

Orange County Coastkeeper (Coastkeeper) is a nonprofit clean water organization that serves as a proactive steward of our fresh- and saltwater ecosystems. We work collaboratively with diverse groups in the public and private sectors to achieve healthy, accessible, and sustainable water resources for the region. We implement innovative, effective programs in education, advocacy, restoration, research, enforcement, and conservation.

The Orange County Marine Protected Area (OCMPA) Watch Program enlists volunteers, community groups and local government to monitor human activity in the Laguna Beach State Marine Reserve and Conservation Areas (SMRs & SMCAs), Crystal Cove, Dana Point, and Upper Newport Bay State Marine Conservation Areas (SMCAs). MPA Watch is a statewide program with the Orange County component run by Orange County Coastkeeper (OCCCK). The goal of MPA watch is to provide information to enhance management and performance of Marine Protected Areas.

## Executive Summary

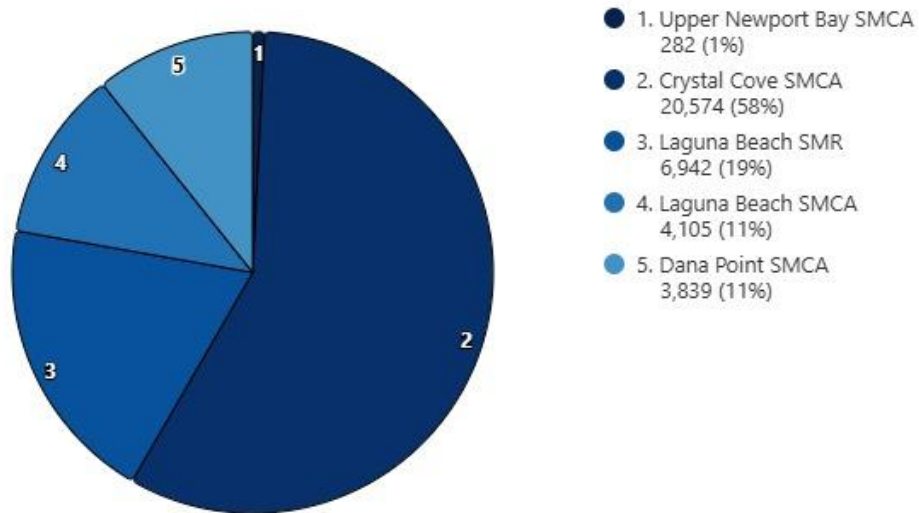
- During this period, 523 surveys were completed in Orange County at 27 MPA survey sites by 21 volunteers.
- There were 39 potential violations observed out of 35,742 total activities documented. 30 of those potential violations were at the Crystal Cove SMCA
- The Crystal Cove SMCA continues to be the busiest MPA in Orange County for human activity, Followed by the Laguna Beach SMR, and Laguna Beach SMCA.

