

**Marine Protected Area (MPA) Watch Regional Report
Orange County
January 1, 2025 – December 31, 2025**



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 (OCCK). This report also includes MPA Watch data collected by California State Parks at Crystal Cove State Park. The goal of MPA Watch is to provide information to enhance the management and performance of Marine Protected Areas.

Executive Summary

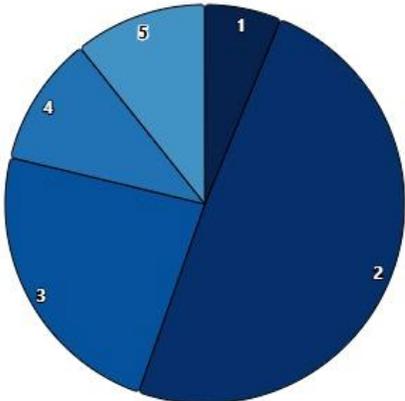
- During this period, 1,028 surveys were completed at 29 MPA survey sites by 50 volunteers.
- There were seventy five potential violations observed out of 73,293 total activities documented. 39 those potential violations were reported to enforcement agencies by Coastkeeper staff and volunteers. Thirty potential violations were observed by State Park staff and volunteers, who are considered enforcement.
- This reporting period saw an overall increase in the rate of non-consumptive uses and a slight decrease in consumptive uses vs. the long-term baseline, largely due to consumptive use decreases in the Laguna Beach SMCA and Upper Newport Bay SMCA.
- The rate of consumptive activities observed remains relatively low in all MPAs surveyed, accounting for only 0.61% of all observations recorded.

Human Use of MPAs January 1, 2025 – December 31, 2025

Overview

Top 5 MPAs by All Activity

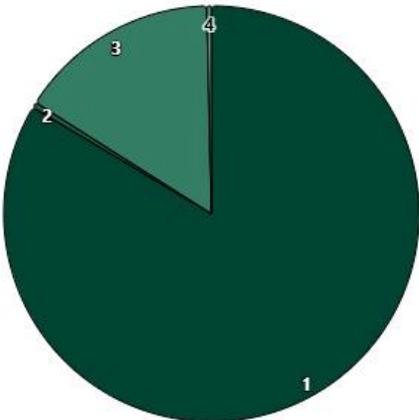
January 1, 2025 - December 31, 2025
73,293 total activity events



- 1. Upper Newport Bay SMCA
4,543 (6%)
- 2. Crystal Cove SMCA
36,049 (49%)
- 3. Laguna Beach SMR
17,122 (23%)
- 4. Laguna Beach SMCA
7,738 (11%)
- 5. Dana Point SMCA
7,841 (11%)

All MPAs Combined

January 1, 2025 - December 31, 2025
73,293 activity events



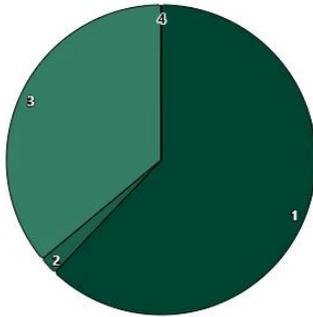
- 1. On-Shore Nonconsumptive
61,240 (84%)
- 2. On-Shore Consumptive
315 (< 1%)
- 3. Off-Shore Nonconsumptive
11,480 (16%)
- 4. Off-Shore Consumptive
258 (< 1%)



Activity by MPA

Upper Newport Bay SMCA

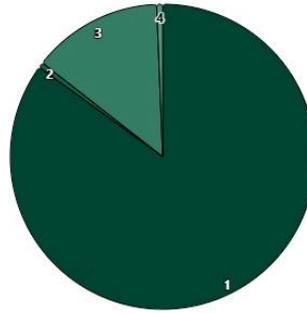
January 1, 2025 - December 31, 2025
4,543 activity events



- 1. On-Shore Nonconsumptive
2,819 (62%)
- 2. On-Shore Consumptive
86 (2%)
- 3. Off-Shore Nonconsumptive
1,638 (36%)
- 4. Off-Shore Consumptive
0 (< 1%)

