



ENGAGING DOCENTS AS MARINE PROTECTED AREA AMBASSADORS

Volunteer and docents are the state's front line educators about the cultural and natural history of the California Coast and are natural and effective partners on MPA outreach. Docent programs at natural history museums, aquaria, state and national parks and sanctuary interpretive centers provide a cadre of able and experienced communicators that are eager to incorporate new concepts such as land-sea connections and MPA conservation. Building MPA outreach into docent training and docent materials helps inform a large and active group of educators and leverages existing investments.

SNAPSHOT OF DOCENT PROGRAMS

- **Mobile MPA cart:** Santa Cruz Collaborative members created a mobile beach cart to use as an MPA interpretive tool at Natural Bridges State Beach, allowing docents to share information, fun facts and rules on the beach before visitors reach the shore and the MPA. Mobile carts are used at the Monterey Bay Aquarium and other institutions and can be easily updated and tailored to incorporate locally relevant ocean messaging.
- **Kayak docents in Morro and Monterey Bays:** San Luis Obispo Collaborative members established Sealife Stewards, a kayak-based docent program on Morro Bay modeled on Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary's Team Ocean program. These programs put trained, knowledgeable naturalists out on the water serving as interpretive docents that promote respectful wildlife viewing, and protect marine mammals from disturbance.
- **Whale watching in the Bay Area:** Golden Gate Collaborative members designed and printed a brochure that is being used by docents aboard whale watching boats visiting the Farallon Islands and handed out by docents to tidepoolers at Duxbury Reef in Marin County.
- **Integrating MPA content into docent trainings:** Maps, locally and nationally relevant scientific facts and stories, scripts, and messaging about California MPAs have been incorporated into existing docent training programs across the state.
- **Bioblitz with California Academy of Sciences:** All fourteen Collaboratives partnered with the California Academy of Sciences to host bioblitz events gathering biodiversity data in their local MPAs, which engaged numerous local docent programs and citizen scientists through use of the iNaturalist mobile app.

KEY INSIGHTS AND IDEAS

➤ Tap existing resources

A wide range of materials are available to help train docents to communicate effectively about MPAs, including the Ocean Communicators Alliance Docent Handbooks and the South Coast Aquarium Collaborative's Curriculum Guide. Maps, brochures, videos, training materials, and other MPA information is available on the California Marine Sanctuary Foundation website: www.CaliforniaMPAs.org

➤ Learning goes both ways

Docents have considerable experience translating complex information for lay audiences, and can help Collaborative Network members communicate about MPAs in a way that is most likely to resonate with visitors, such as by emphasizing wildlife, and natural and cultural history, rather than leading off with fishing rules and regulations.

➤ Tailor by location and audience

Interpreting MPAs effectively to children, college students, or international visitors may require different materials and messages. Docent program coordinators repeatedly emphasized that there is no single message that works for everyone – but recommended focusing on local MPAs.

➤ Plan to follow up, and engage outside experts

To be effective MPA messengers, docents will ideally receive MPA materials, multiple trainings on interpreting MPAs to the public, as well as yearly enrichments on the topic. Orange County has had success bringing together docents from multiple programs for a single annual MPA training. Guest speakers like scientists, fish and wildlife wardens, and even underwater photographers and artists can provide vital context, enliven trainings, and encourage docents to discuss MPAs with visitors.

➤ Staff up to support interpretive programs

The most successful docent programs have invested in a staff member that can recruit, train and retain docents.

➤ Build connections with local Fish and Wildlife Wardens

Docents act as eyes on the water, and can add valuable volunteer capacity to professional enforcement efforts. Docent programs can promote MPA compliance by informing the public about MPA rules and by reporting poaching to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife or other law enforcement. All potential MPA violations should be reported to CalTIP at 1-888-334-CalTIP or by text at: tip411

For more information about MPAs and docent programs, please contact Calla Allison at calla.allison@resources.ca.gov

COLLABORATIVE MEMBERS PARTICIPATING IN DOCENT-LED OUTREACH

State Parks

Wishtoyo Foundation

Audubon Society

Monterey Bay Aquarium

Laguna Ocean Foundation

Redwood National Park

Serenos de Point Vicente

Central Coast Aquarium

Point Lobos Foundation

City of Laguna Beach

Tijuana River NERR

Coal Oil Point Reserve

Coastal Discovery Center

Central Coast Aquarium

Newport Landing

Monterey Bay NMS

Seymour Center

Noyo Marine Center

Grey Whales Count

Aquarium of the Bay

Sea Life Aquarium

Birch Aquarium

Ocean Institute

Cabrillo Aquarium

Aquarium of the Pacific

Friends of Fitzgerald

Santa Barbara Sea Center

Elkhorn Slough Foundation

Seabird Protection Network

Marine Mammal Center

Cabrillo National Monument

Elkhorn Slough Foundation

California Marine Sanctuary Foundation

Stewards of the Coast and Redwoods

California Academy of Sciences

Santa Monica Pier Aquarium

San Elijo Lagoon Conservancy

Bureau of Land Management

Morro Bay Museum of Natural History

Friends of the Elephant Seal