



**ASA Position Statement
Marine Protected Areas
Revised 4/3/2013**

ASA strongly supports scientifically-based management of our marine and freshwater resources. Anglers are conservationists first and foremost and have a long history of making sacrifices for the betterment of the resources. These have included targeted area closures where the science has clearly indicated they are the best solutions to conserve fish and sensitive habitat and other management approaches have failed.

The term marine protected area (MPA) is used to describe a variety of area-based management approaches in marine waters whereby some or all human activities are restricted. MPAs are one tool among the suite of resources available for effective fisheries management. In nearly all cases, well-regulated recreational fishing can be allowed while still ensuring sustainability of fish stocks and habitat. According to the MPA Center¹, approximately 41 percent, or over 1.2 billion acres, of all U.S. waters are in some form of MPA. Within the current system of MPAs, 86 percent allow for recreational fishing.

A subset of MPAs, often called marine reserves or no-take zones, ban all recreational fishing activities, typically along with all other "extractive" human activities. U.S. fisheries are regulated under a fisheries management system that requires fish harvest be set for all stocks at levels that maintain healthy populations. Where traditional fisheries management tools are effectively sustaining healthy fish populations – as required by law – the value of marine reserves is very limited, but by displacing where fishing can take place, the impacts on anglers are significant. By prohibiting recreational fishing access, particularly in popular fishing areas, marine reserves deter recreational fishing participation and negatively affect coastal communities and fisheries resource management agencies that depend on revenue derived from recreational fishing and boating.

Because they are the most restrictive fisheries management tool, marine reserves should be considered only when recreational fishing poses a clear and demonstrated threat to the sustainability of fisheries resources and only after conventional fisheries management measures have failed.

As with any good fisheries management decision, discussions about measures that restrict public access to public resources must involve an open public process, a solid scientific basis, and specific guidelines on implementation and follow-up. The establishment of any MPA that closes areas to recreational fishing should:

1. Only be considered after well-enforced conventional fisheries management tools, such as bag limits, size limits, quotas and seasons, have failed;
2. Be limited to the smallest area possible to achieve fisheries management goals;
3. Require that sufficient, long-term government funding is available for regular monitoring and enforcement of the closed area;

¹ Department of Commerce, Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management, "Analysis of United States MPAs, March 2012" (Silver Spring, MD, 2012)

4. Include a timetable for review of the closed area's performance in meeting fisheries management goals; and
5. Have the ultimate goal of reopening the area to recreational fishing once fisheries management goals are achieved.

It is a long-standing policy of the federal government to allow public access to public lands and waters for recreational purposes consistent with sound conservation. This policy is reflected in the principles of our wildlife refuges, national forests, national parks, and wilderness areas, and should be reflected in any decision to implement MPAs – especially no-take areas. The ability of recreational anglers to access public marine resources should be as strong as the ability of hunters and anglers to use public lands.