Crystal Cove SMCA

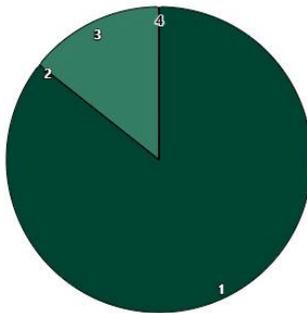
January 1, 2025 - December 31, 2025
36,049 activity events



- 1. On-Shore Nonconsumptive
30,639 (85%)
- 2. On-Shore Consumptive
196 (1%)
- 3. Off-Shore Nonconsumptive
4,984 (14%)
- 4. Off-Shore Consumptive
230 (1%)

Laguna Beach SMR

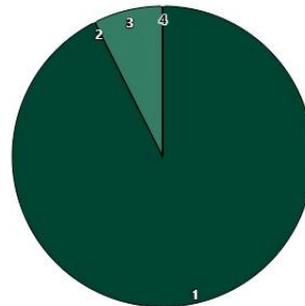
January 1, 2025 - December 31, 2025
17,122 activity events



- 1. On-Shore Nonconsumptive
14,665 (86%)
- 2. On-Shore Consumptive
2 (< 1%)
- 3. Off-Shore Nonconsumptive
2,455 (14%)
- 4. Off-Shore Consumptive
0 (< 1%)

Laguna Beach SMCA

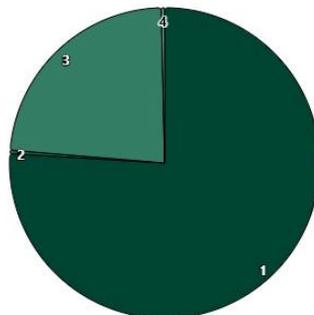
January 1, 2025 - December 31, 2025
7,738 activity events



- 1. On-Shore Nonconsumptive
7,161 (93%)
- 2. On-Shore Consumptive
2 (< 1%)
- 3. Off-Shore Nonconsumptive
575 (7%)
- 4. Off-Shore Consumptive
0 (< 1%)

Dana Point SMCA

January 1, 2025 - December 31, 2025
7,841 activity events



- 1. On-Shore Nonconsumptive
5,956 (76%)
- 2. On-Shore Consumptive
29 (< 1%)
- 3. Off-Shore Nonconsumptive
1,828 (23%)
- 4. Off-Shore Consumptive
28 (< 1%)

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.

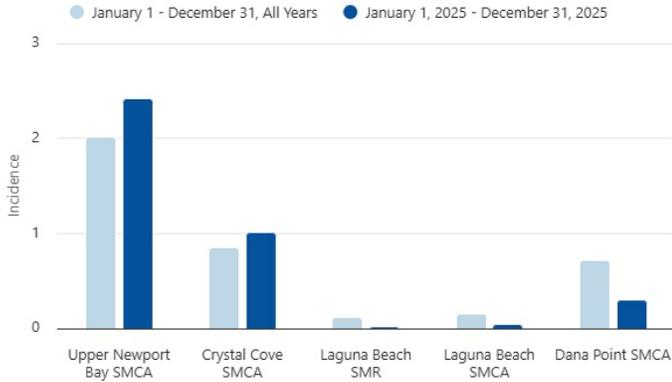
Non-Consumptive - An activity in which a natural resource is not collected.

Activity Incidence by MPA

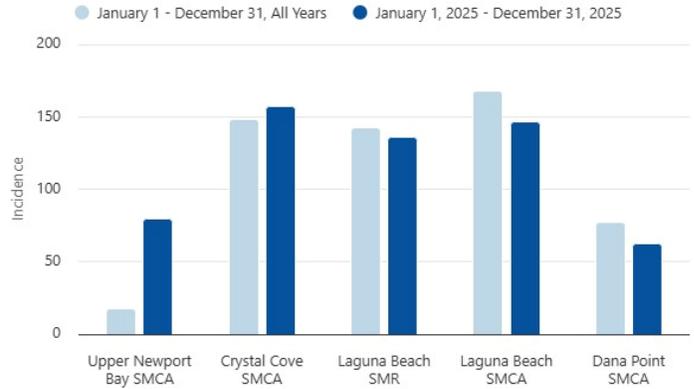
The charts below show incidence values for each MPA monitored by MPA Watch in Orange County. Incidence is calculated as the number of activities recorded divided by total survey-miles.

