

California Marine Life Protection Act Initiative

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To: North Central Coast Regional Stakeholder Group (NCCRSG)

From: Marine Life Protection Act Initiative Staff (MLPA I-Team)

Re: Characterization of potential special closures options by marine bird and mammal disturbance work group members.

Date: March 13, 2008

Background

At their February 14, 2008 meeting, the Blue Ribbon Task Force (BRTF) considered the question of potential special closures, and recognized that in some instances special closures may offer geographically-specific protection to seabirds and marine mammals from disturbance, which is not necessarily addressed by marine protected areas (MPAs). The BRTF stated that the special closure designation should be used both sparingly and selectively. The BRTF also directed that the NCCRSG may elect to include recommendations for special closures in their final proposals, so long as this does not detract from completing the primary task of developing alternative MPA proposals.

Consistent with this advice, at the NCCRSG meeting on February 21, 2008, NCCRSG members received a menu of potential special closure options generated by the disturbance work group during their two work sessions. The menu of potential options was distributed to assist NCCRSG members as they consider inclusion of special closures concurrent with MPA planning efforts.

Disturbance work group characterization of options

Subsequent to the work sessions, the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) and MLPA Initiative staff proposed that the NCCRSG would benefit from further characterization of the menu of potential special closure options. For each potential special closure, MLPA Initiative staff asked disturbance work group members to: 1) characterize both the conservation value and feasibility of menu options, based on their professional judgment, as "low", "medium", or "high"; and 2) provide a specific rationale that explains their characterization.

To date, eight of the fifteen work group members have submitted their characterization or feedback on the options. Six respondents were NCCRSG members; two were non-NCCRSG members with a demonstrated interest in, and local knowledge of, seabird and marine mammal disturbance issues.

Data fields and format of attached spreadsheet

The attached spreadsheet includes respondents' characterizations of the special closure options distributed on February 21, 2008, including a rationale for each characterization. Feedback has been aggregated according to the number of responses for "low", "medium", and "high" for both conservation value and feasibility, and rationales for these characterizations have been summarized in the same cell. Feedback that was not received within the table format is summarized in the comments section.

The revised menu of special closure options includes the following information for each option (new items appear in bold):

Hot spot geographic name – Hot spots include areas of high diversity and abundance for marine birds and mammals. Nineteen geographic areas were originally identified by the disturbance work group and two SAT members at their meeting on January 8, 2008. In this version of the special closures menu, we

have retained only the marine bird and mammal hotspots for which the disturbance work group generated special closure options, although we still recognize that the work group identified the need for an enhanced educational program exceeding the status quo at all hot spots.

Proposed options – The special closure options generated by individuals in the disturbance work group, which would prohibit or limit human access to marine bird and mammal hot spots within a specific distance.

Seasonality – The proposed annual duration of the special closure option, corresponding with the time that the area is used by marine birds and mammals for nesting and breeding.

Conservation benefit - (“low”, “medium”, and “high” and rationale for characterization) - the significance of the marine bird and mammal populations to be protected (e.g. in terms of diversity, abundance, and conservation status).

Feasibility - (“low”, “medium”, and “high” and rationale for characterization) – implementation considerations such as safety, enforcement, and conflicts with existing human uses. (Note to disturbance work group: we originally asked for a characterization of “feasibility concern”, which caused some confusion among respondents. We have recast this as simply “feasibility” for greater ease of understanding and have adjusted your responses to reflect this (e.g., we considered “low” responses for “feasibility concern” to equate with a “high” characterization for “feasibility”).)

Human uses potentially impacted – The current known human uses that would be denied or have restricted access within a discrete area should a special closure be implemented.

Species involved – Species and number of breeding birds and mammals, including specific location within hotspot.

Rationale for closure – Identification of current or foreseeable disturbance threat and why current regulations (if any) are not sufficient to address threat.

Site-specific comments, questions, or information – Additional site-specific information on existing research and monitoring, notes on disturbance work group deliberations, other interests potentially impacted by potential closure.

General comments – Feedback from disturbance work group members who provided general feedback on special closure options rather than a site-specific characterization.

Use of characterized menu of special closure options

NCCRSR members should consider the attached menu of special closure options while crafting proposals for MPAs in the North Central Coast Study Region. The options should be considered in conjunction with the CDFG memorandum regarding use of special closures (dated November 1, 2007) and the BRTF directive that special closures be used both sparingly and to the extent that they do not detract from the creation of alternative MPA proposals. Stakeholders might consider most closely those special closure options that receive “high” characterization for both conservation benefit and feasibility, also recognizing the rationale for each option as well as potential impacts to human use. Options with more than 3 responses for a “low”, “medium”, or “high” categorization are shaded in the special closures options menu.