# Human Use of MPAs January 1, 2025 – June 30, 2025

## Overview

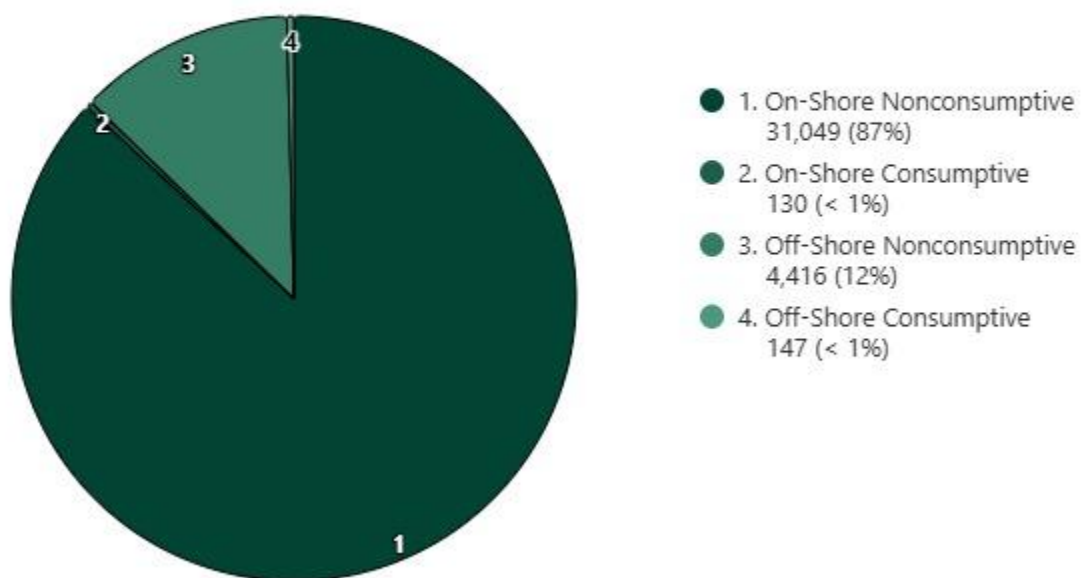
### Top 5 MPAs by All Activity

January 1, 2025 - June 30, 2025  
35,742 total activity events



### All MPAs Combined

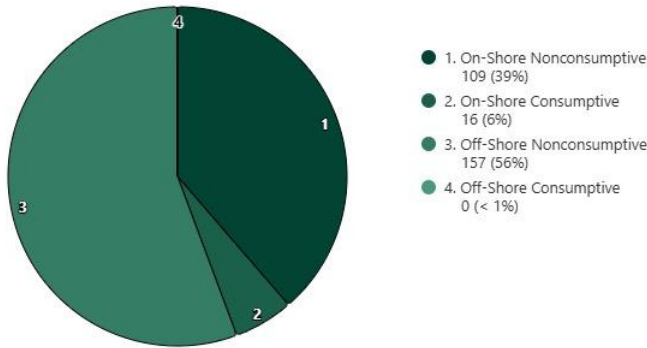
January 1, 2025 - June 30, 2025  
35,742 activity events



