



# Marine Protected Areas

Conserve key marine life and habitats

Preserve natural diversity

Help rebuild depleted populations

Protect geologic features and cultural areas

Support research and education

Offer recreational and economic opportunities

Image above: Morro Rock (Mike Baird, flickr.bairdphotos.com)  
below: white pelicans (Mike Baird, flickr.bairdphotos.com)

**California State Parks**  
San Luis Obispo Sector Office:  
805-534-2801  
711, TTY RELAY SERVICE  
[www.parks.ca.gov](http://www.parks.ca.gov)

**Morro Bay State Park**  
805-772-2694

**California Department of Fish and Game**  
For more information:  
[www.dfg.ca.gov](http://www.dfg.ca.gov)  
For boundaries and regulations, go to:  
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Cover: southern sea otters (Mike Baird, flickr.bairdphotos.com)

# Morro Bay Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)

Morro Bay State Marine Recreational Management Area  
Morro Bay State Marine Reserve



Central Coast Marine Protected Areas



# *From the salt marsh to the sea*

## California Is Making a Difference

by creating a statewide network of marine protected areas (MPAs). Marine protected areas are underwater places designed to protect key habitats and species by prohibiting or restricting the take of marine life. Just as the nation's parks, forests and wilderness areas protect special places on land, California's MPAs protect unique areas in the ocean. The California MPA network includes the many different types of habitats found along our coast, from sheltered estuaries and lush kelp forests to steep underwater canyons.

Image above left: sea lion (Mike Baird, flickr.bairdphotos.com)  
above right: leopard shark (Chad King)

**Tidal creeks and streams** carry freshwater from the inland areas of California and converge in a maze of coastal marshes and wetlands at Morro Bay Estuary. Killifish, striped bass, topsmelt, leopard shark and starry flounder roam the submerged eelgrass beds of the estuary year-round. Acting as protective nursery grounds, the shallow waters also teem with cockles, mussels, clams, shrimp, and oysters. Many species that live as adults in the ocean spend their early life in the protected bay habitat. Chorro and Los Osos creeks host steelhead trout, a threatened species in this region that spawns in creeks, migrates to the estuary and the ocean, and returns to the creeks.

**Lagoons and wetlands** were once common along the Southern California coast, but almost all were filled and developed before we understood the importance of these delicate ecosystems. Morro Bay has largely survived, a rare

example of a vast coastal estuary showing how much of California's west coast once appeared. Today the estuary is struggling with the impacts of coastal development and other human activities. The newly designated MPAs are a step toward restoring and protecting this special place.

## Amazing Diversity of Life

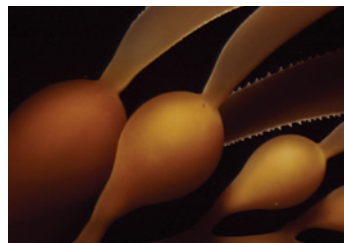
- Fish in estuaries can tolerate a mix of salt and fresh water. These nutrient-rich wetlands are prime habitat for a variety of fish.
- Eelgrass beds provide habitat for many animals, including black brant, a small goose that spends the winter in the area.
- Marine mammals such as sea otters, sea lions and harbor seals eat and rest along the banks of Morro Bay.
- Invertebrates such as gaper clams, shore crabs, and fat innkeeper worms along with many other species reside in the mud.
- Hundreds of species of birds reside or migrate to these rich and diverse MPAs.



nudibranch (Ken Bondy)



diver (Jerry Loomis)



giant kelp (Jerry Loomis)



striped shore crab (Jerry Kirkhart)



lemon nudibranch (Ken Bondy)



Morro Rock (Jerry Kirkhart)

