

SNAPSHOT OF GULF OF MEXICO MPAs

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The information provided here is current as of March 2011, and is from the Marine Protected Areas Inventory (MPA Inventory) – a comprehensive geospatial database designed to catalog and classify marine protected areas within U.S. waters. The MPA Inventory was developed from information provided by state, territorial, tribal and federal MPA programs, and other publicly available data.

WHAT IS A MARINE PROTECTED AREA?

Executive Order 13158 (see below) defines an MPA as “any area of the marine environment that has been reserved by federal, state, territorial, tribal, or local laws or regulations to provide lasting protection for part or all of the natural and cultural resources therein.” Key terms within the definition -- area, marine, reserved, lasting, and protection -- are defined in the *Framework for the National System of Marine Protected Areas of the United States of America*.

BUILDING A NATIONAL SYSTEM OF MPAs

Over the past century, MPAs have been created by a mix of federal, state, and local legislation and regulations, each established for its own specific purpose. As a result, the nation’s collection of MPAs (reserves, refuges, preserves, sanctuaries, areas of special biological significance, and others) is fragmented and complex, potentially missing opportunities for broader regional conservation through coordinated planning and management. In 2000, Presidential Executive Order 13158 directed the Department of Commerce to work with the Department of the Interior, other federal agencies, states, territories and stakeholders to establish a national system of MPAs to integrate and enhance the nation’s MPAs, bringing these diverse sites and programs together to work on common conservation objectives. There are currently 297 members of the national system. Of these, 33 are from the Gulf of Mexico.

GULF OF MEXICO MPAs AT A GLANCE:

- There are currently 295 MPAs in the region
- About 40% of the Gulf of Mexico is in some form of MPA
- Nearly all (278) Gulf of Mexico MPAs are multiple use
- “No take” MPAs occupy only about 0.5% of all Gulf waters
- State governments manage approximately 77% of the Gulf of Mexico’s MPAs, but most MPA area in the region is managed by federal agencies
- Gulf of Mexico MPAs account for 6% of the total area of MPAs in U.S. waters

NOAA’s National Marine Protected Areas (MPA) Center’s mission is to facilitate the effective use of science, technology, training, and information in the planning, management, and evaluation of the nation’s system of marine protected areas. The MPA Center works in partnership with federal, state, tribal, and local governments and stakeholders to develop a science-based, comprehensive national system of MPAs. These collaborative efforts will lead to a more efficient, effective use of MPAs now and in the future to conserve and sustain the nation’s vital marine resources.



DEVELOPING A REGIONAL GULF OF MEXICO NETWORK

MPA managers in the Gulf are faced with many common challenges, including adaptation to climate change, responding to emergencies such as the BP/Deepwater Horizon spill, habitat loss and invasive species. In April 2011, the MPA Center sponsored a meeting hosted by Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR) to identify key issues and initial strategies for collaboration among the region's MPAs. This network of federal and state MPA managers and staff will work with existing regional bodies and initiatives to address these challenges and identify opportunities to enhance the conservation of the region's natural and cultural marine resources. For more information, contact Ryan Young at Rookery Bay NERR (ryan.young@dep.state.fl.us).

IN FOCUS: GULF OF MEXICO MPAS

The Gulf of Mexico is home to 295 MPAs. These areas cover nearly 40% of Gulf of Mexico U.S. marine waters, and vary widely in purpose, legal authorities, managing agencies, management approaches, level of protection, and restrictions on human uses. Some examples of Gulf of Mexico MPAs include:



Grand Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve: The Grand Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve is one of the most biologically productive estuarine ecosystems in the northern Gulf of Mexico. Located between Pascagoula, Mississippi and the Alabama state line, the Reserve's habitats support rare and endangered plant and animal species, important marine fisheries and archeological sites.



Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary: The 2,800 square nautical mile Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary surrounds the entire archipelago of the Florida Keys and includes the productive waters of Florida Bay, the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean. The most extensive living coral reef in the United States is adjacent to the 126 mile island chain of the Florida Keys. These coral reefs are intimately linked to a marine ecosystem that supports one of the most unique and diverse assemblages of plants and animals in North America.

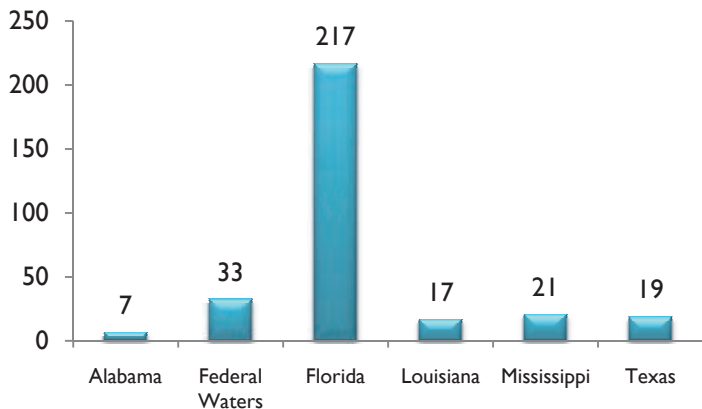


Breton National Wildlife Refuge: Located in Southeast Louisiana, Breton National Wildlife Refuge provides habitat for colonies of nesting wading birds and seabirds, as well as wintering shorebirds and waterfowl. Twenty-three species of seabirds and shorebirds frequently use the refuge, and 13 species nest on the various islands. Other wildlife species found on the refuge include nutria, rabbits, raccoons and loggerhead sea turtles.

