


R E S P O N S I B L Y   M A N A G I N G   A L A S K A ' S   F I S H E R I E S

MARINE  
PROTECTED AREAS



A scenic view of a fjord in Alaska, with steep, forested mountainsides and a snow-capped peak in the background. The water is calm and blue, reflecting the sky. The mountains are covered in dense green forest, and the sky is a pale blue with light clouds.

Sustainable fisheries management means more than seasons and harvest levels. It also means protecting important habitat areas to help maintain a healthy ecosystem. Protecting important marine habitat areas not only helps to support sustainable fisheries, but also promotes biodiversity and provides for other species. Alaska's comprehensive approach to sustainable fisheries management includes significant efforts to protect marine habitats by partially or totally restricting human and fishing activities in key areas. In Alaska, there are nearly a million square miles of protected marine habitat.

## WHAT IS A MARINE PROTECTED AREA?

MPAs are a critical element of Alaska's ecosystem-based fisheries management.

**M**arine Protected Areas (MPAs) are important tools in managing fisheries and other human activities in the ocean. Examples of American MPAs include national marine sanctuaries, national parks and wildlife refuges, many state parks and conservation areas, and a wide variety of fishery management closures. MPAs are used extensively in Alaska fisheries management.

The generic term "Marine Protected Area" (formerly called "area closure") can mean several different things, but it always refers to a closure of some part of the marine environment to some type of human activity. In the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of the USA, federal, state, and territorial authorities have established more than 1,500 MPAs.

MPAs have been established to meet several

goals, including conservation of habitat and biodiversity, increased scientific knowledge, educational opportunities, recreational activities, maintenance of ecosystem services, protection of cultural heritage, and fisheries management.

MPAs are a critical element of ecosystem-based fisheries management, which is being developed and promoted as the new approach to managing fisheries in the U.S. and elsewhere. For fisheries management, MPAs are used to control exploitation rates of target species, protect spawning and nursery areas, improve sustainable yields, reduce bycatch of non-target species, protect benthic habitat from disturbance by fishing gear, ensure against uncertainties, and conserve genetic diversity, among other objectives.



## HOW ARE MPAs USED IN ALASKA'S FISHERIES MANAGEMENT?

In total, there are over 40 named MPAs in waters off Alaska, encompassing nearly a million square nautical miles.

As used in Alaska fisheries management, MPAs can be grouped according to their primary objective:

- Protection of ecological structure and function
- Habitat conservation
- Protection of vulnerable stocks
- Improvement of scientific understanding and cultural resources

In total, there are over 40 named MPAs in waters off Alaska, some of which include multiple sites. Taken together, these MPAs encompass nearly a million square nautical miles of area with fishing restrictions. For example:

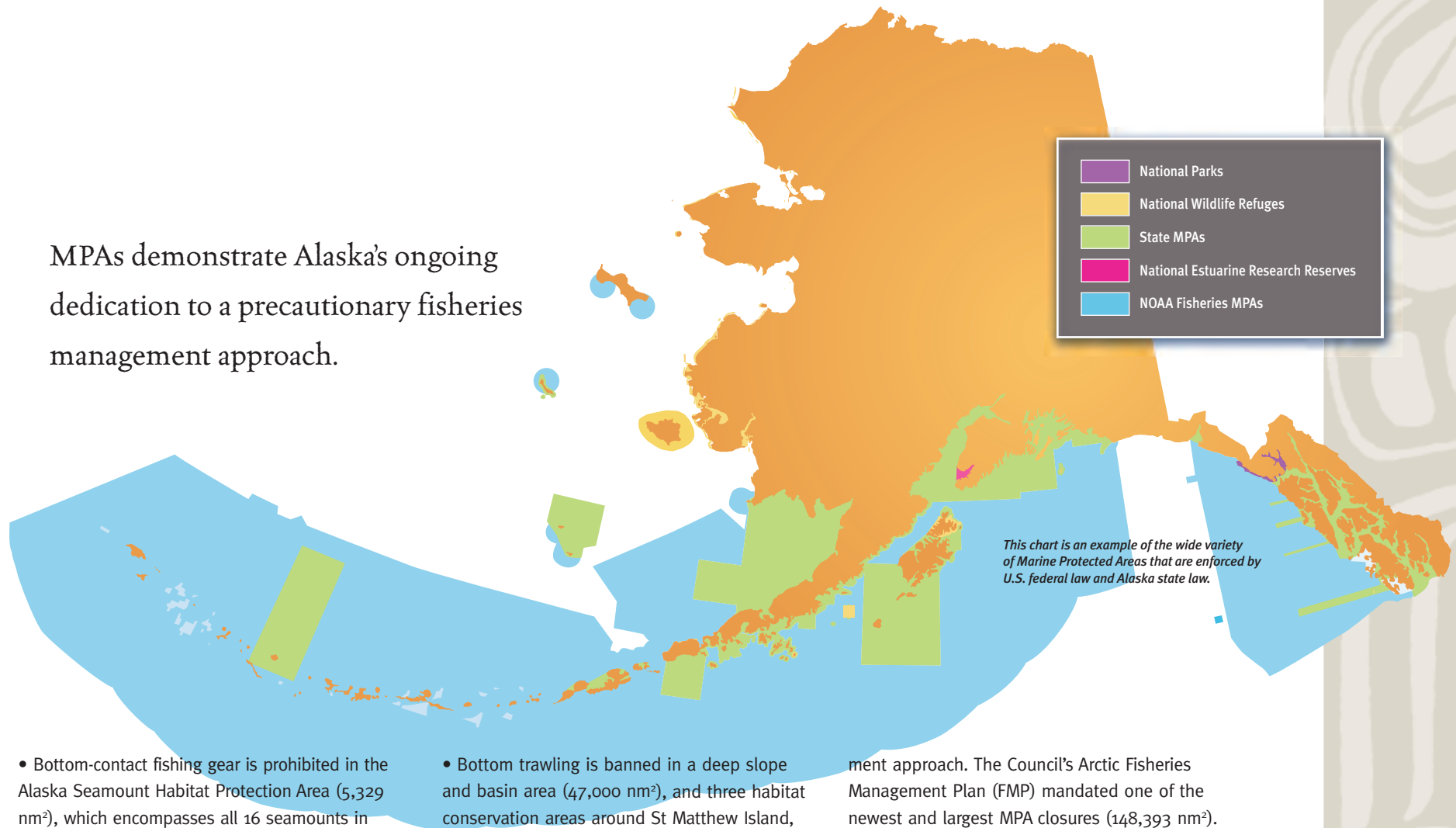
- 665,162 square nautical miles (nm<sup>2</sup>) of seabed

are closed to bottom trawling; this is almost 65% of the entire American EEZ off Alaska.

- Well over 58,000 nm<sup>2</sup> are closed to mitigate impacts to Steller sea lions.
- Aleutian Islands Habitat Conservation Area, at 277,100 nm<sup>2</sup> (95% of that area), is closed to bottom trawling, and a vessel monitoring system is required for all fishing boats in the Aleutian area.
- Within that Aleutian conservation area, 110 nm<sup>2</sup> of "coral garden" area are closed to all "bottom-contact" fishing gear (pots and longline, as well as trawls).
- Northern Bering Sea Research Area (65,559 nm<sup>2</sup>) is set aside for research on the impacts of bottom trawling on benthic habitat.



MPAs demonstrate Alaska's ongoing dedication to a precautionary fisheries management approach.



- Bottom-contact fishing gear is prohibited in the Alaska Seamount Habitat Protection Area (5,329 nm<sup>2</sup>), which encompasses all 16 seamounts in Federal waters off Alaska.
- In Southeast Alaska, three sites (67 nm<sup>2</sup>) with large aggregations (“thickets”) of long-lived *Primnoa* coral are identified as Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (HAPC); all bottom-contact gear (long-lines, trawls, pots, dinglebar gear, etc.) is prohibited in this area
- Bottom trawling for all groundfish species is prohibited in 10 designated areas (total 2,086 nm<sup>2</sup>) along the continental shelf in the Gulf of Alaska Slope Habitat Conservation Areas.

- Bottom trawling is banned in a deep slope and basin area (47,000 nm<sup>2</sup>), and three habitat conservation areas around St Matthew Island, St Lawrence Island, and an area encompassing Nunivak Island-Etolin Strait-Kuskokwim Bay.

In addition to these MPAs, commercial salmon fishing is prohibited in more than 1.5 million nm<sup>2</sup> of ocean space.