## Activity by MPA

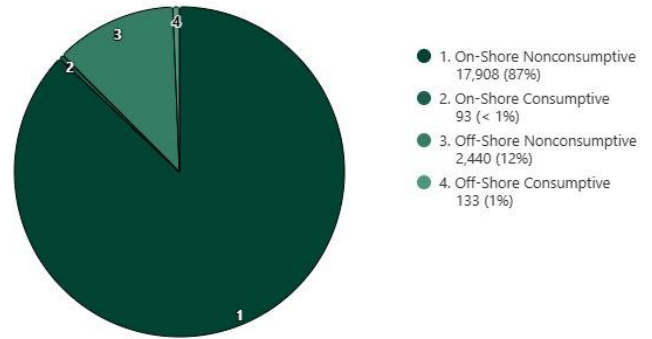
### Upper Newport Bay SMCA

January 1, 2025 - June 30, 2025  
282 activity events



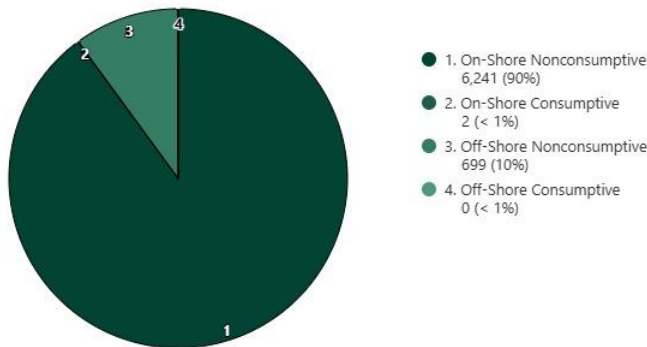
### Crystal Cove SMCA

January 1, 2025 - June 30, 2025  
20,574 activity events



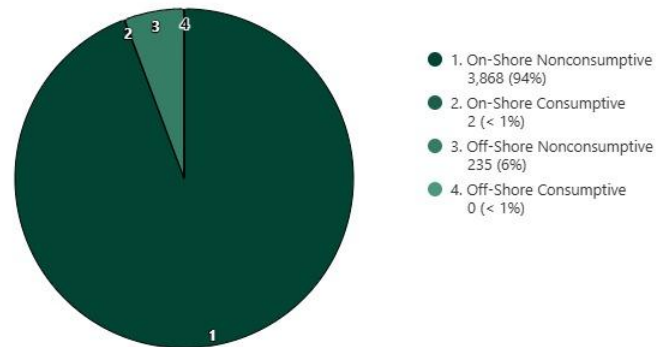
### Laguna Beach SMR

January 1, 2025 - June 30, 2025  
6,942 activity events



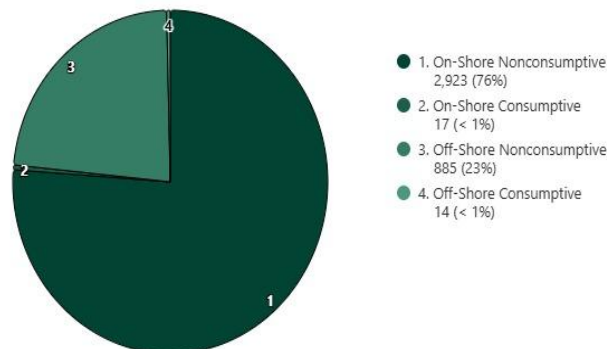
### Laguna Beach SMCA

January 1, 2025 - June 30, 2025  
4,105 activity events



### Dana Point SMCA

January 1, 2025 - June 30, 2025  
3,839 activity events



## Activity Classifications

**On-Shore** - Activities that take place on a sandy or rocky beach. Excludes bluffs, trails, sea walls, parking lots, or other man-made structures. Includes recreation, tidepooling, shore-based fishing, etc.

**Off-Shore** - Activities that take place offshore, typically in knee-deep water or deeper. Includes surfing, SCUBA diving, kayaking, boat fishing, etc.

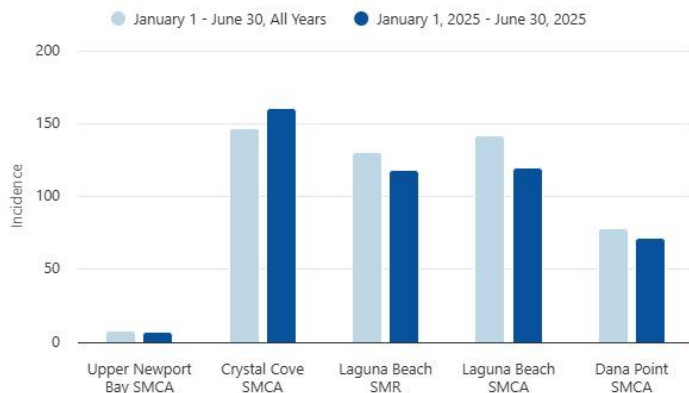
**Consumptive** - An activity in which a natural resource (i.e., fish, kelp, shells) is being collected.

**Non-Consumptive** - An activity in which a natural resource is not collected.

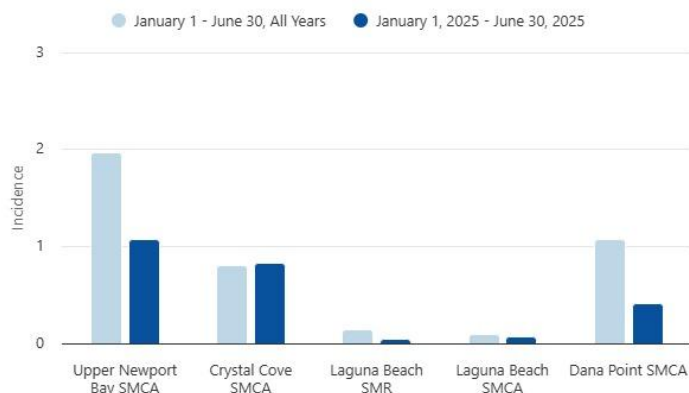
## Activity Incidence by MPA

The charts below show incidence values for each MPA monitored by MPA Watch in Orange County. Incidence is calculated as the number of activities recorded divided by total survey-miles.

