive activity—0 observations per survey mile—is smaller than the all-years mid-year average of 0.6. Offshore consumptive activity—0.3 observations per survey mile—is the same as the all-years mid-year average (Figure 4). No consumptive activities constituted top 10 activities in this MPA. Total activity in this MPA is 36.1 observations per survey mile, which is higher than the all-years mid-year average of 25.4 (Table 1). The most common activities observed in Abalone Cove in 2026 were rocky and sandy beach recreation (45% and 24%, respectively), kayaking (18%), whale watching (2%), and work boating (2%) (Figure 9).

BREAKDOWN BY MPA

MPA	Number of Surveys January 1, 2026 - June 30, 2026	Activities Observed January 1, 2026 - June 30, 2026
Control OW	2	14
Point Dume SMCA	20	1,779
Point Dume SMR	31	941
Control OE	6	109
Control PVON1	14	143
Point Vicente SMCA	61	351
Abalone Cove SMCA	18	130
All MPAs Combined	152	3,467

Table 2: Survey and Observation Totals per MPA

POTENTIAL VIOLATIONS

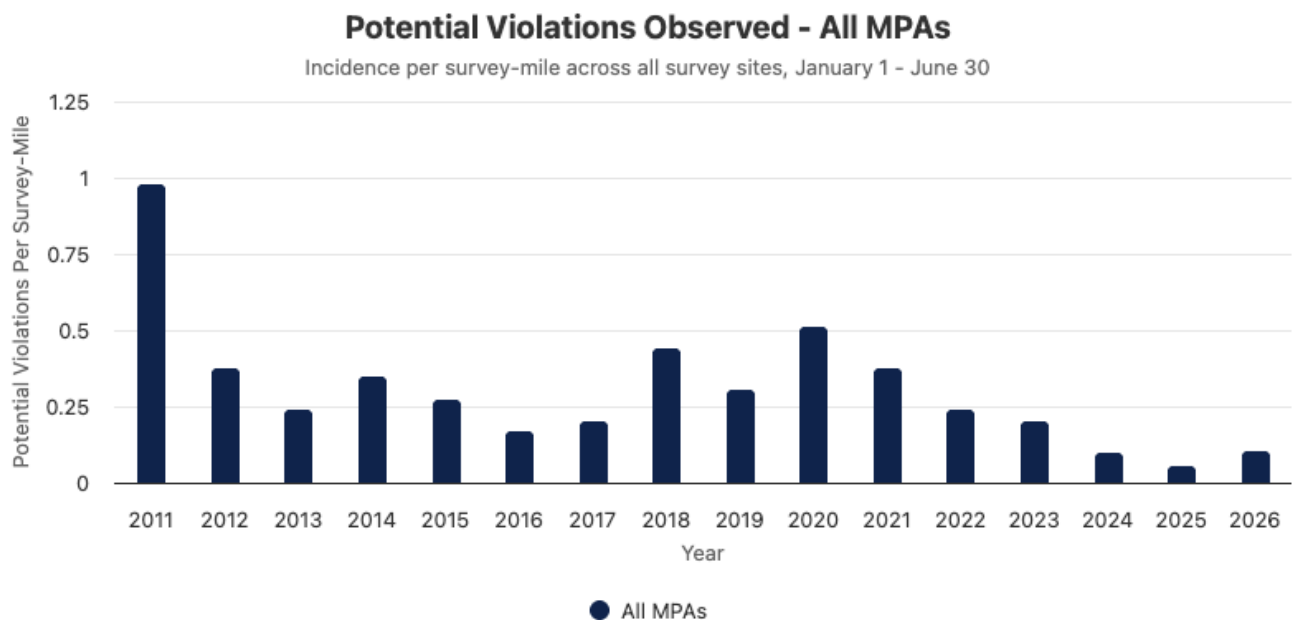


Figure 10: Potential Violations Observed - All MPAs. Incidence per survey-mile across all survey sites, January 1 - June 30 of each year. 2011, 0.980; 2012, 0.375; 2013, 0.237; 2014, 0.347; 2015, 0.270; 2016, 0.167; 2017, 0.199; 2018, 0.441; 2019, 0.304; 2020, 0.513; 2021, 0.373; 2022, 0.239; 2023, 0.200; 2024, 0.098; 2025, 0.057; 2026, 0.104.