Stakeholders should note that the disturbance work group plans to meet via conference call before the upcoming March 18-19 RSG meeting and may be able to provide additional information on the characterization of special closure options. In addition, NCCRSR members should feel free to approach disturbance work group members for additional information on any specific option or geography.

Enclosures

Options for Marine Bird and Mammal Protection Areas (Special Closures)

Proposal 1-3: Consideration of Marine Bird and Mammal Protection: Within this MPA proposal, certain areas may warrant increased protection of marine birds and/or marine mammals though the use of "no disturbance" zones or special closures. Note that the shoreside boundary is the mean high tide line and the seaward boundary is measured from mean low low water.

Area	GIS ID	Boundaries	Focus Species	Seasonality (Year round or what season)	Comments, Questions or Important Information
Point Reyes	5	1000 ft	Nine nesting seabird species, more than 43,000 birds. Largest and most species diverse seabird colony on the mainland in the entire NCCSR subregion. Common murre, pelagic cormorants, Brandt's cormorants, pigeon guillemots, western gulls, rhinoceros auklets, ashy storm-petrels, roosting brown pelicans (>100 pelicans). Bird colonies from tip of Chimney Rock to west of the lighthouse. Elephant seal rookery. Whole headland is important.	Year round	Highest mainland priority due to size of seabird colonies & marine mammal diversity. Proposal 1-3 has SMR in this location which limits socioeconomic impact of special closure to fishermen. Seabird monitoring already being conducted by USFWS. Safe navigation concern for rounding Point Reyes Headland on west side during stormy conditions. Use existing SMCA boundary but with West edge cut straight south at 123 01 to accommodate safe passage around point. Eastern boundary should be east-west to incorporate Chimney Rock & provide buffer around it.
Point Resistance	2	500 ft	Large common murre colony on rock from waterline up to peak of rock. Currently 4 nesting seabird species with 7 historically (pre-1989). Cormorants in cove and pigeon guillemots in caves. More than 100 roosting brown pelicans.	Year round	Limits potential flushing, get to higher level of protection. People access beach here by going off-trail in Pt Reyes National Seashore so would need signage. Line would be drawn from mean low low water (not affect any landward trail). Make it 500 ft, centered on rock.
Stormy Stack	9	300 ft	About 700-1000 harbor seals in haul-out & breed along beach; California sea lions haul out on islets. Stormy Stack/Double Pt is 2nd largest breeding colony in subregion with 16,000 breeding birds, almost entirely Murre on Stormy Stack. Murre, Brandt's cormorants, pelagic cormorants, pigeon guillemots, & Ashy storm petrels. Roosting brown pelicans (>100 pelicans).	Year round	A priority mainland closure due to number and diversity of breeding birds plus harbor seal colony. Protect against flushing (boats from surfers). Seabird monitoring already being conducted by USFWS.
Egg Rock (Devil's Slide Rock)	12	1000 ft circle	Common murre & Brandt's cormorant colony on Devil's Slide, or "Egg", Rock. Pigeon guillemots, pelagic cormorants, western gulls & black oystercatcher colonies extend south along mainland to Gray Whale Beach. Roosting brown pelicans on rock & mainland (>100 pelicans).	Year round	A priority because this is site of multi-million dollar and multi-year common murre restoration project managed by USFWS.
Bean Hollow	14	300 ft	Harbor seal rookery and haul out	Seasonal: Feb thru Aug	Present harbor seal population & use as a rookery site being limited by low persistent disturbance especially by shore fishing, kayak angling & walking on rocky intertidal. Marine mammal guidelines suggest 300 ft. buffers. Rookery close to bluff provides great educational & recreation (wildlife viewing, photography) benefit. Move up 100 yards further north in southern boundary.

Proposal 2-XA: Consideration of Marine Bird and Mammal Protection: Within this MPA proposal, certain areas may warrant increased protection of marine birds and/or marine mammals though the use of "no disturbance" zones or special closures. Note that the shoreside boundary is the mean high tide line and the seaward boundary is measured from mean low low water.