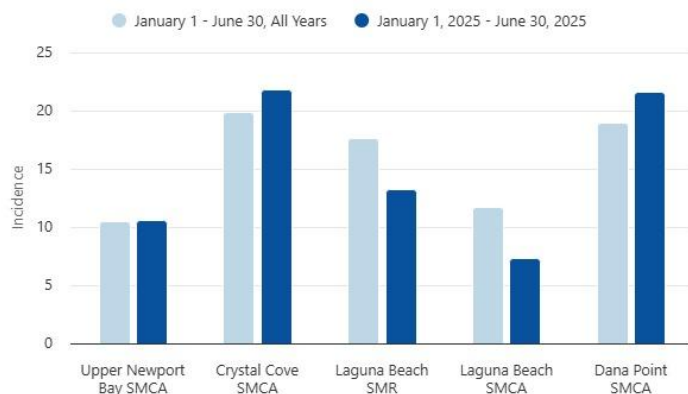
**On-Shore, Non-Consumptive**



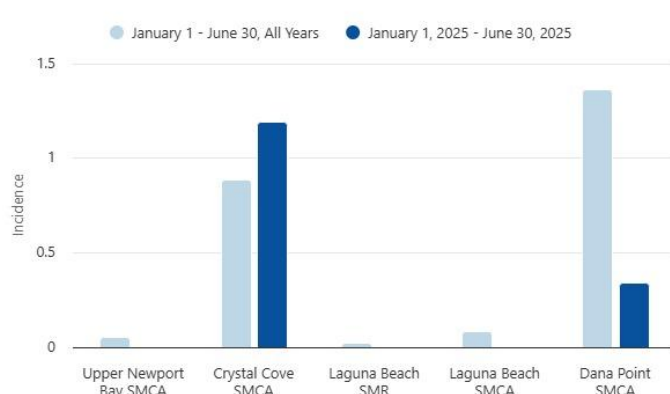
**On-Shore, Consumptive**



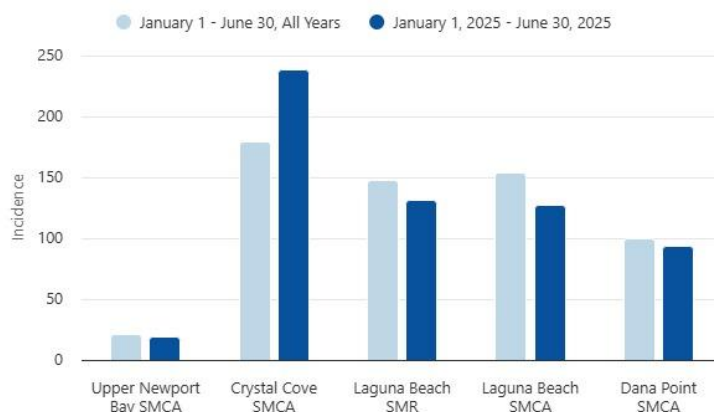
**Off-Shore, Non-Consumptive**



**Off-Shore, Consumptive**



**All Activity**



## Activity Incidence by MPA

MPA	On-Shore			
	Non-Consumptive		Consumptive	
	January 1 June 30 All Years	January 1, 2025 through June 30, 2025	January 1 June 30 All Years	January 1, 2025 through June 30, 2025
Upper Newport Bay SMCA	8.0	7.3	2.0	1.1
Crystal Cove SMCA	146.3	160.0	0.8	0.8
Laguna Beach SMR	129.8	118.2	0.1	0.0
Laguna Beach SMCA	141.6	119.4	0.1	0.1
Dana Point SMCA	78.0	71.1	1.1	0.4
All MPAs Combined	114.8	122.7	0.8	0.5