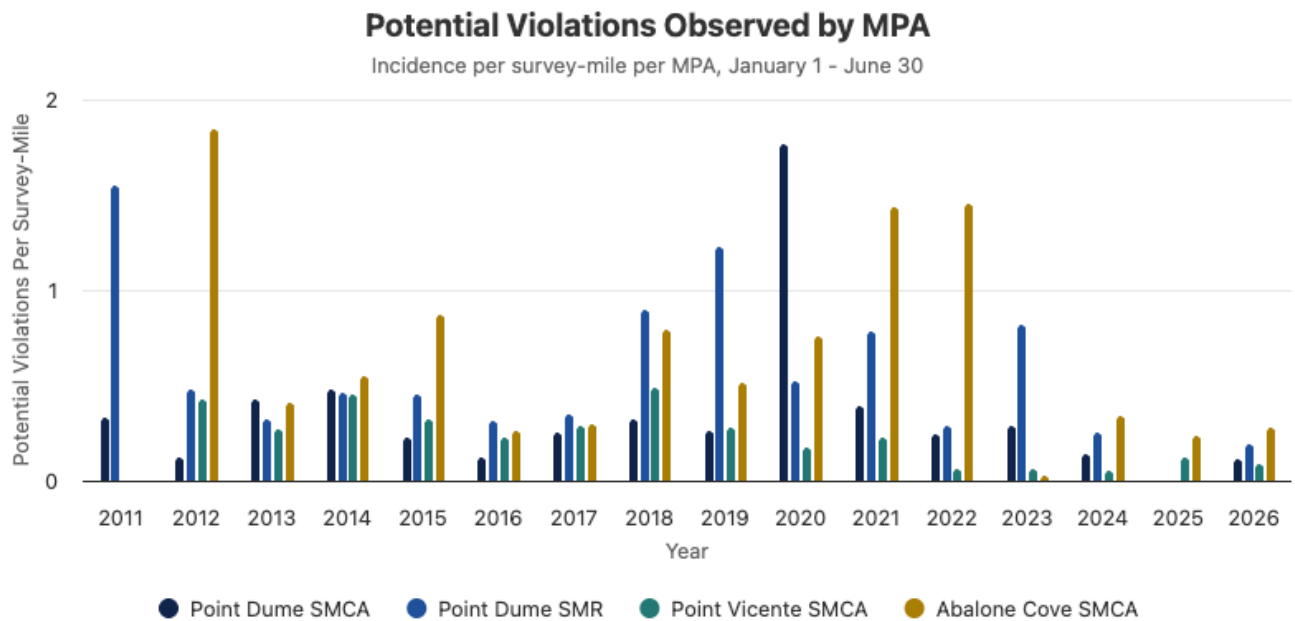


Figure 11: Potential Violations Observed by MPA. Incidence per survey-mile per MPA.

The rate of consumptive activities across all LA MPAs surveyed by MPA Watch remains relatively low in LA County mainland MPAs, consistent with previous reporting. In 2026, consumptive activities account for 0.3% of all observed activities in MPAs, which is lower than the all-years mid-year average of 1.1%. Both onshore and offshore consumptive activity incidence rates were lower than the all-years mid-year averages; from 0.3 to 0.1 and 0.2 to 0.1, respectively.

So far in 2026, our surveyors have recorded 9 potential violations, accounting for 0.3% of total observations across all MPAs. Those potential violations were: 2 observations of sandy beach hook and line fishing at Point Dume SMCA; 2 observations of rocky beach hook and line fishing at Point Dume SMR and 1 at Point Vicente SMCA; 2 observations of recreational boat fishing with hook and line at Point Dume SMR and 1 at Abalone Cove SMCA; and 1 observation of commercial boat fishing with nets at Point Vicente SMCA. Of the 9 potential violations observed by volunteers, 8 were reported to CalTIP. We deem this 89% reporting rate to be a remarkable success.

Our volunteers have also reported very high rates of animals on the beach. At only the mid-year point, there have been 70 observations. 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 non-MPA 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. 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

As mentioned above and in previous reporting, Heal the Bay's MPA Watch program has trained volunteers using a different shoreward boundary than the rest of the MPA Watch network. This protocol, which only counted onshore recreation up until the mean high tide line, or, where the wet sand meets the dry sand, has resulted in an under-representation of onshore activity rates compared to the rest of the state, which counts until the first man-made or geologic boundary (typically a cliffside or parking lot). After a year-long process of examining and coordinating every protocol detail with state-wide managers, a new, unified MPA Watch protocol has been released, and our volunteers have begun the process of being retrained. Beginning in June, existing volunteers will watch a recorded re-training video, complete a quiz to demonstrate their understanding, and be mailed a new, up-to-date manual. All new volunteers will be trained using the new protocol. Existing volunteers can complete their retraining until December 31, after which their MPA Watch database account will be deactivated, and they must complete a full MPA Watch training. This means that, beginning January 1, 2027, the data collected will be using one protocol unified against all statewide chapters.

The new manual created by Heal the Bay and distributed to each volunteer includes updated, ground-truthed site photos, updated MPA science information, Indigenous placenames and an improved land acknowledgement, and, of course, the updated step-by-step protocol. This standardized tool will be conducive to standardized, reliable data collection.

Another exciting undertaking from the Heal the Bay MPA Watch team is the Intercept Survey. In collaboration with other statewide MPA Watch managers and the UC Davis Center for Community and Citizen Science, Heal the Bay is piloting an extension to the MPA Watch program that directly interviews beachgoers to collect data about where people are coming from, what obstacles they face when spending time on the coast, their awareness of MPAs, and more. This exciting project will expand current understandings of how we can make coastal access more equitable, and what steps must be taken to increase public understandings of MPAs.

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.

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.

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