



NATIONAL MARINE
SANCTUARIES™

MOTORIZED PERSONAL WATERCRAFT Action Plan Summary

MONTEREY BAY NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY

THE ISSUE:

Motorized personal watercraft (MPWC) have the potential to disturb wildlife due to the unique characteristics these vehicles possess. The use of MPWC in the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary (MBNMS) has also led to conflicts between MPWC operators and other recreationalists.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Motorized Personal Watercraft (MPWC) are small, fast, and highly maneuverable craft that possess unconventionally high thrust capability and horsepower relative to their size and weight. These characteristics enable them to make sharp turns at high speeds and alter direction rapidly, while maintaining controlled stability. Their small size, shallow draft, instant thrust, and “quick reflex” enable them to operate closer to shore and in areas that would commonly pose a hazard to conventional craft operating at comparable speeds. Many can be launched across a beach area without the need for a launch ramp. These intrinsic features of MPWC pose a unique threat of routine wildlife disturbance not posed by more conventional vessels operated in the MBNMS.

During the designation of the MBNMS, the operation of MPWC in nearshore areas was identified as an activity that should be prohibited. Assessments of MPWC impacts indicated that unrestricted access to

all reaches of the MBNMS by such craft would pose an unacceptable threat to wildlife and other ocean users. In nearshore areas that wildlife often inhabit, MPWC can traverse an area often with irregular movements and high speed making them an unpredictable hazard to wildlife. Disturbance impacts associated with MPWC tend to be locally concentrated, producing effects that are more geographically limited yet potentially more severe than motorboat use, due to repeated disruptions and an accumulation of impacts in a shorter period of time. To prevent the disturbance of wildlife and other nearshore users, the MBNMS designated four unlimited use MPWC zones in 1992, which took into consideration local wildlife, boat launching facilities, and traditional areas of MPWC use. This designation balanced recreational use and enjoyment of MPWC with resource protection in the sanctuary.

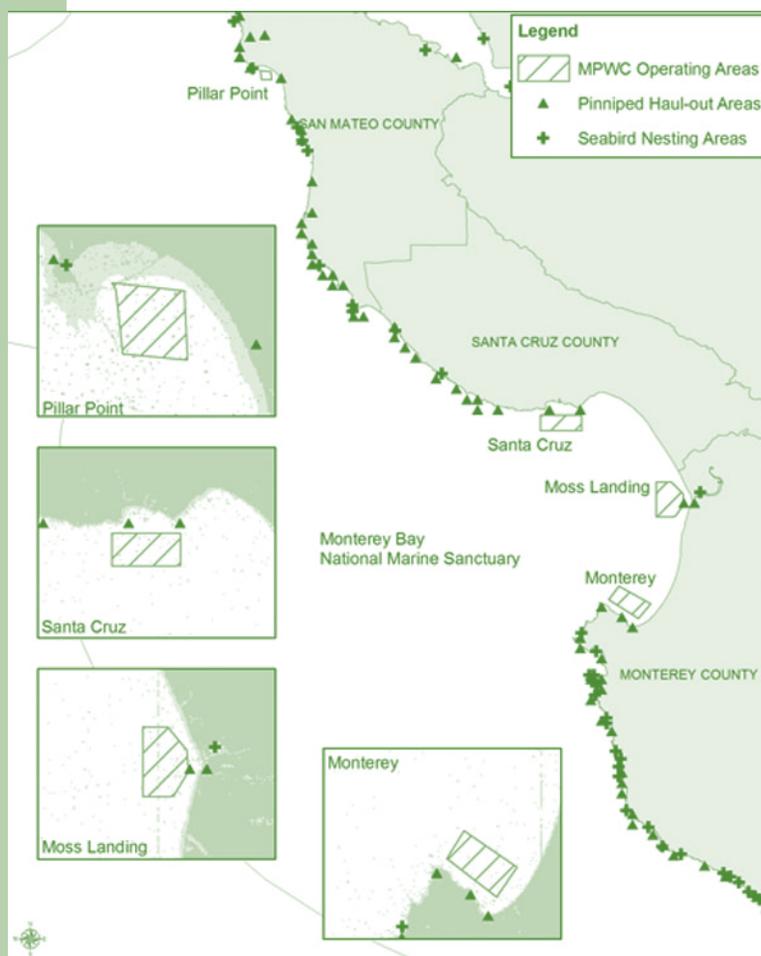
See Map 1

OUR GOAL

The sanctuary's goal is to minimize disturbance of wildlife by MPWC and to minimize user conflicts between MPWC operators and other recreationalists while providing opportunities for MPWC use within the sanctuary.



Map 1: MPWC Zones for MBNMS



In the past, the sanctuary has defined Motorized Personal Watercraft as any motorized vessel that is less than fifteen feet in length as manufactured, is capable of exceeding a speed of fifteen knots (17.27 miles per hour), and has the capacity to carry not more than the operator and one other person while in operation. However, since MPWC have increased in size, increased in carrying capacity, and many new designs have entered the market, the sanctuary is proposing a new definition for MPWC.

Personal watercraft are defined as Class A inboard boats by the US Coast Guard and are required to follow most boating regulations. Information on boating regulations can be found through the US Coast Guard or the California Department of Boating and Waterways.

Current popular uses of MPWC in the MBNMS are operation within the surf zone, weaving in and out of wave lines, launching off the crest of waves and wakes, and towing surfers into large and/or remote wave breaks. Larger size MPWC models are preferred in high-energy ocean environments for increased power, range, and towing ability. Use of MPWC to tow surfers into surf is a relatively new technique in surfing, and allows some surfers to catch massive waves previously considered too large for individual surfers to paddle into. Use of MPWC for tow-in surfing has increased significantly during the past few years at many traditional surfing locations in the MBNMS, regardless of surf conditions. The MBNMS has received complaints by surfers, beachgoers, and coastal residents that the use of MPWC in traditional surfing areas has produced conflicts with other ocean users and caused disturbance of wildlife.