On-Shore

On-Shore, Consumptive

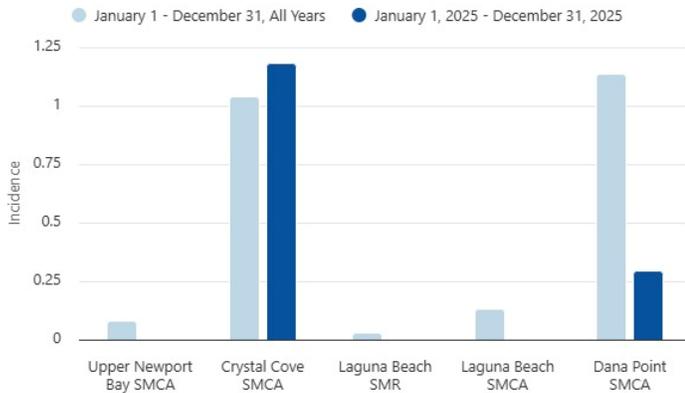


On-Shore, Non-Consumptive

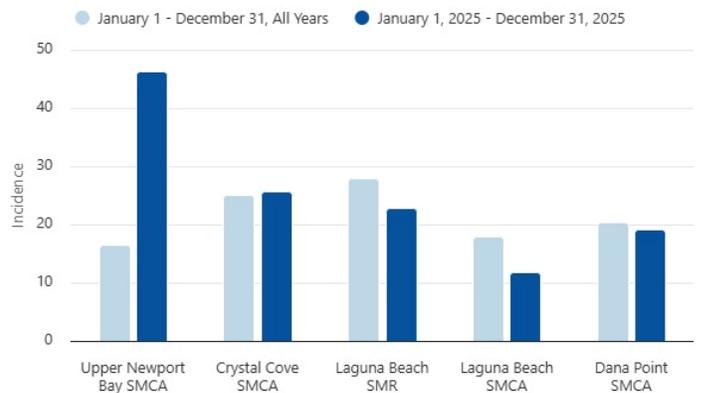


Off-Shore

Off-Shore, Consumptive



Off-Shore, Non-Consumptive



Activity Incidence by MPA

MPA	On-Shore			
	Non-Consumptive		Consumptive	
	January 1 December 31 All Years	January 1, 2025 through December 31, 2025	January 1 December 31 All Years	January 1, 2025 through December 31, 2025
Upper Newport Bay SMCA	17.3	79.4	2.0	2.4
Crystal Cove SMCA	148.4	157.0	0.9	1.0
Laguna Beach SMR	142.6	135.9	0.1	0.0
Laguna Beach SMCA	167.8	146.1	0.1	0.0
Dana Point SMCA	76.8	62.2	0.7	0.3
All MPAs Combined	119.8	126.7	0.7	0.7

MPA	Off-Shore			
	Non-Consumptive		Consumptive	
	January 1 December 31 All Years	January 1, 2025 through December 31, 2025	January 1 December 31 All Years	January 1, 2025 through December 31, 2025
Upper Newport Bay SMCA	16.4	46.1	0.1	0.0
Crystal Cove SMCA	24.9	25.5	1.0	1.2
Laguna Beach SMR	27.9	22.8	0.0	0.0
Laguna Beach SMCA	17.8	11.7	0.1	0.0
Dana Point SMCA	20.4	19.1	1.1	0.3
All MPAs Combined	23.0	23.8	0.6	0.5

MPA	Total Combined	
	January 1 December 31 All Years	January 1, 2025 through December 31, 2025
Upper Newport Bay SMCA	35.8	128.0
Crystal Cove SMCA	175.2	184.8
Laguna Beach SMR	170.7	158.7
Laguna Beach SMCA	185.8	157.9
Dana Point SMCA	99.0	81.8
All MPAs Combined	144.2	151.7

Notes on Calculating Incidence

The baseline rate for the reporting period was calculated by summing the total use count for each category during the same period from each previous year and dividing this value by the transect miles surveyed at each site. The miles surveyed were calculated by first identifying the length of each transect for all the MPA's in question and multiplying the length of the transect by the number of surveys that had been taken along that transect during the same time period. For MPA's with multiple transects, the total distance traveled for each transect within the MPA were summed together to get the total miles surveyed within that MPA.