#### PRECAUTIONARY MANAGEMENT AND ECOSYSTEM APPROACH

Ocean habitat is essential for maintaining productivity of fishery resources, and is a key component of an ecosystem-oriented manage-

ment approach. The Council's Arctic Fisheries Management Plan (FMP) mandated one of the newest and largest MPA closures (148,393 nm<sup>2</sup>). The plan covers the Arctic waters of the United States in the Chukchi and Beaufort seas. Warming ocean temperatures, migrating fish stocks and shifting sea ice conditions from a changing climate may potentially favor the development of commercial fisheries. The plan establishes a framework for sustainably managing Arctic marine resources. It prohibits commercial fishing in the Arctic waters of the region until more information is available to support sustainable fisheries management.



WHO ESTABLISHES AND  
CONTROLS MPAs ?

## Fisheries management in the North Pacific region is a model for other U.S. waters.

In the federal waters of the United States (3 to 200 nautical miles offshore), MPAs are usually established by one of the regional fishery management councils that were authorized by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. In the Alaska region, the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC, or Council) bears this responsibility. MPAs (and other regulations) developed by the Council are enforced by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS).

NPFMC has established many MPAs in federal waters off Alaska, and they are an important component of the Council's precautionary approach to sustainable fisheries management. These MPAs are permanently designated in the federal Fishery Management Plans for the crab, scallop, salmon, and groundfish (Pollock, cod, flatfish) fisheries. All fishery management plans include a description and identification of essential fish habitat (EFH), a description of adverse impacts, and actions to

conserve and enhance habitat.

In state waters (0–3 nautical miles offshore), the coastal state has primary authority for fisheries management generally, and for MPAs specifically. In Alaska, the Alaska Board of Fisheries (or Board) enacts regulations and establishes MPAs. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG) enforce these regulations.

The Board has enacted closures of state waters for research purposes, and to conserve fish stocks, protect habitat, reduce bycatch, provide subsistence and recreational harvest opportunities, and regulate harvests. These closures have been applied to fisheries for salmon, herring, crab, and groundfish fisheries, among others.

The International Pacific Halibut Commission has authority to enact conservation measures, including MPAs, for the Pacific halibut fishery along the west coast of Canada and the U.S., including Alaska.

## ARE ALASKA'S MPAs USEFUL AND SUCCESSFUL?

MPAs have a long history of effective use  
in Alaska fisheries management.

Sustainable production has been maintained in the groundfish fisheries, and conservation and allocation issues involving bycatch of vulnerable species has been addressed. Also, in many cases, MPAs have shown benefits to the conservation of habitat and biodiversity.

The U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy considers fisheries management in the North Pacific region to be a model for other U.S. waters. Strict catch quotas for all managed target and non-target species, coupled with an effective monitoring program, form the foundation of the fishery management program of NPFMC and NMFS. Other management measures, including



MPAs, effort limitation, rights-based programs, community development programs, and protected resources considerations combine to provide a comprehensive fisheries conservation and management program.

Finally, it must be pointed out that the establishment and maintenance of these Alaska MPAs has generally enjoyed the support of the stakeholders in the fisheries, most especially the commercial fishing industry. In other words, the government and the industry share the common goal of precautionary, sustainable, ecosystem-based fisheries management, and they both recognize the vital role played by MPAs.



## MPA REFERENCE INFORMATION

Material for this brochure was taken from:

- Witherell, D. & D. Woodby 2005, "Application of Marine Protected Areas for Sustainable Production and Marine Biodiversity off Alaska;" Marine Fisheries Review 67(1):1-27  
The complete reference work by is available for free download at:  
<http://spo.nmfs.noaa.gov/mfr671/mfr6711.pdf>  
This is a comprehensive list and discussion of the application of MPAs for sustainable production and marine biodiversity off Alaska.
- The website of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council:  
<http://www.npfmc.org>
- More information is available from the National Marine Fisheries Service:  
<http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/habitat/default.htm>  
<http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/protectedresources/default.htm>
- For information regarding MPAs in State waters and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game's Programs:  
<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/sf/SARR/AWC/index.cfm?ADFG=main.home>  
<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=protectedareas.locator>  
<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=habitatregulations.prohibited>

---

ALASKA SEAFOOD MARKETING INSTITUTE • [www.alaskaseafood.org](http://www.alaskaseafood.org)  
Marketing Office: 150 Nickerson Street, Suite 310, Seattle, WA 98109 • 800-806-2497  
Administrative Office: 311 N. Franklin St., Suite 200, Juneau, AK 99801 • 800-478-2903



Wild, Natural & Sustainable™