MPA	Off-Shore			
	Non-Consumptive		Consumptive	
	January 1 June 30 All Years	January 1, 2025 through June 30, 2025	January 1 June 30 All Years	January 1, 2025 through June 30, 2025
Upper Newport Bay SMCA	10.4	10.5	0.1	0.0
Crystal Cove SMCA	19.8	21.8	0.9	1.2
Laguna Beach SMR	17.6	13.2	0.0	0.0
Laguna Beach SMCA	11.7	7.3	0.1	0.0
Dana Point SMCA	19.0	21.5	1.4	0.3
All MPAs Combined	17.3	17.4	0.6	0.6

Total		
Combined		
MPA	January 1 June 30 All Years	January 1, 2025 through June 30, 2025
Upper Newport Bay SMCA	20.4	18.9
Crystal Cove SMCA	167.8	183.9
Laguna Beach SMR	147.5	131.5
Laguna Beach SMCA	153.5	126.7
Dana Point SMCA	99.5	93.4
All MPAs Combined	133.4	141.2

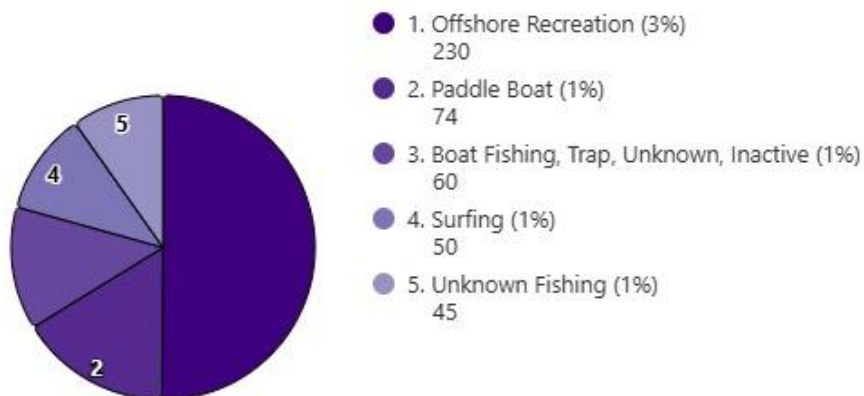
# California State Parks Data

## Crystal Cove State Park-Los Trancos Transect

### Offshore Activities

#### Crystal Cove SMCA

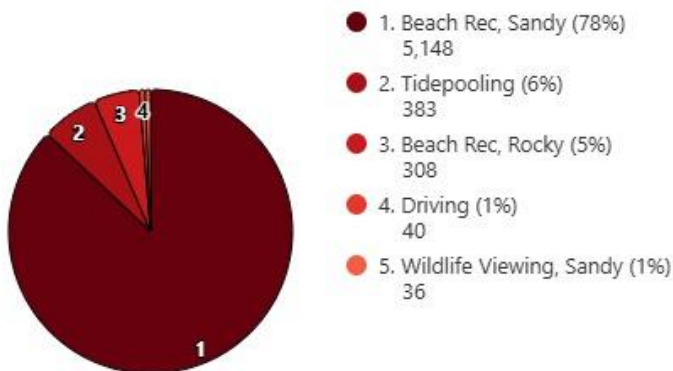
January 1, 2025 - June 30, 2025  
Top offshore activity, 459 (7%) of all 6,628 observations



### Onshore Activities

#### Crystal Cove SMCA

January 1, 2025 - June 30, 2025  
Top onshore activity, 5,915 (89%) of all 6,628 observations





## Activities Rate

MPA	Off-Shore			
	Non-Consumptive		Consumptive	
	January 1 June 30 All Years	January 1, 2025 through June 30, 2025	January 1 June 30 All Years	January 1, 2025 through June 30, 2025
Crystal Cove SMCA	12.9	10.1	1.5	2.0
All MPAs Combined	12.9	10.1	1.5	2.0