Breakdown by MPA

Upper Newport Bay State Marine Conservation Area

For the year 2025 there were 98 surveys submitted to the MPA Watch website. Orange County MPA Watch data showed an activity incidence rate of 128 at the four survey sites in this MPA. People observed in the MPA were primarily taking part in sandy beach recreational activities (59%), using paddle-operated boats (18%), and offshore recreation (10%). During this reporting period, we observed two 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 year 2025, there were 277 surveys submitted to Orange County MPA Watch. 73 of these were done by Orange County Coastkeeper staff and volunteers, the remainder were done by California State Parks staff and volunteers at the three survey sites located in Crystal Cove State Park. This data showed an activity incidence rate of 184.8 for the six survey sites in this MPA.

People in the MPA were primarily taking part in beach recreational activities (77.0%) and tidepooling (4%). Offshore recreation activities accounted for 10% of total activities. The Crystal Cove SMCA had the highest number of consumptive activities observed at 198. This was still only 1% of the observed activities. During this reporting period, we observed 60 potential MPA violations, 30 of them in Crystal Cove State Park. A summary of Crystal Cove State Park's MPA Watch activities follows.

Crystal Cove State Park – State Parks Summary

January–December 2025

Crystal Cove State Marine Conservation Area (SMCA)

From January 1 through December 31, 2025, 204 MPA Watch surveys were conducted at the Crystal Cove State Marine Conservation Area (SMCA). These surveys provided insight into recreational use patterns, activity types, and potential violations within the protected area. Data from the full year reflects consistently high visitation, a strong dominance of non-consumptive activities, and ongoing considerations for monitoring, education, and enforcement.

Activity Overview

Recreational use at Crystal Cove SMCA during 2025 was mainly non-consumptive, accounting for 22,579 observations (96%) of all recorded activity. On-shore non-consumptive activities represented most of the use, with 19,762 observations (84%), reflecting heavy year-round visitation along sandy and rocky shorelines. The most frequently observed activity was beach recreation on sandy shorelines, totaling 17,879 observations (76%) of all activity.

Other common onshore non-consumptive activities included tidepooling (902 observations; 4%), while lower-frequency on-shore activities included animals on leash on sandy beaches (93 observations; <1%) and wildlife viewing on sandy beaches (63 observations; <1%). Off-shore activities accounted for 3,319 observations (14%) of all recorded use. The dominant offshore activity was offshore recreation, such as kayaking and paddleboarding (2,669 observations; 11%). Other offshore activities occurred at much lower levels.

Potential Violations

Despite high levels of recreational use throughout 2025, potential violations at Crystal Cove SMCA remained low during the year. Tidepooling, while categorized as a non-consumptive activity, warrants continued attention. With 902 tidepooling observations, there remains a risk of unintentional violations, such as the handling or removal of marine organisms from intertidal habitats, particularly when visitors are unfamiliar with MPA regulations.

Seasonal Trends

Seasonal patterns observed during 2025 were consistent with long-term trends at Crystal Cove SMCA. Beach recreation and tidepooling activity increased during weekends, holidays, and warmer months, particularly during spring and summer, when visitor use was highest. Favorable weather conditions extended high visitation rates into early fall. As expected, overall visitation declined during the late fall and winter months, with a gradual decrease in total activity levels.

Laguna Beach State Marine Reserve

For the year 2025, there were 408 surveys submitted to the MPA Watch website. Orange County MPA Watch data shows an activity incidence rate of 158.7 for the eleven survey sites in this MPA. People in the MPA were taking part in beach recreational activities (85.0%). Offshore activities comprised 15% of the total activities in the MPA. Scuba (2%), board sports (2%), and tidepooling (2%) are popular activities in this MPA. During this reporting period, we observed two potential MPA violations. Regulations do not allow take of any kind in the Laguna Beach SMR.