Some Simple Things MPWC Operators Can Do to Reduce the Impact of MPWC on Sanctuary Resources

Help Protect Sensitive Shorelines. From wave-swept beaches and lush kelp forests to tranquil estuaries, the sanctuary's near-shore habitats are fragile and full of life. The MPWC operating zones are designed to provide special protection for these areas. Stay within the zones and access routes at all times, and launch and return to shore only within the designated harbors.

Watch Out For Wildlife. You may encounter sea birds, sea turtles, or marine mammals such as sea otters, seals, sea lions, whales, or dolphins while riding in the sanctuary. Many of these animals are threatened or endangered, and federal law protects all. Although it may be tempting to approach them for a closer look, please watch them from a distance. Avoid harassment (which is illegal) by staying at least 50 to 100 yards away.

Slow Your Speed. Speeding can be dangerous to people and marine life. Avoid areas concentrated with wildlife, such as large gatherings of sea birds resting on the water, or groups of marine mammals. Minimize disturbance by riding slowly near sensitive habitats such as kelp forests.

Reduce Noise. Noise may disturb birds or marine mammals resting on the surface. If you encounter wildlife, slow or idle your speed to reduce noise and the chance of harassing any animals you see.

Pick Up Plastic. Birds, fish, mammals, and sea turtles can get entangled in plastic or mistake it for food, and die of starvation or poisoning from plastic in their stomachs. Plastic debris in the water can also foul propellers and clog or damage engine intake systems. Always stow your trash for disposal in port, and help remove floating plastics from the marine environment.

Spills Aren't Slick. Even small amounts of oil or gas can be deadly to marine wildlife. You can help protect wildlife by preventing fuel spills. Fill your tank slowly, don't overfill, and wipe up any accidental spills quickly with an absorbent pad.

Report spills you see to the US Coast Guard at 1-800-424-8802.

THE SANCTUARY'S ACTION PLAN

The sanctuary's "Motorized Personal Watercraft Action Plan" was developed jointly with a variety of stakeholders and partners and includes, but is not limited to, the following components:

- Revising the definition of MPWC within the MBNMS regulations
- Maintaining existing MPWC zones and improving marker buoys to be more visible and to ensure proper location
- Identifying and implementing official protocols for training of public safety personnel
- Considering special permits for controlled MPWC operation outside of designated zones for tow-in surfing competition near Pillar Point, and for public safety agencies
- Conducting outreach to the MPWC riding community on MBNMS regulations, MPWC zones, and riding etiquette
- Working with local law enforcement personnel to assist the MBNMS in enforcing MPWC regulations

For a complete listing of the sanctuary's 2003 Draft "Motorized Personal Watercraft Action Plan" please visit http://sanctuaries.nos.noaa.gov/jointplan/m_reptoad.html and scroll down the page.

The Joint Management Plan Review (JMPR)

"Motorized Personal Watercraft" is one of the action plans in the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary Draft Management Plan. The MBNMS Draft Management Plan includes twenty-eight plans that, once finalized, will guide sanctuary management for the next five years. The plan is a revision of the original management plan, adopted with sanctuary designation in 1992, and is focused on how to best understand and protect the sanctuary's resources.

The National Marine Sanctuary Program (NMSP) is updating the management plans for the Cordell Bank, Gulf of the Farallones, and Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuaries in a process known as the Joint Management Plan Review (JMPR).



How You Can Get Involved in the MBNMS Management Plan Process

The MBNMS welcomes your ideas about important resource management issues in the sanctuary. A Draft Management Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement are scheduled for release to the public in 2006. Following their release, hearings will be held in several locations throughout the region to gather public comment. Written comments will be accepted as well. To find out about public hearings, or how to submit written comments, please visit our website at <http://www.sanctuaries.nos.noaa.gov/jointplan>.

Resources

California Department of Boating and Waterways <http://www.dbw.ca.gov>
Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary <http://farallones.noaa.gov>
Mavericks Information <http://mavericks.bolt.com/>
Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary <http://montereybay.noaa.gov>
Monterey Harbor <http://www.monterey.org/harbor>
Moss Landing Harbor <http://www.mosslandingharbor.dst.ca.us>
Personal Watercraft Industry Association <http://www.pwia.org>
Pillar Point Harbor <http://www.smharbor.com/pillarpoint>
Santa Cruz Harbor <http://www.santacruzharbor.org>
San Mateo Chapter of Surfrider Foundation <http://www.surfridersmc.org/Portal/.org>
Sanctuary Integrated Monitoring Network (SIMoN) <http://www.mbnms-simon.org>
US Coast Guard Office of Boating Safety <http://www.uscgboating.org>

THE MONTEREY BAY NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY

Stretching from Marin to Cambria, the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary encompasses 276 miles of shoreline and 5,322 square miles (4,625 nautical miles) of ocean, extending an average distance of 30 miles from shore. At its deepest point, the sanctuary reaches down 10,663 feet (more than two miles). The sanctuary was established for the purposes of resource protection, research, education, and public use. Its natural resources include one of our nation's largest kelp forests and one of North America's largest underwater canyons. It is home to one of the most diverse marine ecosystems in the world, including 33 marine mammal species, 94 seabird species, 345 fish species, and numerous invertebrates and plants. This remarkably productive marine environment is fringed by spectacular coastal scenery, including sandy beaches, rocky cliffs, rolling hills, and steep mountains.