Area	GIS ID	Boundary	Focus Species	Seasonality (Year round or what season)	Comments, Questions or Important Information
Pt. Resistance		300ft. Around point	Common murres and brown pelicans.	Year-round	
Devil's Slide		300ft around Egg Rock	Common murres, Brandt's Cormorant, and brown pelicans	Year-round	Want to see educational information at Linda Mar and other access points
Double Point		300ft. Around Stormy Stack	Harbor seals, California sea lions, murres, Brandt's cormorants, pelagic cormorants, pigeon guillemots, Ashy storm petrels, brown pelicans	Year-round	
North Farallon Islands		300ft around North Island and Isle of St. James	Steller sea lions, common murres, pelagic cormorants, Brandt's cormorants, pigeon guillemots, western gulls, Cassin's auklets	Year-round	Closure size of 300ft still provides safe transit between North Island and Isle of St. James
SE Farallon Islands		300 ft. Except in lee of island between and including Sugarloaf and East Landing	Steller sea lions, Northern fur seals, Northern elephant seals, California sea lions, common murres, pelagic cormorants, Brandt's cormorants, Double-crested cormorant, pigeon guillemots, western gulls, tufted puffins, Cassin's auklets, rhinoceros auklet, Ashy storm petrel, Leach's storm petrel, black oystercatcher, brown pelicans	Year-round	Intended to allow education (Goal 3) through continued wildlife viewing (e.g. murres) and provide for safe anchorage that is sheltered from predominant NW wind and seas.

*MLPA North Central Coast Project
Memo regarding characterization of special closure options
March 12, 2008*

Proposal 4: Consideration of Marine Bird and Mammal Protection: Within this MPA proposal, certain areas may warrant increased protection of marine birds and/or marine mammals though the use of "no disturbance" zones or special closures. Note that the shoreside boundary is the mean high tide line and the seaward boundary is measured from mean low low water.

Area	GIS ID	Boundaries	Focus Species	Seasonality (Year round or what season)	Comments, Questions or Important Information
Arched Rock	DD54	300 ft.	4 breeding species, 481 birds. Brandt's cormorants (436 breeding birds), pelagic cormorants (9), pigeon guillemots (2), Western gull (34).	Year round	Based on support indicated by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and BLM
Gull Rock	DD55	300 ft.	7 breeding species, 1,056 birds. Cormorants move around between rocks. Double Crested Cormorant colonies (mostly on Russian River Rocks) - not represented in other closure options. Brandt's cormorants, pelagic cormorants, pigeon guillemots, Western gull, black oyster-catcher. Mid-march to mid-August is breeding season. Large Brown Pelican roosts. Large harbor seal haul out & rookery (about 450 seals).	Year round	Based on support indicated by Farallones Sanctuary and BLM
Pt. Reyes Headlands	DD53	1000 ft	9 nesting seabird species, more than 43,000 birds. Largest seabird colony in south subregion & third largest in NCCSR. Common murre, pelagic cormorants, Brandt's cormorants, pigeon guillemots, western gulls, rhinoceros auklets, roosting brown pelicans (>100 pelicans). Bird colonies from tip of Chimney Rock to tip of lighthouse. Elephant seal rookery. Whole headlands is important. Largest murre colony is outside of existing headland.	Year round	Existing SMCA boundaries with edges cut straight south. Moved western boundary to 123 01 to accommodate safe passage around the point.
Stormy Stack	DD56	300 ft.	see special closures notes (Pelican, murre)	Year round	Leaves spaces for safe passage for surfers and boat travel. 2nd largest breeding colony in subregion.
Egg Rock	DD52	1000 ft. (from big rock in the middle)	Common murre and Brandt's cormorant colony on Devil's Slide, or "Egg", Rock. Pigeon guillemots, pelagic cormorants, western gulls, and black oystercatcher colonies extend south along mainland to Gray Whale Beach. Roosting brown pelicans on rock and mainland (>100 pelicans).	Year round	1000 ft around rock but leaving area to south open. Covers transit issue. Year round closure would likely eliminate 91.4% of alarm behaviors & 95.2% of flushing behaviors. Has been identified by Seabird Colony Protection Program as significant seabird breeding area & is site of seabird restoration project. Will nearly eliminate boat disturbance on Devil's Slide (Egg) Rock & benefit birds & nesting areas on mainland cliffs. Recommend buoys be put in to help inform users of special closure.
North Farallons	DD57	1000ft closure. 300ft closure around North Island and Isle of St. James.	Steller sea lions haul out on N. Farallon. More than 72,000 nesting seabirds including common murre, pelagic cormorants, Brandt's cormorants, pigeon guillemots, western gulls, Cassin's auklets	Year round	Retain existing noise abatement regulations