MPA	On-Shore			
	Non-Consumptive		Consumptive	
	January 1 June 30 All Years	January 1, 2025 through June 30, 2025	January 1 June 30 All Years	January 1, 2025 through June 30, 2025
Crystal Cove SMCA	118.4	111.1	0.6	1.2
All MPAs Combined	118.4	111.1	0.6	1.2

## Breakdown by MPA

### Upper Newport Bay State Marine Conservation Area

For the months January through June 2025 there were 37 surveys submitted to the MPA Watch website. Orange County MPA Watch data showed an activity incidence rate of 18.9 total uses per mile. People observed in the MPA were primarily taking part in beach recreational activities - sandy (28.0%), Kayak (24%), other boating (10.00%), and Paddle Boating (6.00%). We observed 14 dogs off leash. This is also a popular shore fishing spot with (5%) of activities including fishing.

During this period (January through June 2025), we did not observe any potential MPA violations in the Upper Newport Bay SMCA. The recreational take of finfish by hook and line is allowed from shore only.

### Crystal Cove State Marine Conservation Area

For the months of January through June 2025, there were 162 surveys submitted to the MPA Watch website. Orange County MPA Watch data showed an activity incidence rate of 183.9 total uses per mile. People in the MPA were primarily taking part in beach recreation (80.0% sandy, 3% rocky), Offshore recreational activities (11.0%), tidepooling (2.00%), and other boating (1.00%) activities. No dogs were observed offleash.

During this period (January through June 2025), we observed (30) potential MPA violations, all related to hand collection of biota. Specifically these occurred at the Pelican Point (1), Los Trancos (27), and Little Orange County MPA Watch Report Jan-June 2025

Corona (2) MPA Watch survey areas. According to volunteers, illegal hand collection from tidepools is commonly observed. Regulations do not allow any taking from tidepools in the Crystal Cove State Marine Conservation Area.

### **Crystal Cove State Park – State Parks Summary**

From January 1 to June 30, 2025, Crystal Cove State Marine Conservation Area (SMCA) staff, park aides, and volunteers conducted 41 surveys. Which accounted for nearly one-third of all surveys completed at the site to date. During this period, 26 potential violations were recorded, making up over half of the total 49 recorded violations, suggesting a rise in noncompliant activity or improved reporting. While non-consumptive activities slightly decreased, consumptive use such as fishing and collecting doubled, highlighting shifting visitor behavior and the importance of continued monitoring and outreach.

From January 1 to June 30, 2025, Crystal Cove State Marine Conservation Area recorded a total of 6,628 activity events, with the majority (93%) being nonconsumptive. On-shore nonconsumptive activities made up 89% of total observations, with beach recreation on sandy shores being 78% of the total recreation activity. Tidepooling (6%) and rocky beach recreation (5%) followed, with smaller contributions from wildlife viewing and beach driving. Offshore nonconsumptive activities, such as paddle boating and general recreation, accounted for 8%, while offshore and onshore consumptive uses (primarily various forms) of fishing remained low at just 2% combined.

**Noticeable change:** Noticeable increase in visitation has occurred at Crystal Cove SMCA. While summer typically brings high weekend traffic, this year has seen a significant rise in weekday visitation as well. Although we can't directly attribute this increase to the park being named the Best California State Beach, the recognition may have played a role in boosting its visibility and appeal to a broader audience.

### **Potential Violations by MPA:**

During this six-month period, 26 potential violations were recorded. These violations were over half of the 49 total violations documented from January to June. The most frequent violations occurred in tidepool areas, where illegal collecting was most commonly observed. Fishing in restricted zones was also noted, especially during early morning or late afternoon hours. Though formal enforcement responses were limited, the surveys suggest an increased awareness of noncompliance among staff and visitors alike, especially during school programs or guided tours.