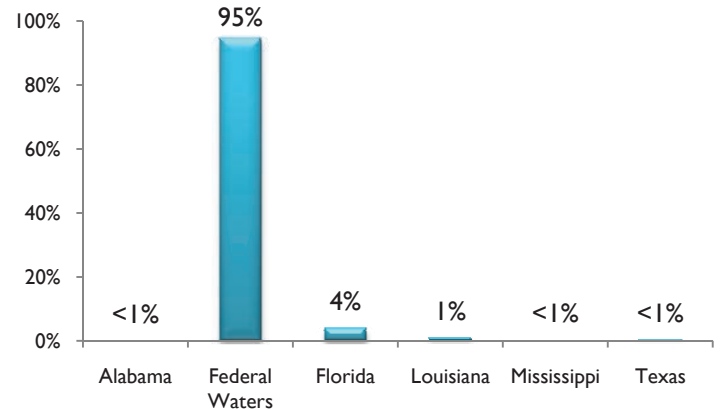
MPAs IN THE GULF OF MEXICO

About two thirds of the region's MPAs are in Florida. Over 100 of Florida's 217 MPAs are Outstanding Florida Waters, overlay zones established to protect water quality in sensitive areas. These often overlap with other MPAs. Florida also has a 41-member system of aquatic preserves, 21 of which are MPAs in the Gulf. Ninety-five percent of the MPA area in the Gulf is in federal waters, most of this is in fishery MPAs managed by the National Marine Fisheries Service with the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council.

NUMBER OF GULF MPAs BY JURISDICTION



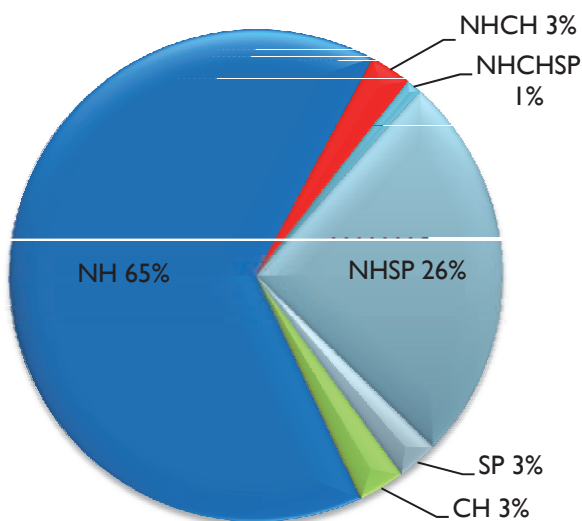
PERCENT OF AREA BY JURISDICTION



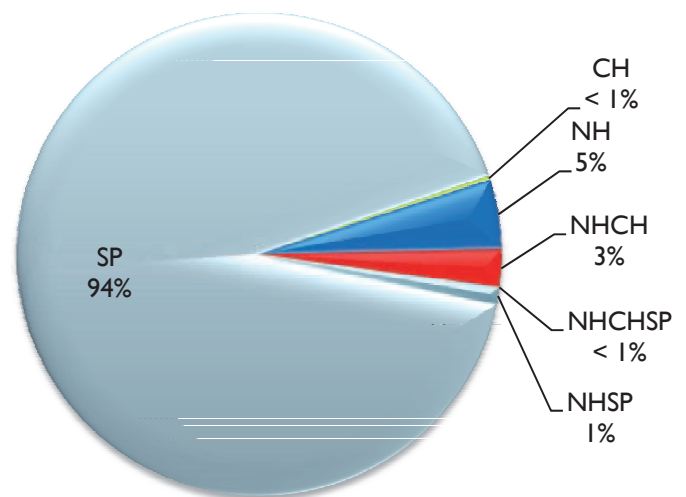
GULF MPAs BY CONSERVATION FOCUS

Many Gulf MPAs have more than one conservation focus. Ninety one percent were created primarily to conserve natural heritage values such as biodiversity, ecosystems, or protected species. Approximately 6% focus on primarily on sustainable production, and 3% focus on conserving our nation's cultural heritage. However, because the MPAs created for sustainable production are so large, approximately 94% of the MPA area in the region has this conservation focus.

