

Ecologically Sustainable Recreation in US MPAs: Are We Ready to Ride the Wave?

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I ATTENDED THE SESSION “Ecologically Sustainable Recreation in US MPAs: Are We Ready to Ride the Wave?” and met Charles Wahle, Cliff McCreedy, and Gary Davis who presented the topics in a café conversation format. We were greatly involved in the ideas being presented. The conversation centered on recreation in Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), and what we can do to prevent the deterioration of these areas while still allowing for recreational activities.

MPAs are struggling with how to approach the matter and identify what would be the most effective way to maintain the balance between recreation and the preservation of these areas. They indicated that right now there is little information on the users of these areas, which makes where to approach the problem more difficult. The users of MPAs can access these areas from a multitude of entrances along the coastline, either on land or from the water. This makes addressing entrance regulations more difficult because of the open availability to enter MPAs. This also makes the recreational activities that are being participated in, as well as the number of participants harder to track, which directly affects the ways MPAs can be managed and any policies or laws that want to be passed.

With this background, the boardroom was split into two different tables where the participants would discuss the ways to better control and protect MPAs. The two groups came up with similar ideas as ways to better protect MPAs but still allow for recreational activities. One idea was to create more government job openings for those already involved in marine areas to bridge the gap between an internship, or volunteer work, to a full-time employee. This idea would allow for more educators on the topic and in the MPAs. Another part of that idea was to partner with universities to get young adults emotionally connected to marine environments leading to greater stewardship. These ideas were intended to create, or build on the creation, of an emotional connection that leads to the public also caring for MPAs because they have been educated and connected.

Another leading idea was to create zones that would be regulated. For example, recreational use would not be allowed in certain areas, but there would be specified areas in which recreational use would be allowed. This would cut down on the use of part of the zone, while still allowing use

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within the MPA. The zoning idea followed suit with adding other restrictions such as permits or allowing a definite number of vehicles in the MPAs per day.

The discussion “Ecologically Sustainable Recreation in US MPAs: Are We Ready to Ride the Wave?” introduced the problem of recreational activities in MPAs. Through the discussion, the leaders were able to hear a variety of answers that were discussed thoroughly and which will hopefully be used to address recreation in marine areas.

Reflection

I was very interested in the topic of sustainable recreation in MPAs because of my academic study focusing on recreation. Marine recreation is especially important to an immense amount of people around the world. Many people do not have a deeper understanding of marine areas, and those that do have a strong connection with the marine environment. I feel that it is important to build the relationships of the participants with the areas they are using. This can create a bond, leading to the stewardship coming from the users themselves rather than exclusively people with authority or educators. Though many agreed, a large majority felt that the most important thing to focus on was creating zones or policies that enforced the protection of marine areas. I believe that these would assist in the maintenance of marine areas, but a large proponent for MPAs would be the users themselves and getting them to care enough. Overall, the discussion was very informational and interactive with every participant, and was able to share a problem, create a discussion, and leave the attendees closer to the topic of MPAs and sustainable recreation.