### **Next Steps for the District:**

Looking ahead, the next steps are to support our district's MPA Watch efforts by helping coordinate refresher training for staff. As part of the interpretive team, I'm using recent MPA Watch findings to inform our outreach strategies and messaging into public programs and educational materials. With visitation on the rise, our goal is to use this information to deliver targeted, impactful education around MPA rules and promote a culture of stewardship.



## **Laguna Beach State Marine Reserve**

Between the months of January through June 2025, there were 188 surveys submitted to the MPA Watch website. Orange County MPA Watch data shows a activity incidence rate of total of 126.7 total uses per mile. People in the MPA were taking part in beach recreational activities (sandy -76.0% and rocky – 7%), offshore recreation (6%), tidepooling (4%). 72 dogs were observed offleash.

During this period (January through June 2025), we observed two (2) potential MPA violations (Hook Fishing; Rocky) at Crescent Bay (1) and (Hand Collect Biota; Sandy) at the Victoria beach (1) MPA Watch areas. Regulations do not allow any take in the Laguna Beach SMR.

## **Laguna Beach State Marine Conservation Area**

For the months of January through June 2025, there were 91 surveys submitted to the MPA Watch website. Orange County MPA Watch data shows a activity incident rate of 127 total uses per mile. People observed in the MPA were primarily taking part in beach recreational activities (sandy 82.0% and rocky 6%), and tidepooling (2%). We observed 19 dogs offleash.

During this period (January through June 2025), we observed two (2) potential MPA violations (Hand Collect Biota; Rocky) at West Beach (1) and (Hand Collect Biota; Sandy) at Aliso Beach MPA Watch survey areas. Regulations allow no take in the Laguna Beach No-Take SMCA without a permit.

## **Dana Point State Marine Conservation Area**

For the months of January through June 2025, there were 49 surveys submitted to the MPA Watch website. Orange County MPA Watch data shows a activity incidence rate of 93.4 total uses per mile. Beach recreation was the most popular activity (72.0% sandy, 3% rocky), followed by offshore recreation (6%), and board sports (4%). The most popular offshore activity was surfing (13.0%).

During this period (January through June 2025) We observed five (5) potential MPA violation (1 Hand Collection of Biota; Sandy) at Strands Beach and (4 Hand Collection of Biota; Rocky) at the Dana Point MPA Watch survey areas. Regulations do not allow any taking from tidepools in the Dana Point SMCA.

## **Potential Violations**

Rate of consumptive activities observed remains relatively low in all MPAs surveyed, accounting for less than 1% (0.10) of all observations recorded. Illegal take is about 0.1% of all activities. Illegal activity is focused at the Los Trancos survey site in the Crystal Cove SMCA.

## Next Steps

MPA Watch collaborates with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) to distribute MPA Watch reports to regional managers in order to improve the management and enforcement of MPAs. MPA Watch is also looking to expand its network of partner organizations to enhance the scale and scope of MPA monitoring across California. MPA Watch makes our human use data available on our website to make it accessible to partners, resource agencies, municipalities, and other interested parties.

In late June we started the second pilot of the MPA Watch Intercept Survey program. This will continue through the end of 2025 and we will include this data in future reports. One of the hopes of MPA Watch is that volunteers and community members help spread knowledge and awareness of MPAs to the communities that surround them, inspiring marine stewardship in our populations.

## Additional Information

For additional information on MPA Watch, including survey sites, participating organizations, protocols and datasheets, media kit, and how to get involved, please visit [mpawatch.org](https://mpawatch.org). Connect with MPA Watch on social media [@MPAWatchOrg](https://twitter.com/MPAWatchOrg).

For additional information regarding MPAs and regulations specific to the various classifications of MPAs please visit [wildlife.ca.gov/MPAs](https://wildlife.ca.gov/MPAs). If you see an activity that violates MPA regulations, please call CalTip to report the violation at (888)-334-2258.

For more information about the work OC Coastkeeper does to conserve California's MPAs and other conservation projects, please visit [coastkeeper.org](https://coastkeeper.org).