NUMBER OF GULF MPAs BY CONSERVATION FOCUS



PERCENT OF AREA BY CONSERVATION FOCUS

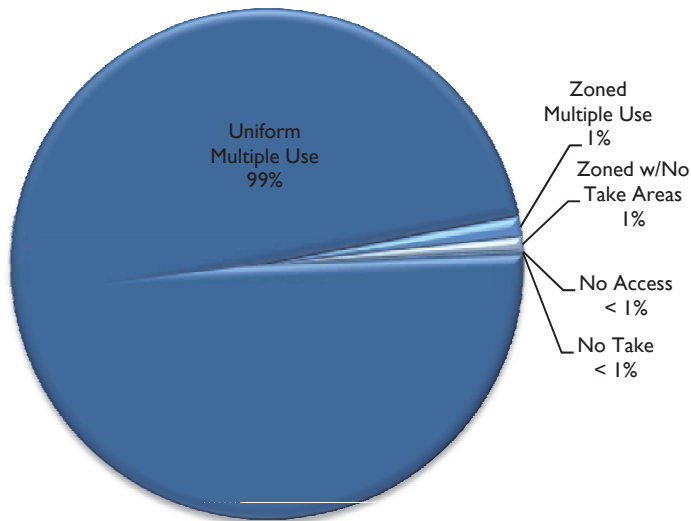


GULF MPAs BY LEVEL OF GOVERNMENT

State agencies manage 77% of the MPAs in the region, but because these are typically quite small, these amount to 4% of the MPA area. By contrast, federal agencies manage 21% of the region's MPAs, accounting for 97% of the MPA area. Partnership programs, such as the National Estuarine Research Reserves, make up the remainder.

GULF MPAs BY LEVEL OF PROTECTION

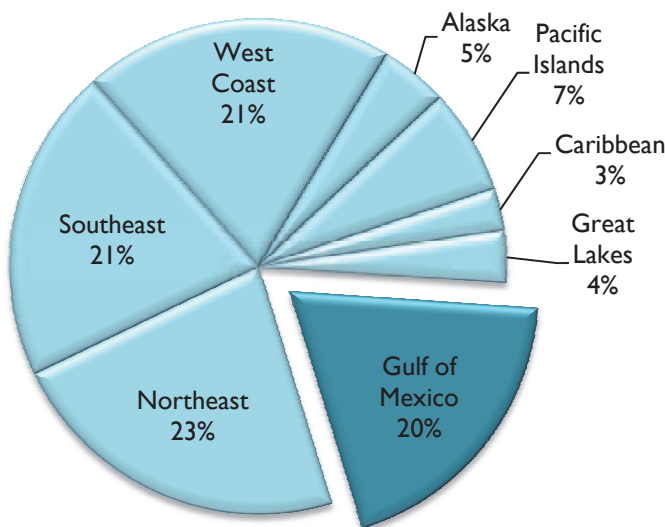
PERCENT OF AREA BY LEVEL OF PROTECTION



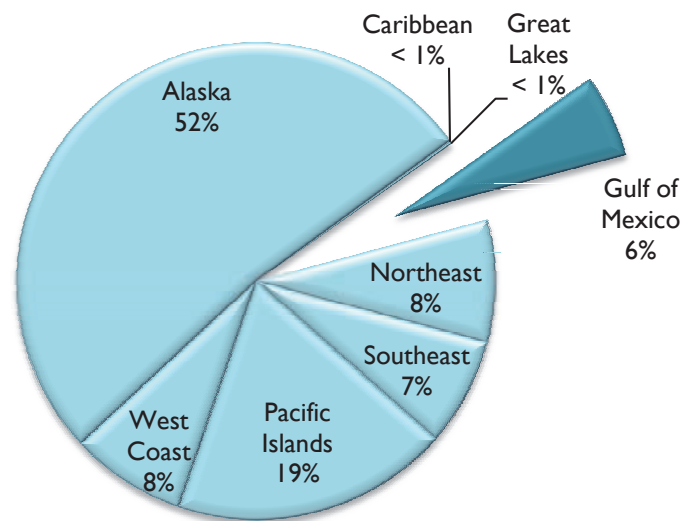
Almost all (99%) of the area in the Gulf's MPAs is multiple-use, in which a variety of human activities, including fishing and other extractive uses, are allowed. In contrast, only 0.5% of the area is no take, where the extraction or significant destruction of natural or cultural resources is prohibited.

GULF MPAs WITHIN THE NATIONAL CONTEXT

NUMBER OF U.S. MPAs BY REGION



PERCENT OF U.S. MPA AREA BY REGION



There are 1,681 MPAs in place in the U.S. These areas cover more than 40% of U.S. marine waters, and vary widely in purpose, legal authorities, managing agencies, management approaches, level of protection, and restrictions on human uses. Approximately 20% of U.S. MPAs are found in the Gulf of Mexico region. The Alaska region has the largest MPA area while the Great Lakes and Caribbean regions combined have the least MPA area. Six percent of U.S. MPA area is located in the Gulf of Mexico region.

ABOUT THE DATA

The information presented in this fact sheet is based on data from the National MPA Center's MPA Inventory. Statistics are based on 1,511 sites in U.S. marine waters (0-200 nautical miles) with GIS data. For more information, see www.mpa.gov, or contact Mimi.Diorio@noaa.gov.

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