Laguna Beach State Marine Conservation Area

For the year 2025, there were 142 surveys submitted to the MPA Watch website. Orange County MPA Watch data shows an activity incidence of 157.9 at the four survey sites in the MPA.

People observed in the MPA were primarily taking part in beach recreational activities (81%). Offshore activities comprised 9% of the total activities in the MPA. Popular activities include board sports (2%), accompanying animals on-leash (2%), and tidepooling (2%).

During this reporting period, surveyors observed 2 potential MPA violations in the Laguna Beach State Marine Conservation Area, both occurring offshore. Take of onshore or offshore resources is not allowed within the Laguna Beach No-Take SMCA.

Dana Point State Marine Conservation Area

For the year 2025, there were 103 surveys submitted to the MPA Watch website. Orange County MPA Watch data shows an activity incidence rate of 81.8 for the five survey sites in this MPA.

People observed in the MPA were primarily taking part in onshore non consumptive recreational activities (76%). Popular offshore activities include surfing (11%) and other board sports (4%). Tidepooling (1%) and boating (1%) are also popular in this MPA. During this period, volunteers reported 9 potential MPA violations in the Dana Point SMCA. Regulations do not allow any taking from tidepools in the Dana Point SMCA.

Count of Potential Violations by MPA

MPA	January 1 December 31 All Years	January 1, 2025 through December 31, 2025
Upper Newport Bay SMCA	55	2
Crystal Cove SMCA	391	60
Laguna Beach SMR	119	2
Laguna Beach SMCA	99	2
Dana Point SMCA	53	9
All MPAs Combined	717	75



Potential Violations

Upper Newport Bay State Marine Conservation Area

According to volunteers there were two potential violations observed during surveys in the Upper Newport Bay SMCA during this reporting period. Both were people using a net to catch fish at North Star Beach. In this SMCA, the recreational take of finfish by hook and line is allowed from shore only in designated areas.

Crystal Cove State Marine Conservation Area

During this reporting period, we observed 60 potential MPA violations: 30 of these occurred within Crystal Cove State Park, and all were hand take of biota. This represents a large increase in observed potential violations, primarily in the Corona Del Mar survey sites in Newport Beach. This may be due to the reduction in Newport Beach docents at these sites. The recreational take of finfish by hook and line or by spearfishing is allowed in this SMCA; no take is allowed from tidepools. According to volunteers, recurring issues with the illegal take and disturbance of tide pool organisms continue to be a problem during low tides. Anecdotally, staff see a lot more violations that take place while not on a survey. During the summer, staff make multiple contacts with people to help educate them on the tidepool rules.

Laguna Beach State Marine Reserve

Volunteers observed two potential violations involving hand collection of biota in the Laguna Beach State Marine Reserve. No take is allowed from the Laguna Beach SMR.

Laguna Beach State Marine Conservation Area

During this reporting period, we observed two potential MPA violations in the Laguna Beach No Take SMCA. Both were offshore fishing. Taking of onshore or offshore resources is not allowed within the Laguna Beach No-Take SMCA.

Dana Point State Marine Conservation Area

During this period, volunteers observed nine potential MPA violations in the Dana Point SMCA. Eight were hand collection of biota, and one was hook and line fishing in tidepools. Regulations do not allow any taking from tidepools in the Dana Point SMCA.

Next Steps

Beginning in June, OC Coastkeeper started the second pilot project for an Intercept Survey developed by the MPA Watch Intercept Survey Working Group (a subcommittee of the MPA Watch managers) and the UC Davis Center for Community and Citizen Science. This survey is designed to enhance and deepen our understanding of how MPAs are being used. The Intercept Survey is designed to go beyond the Core Protocol to identify generally who the users of the sites are, what is their purpose for visiting the sites, the frequency of these visits at each site and their knowledge/awareness of MPA rules and regulations. In 2025 the pilot project was expanded out to other MPA Watch programs throughout the state. OC Coastkeeper will continue with the protocol as determined by the Working Group.

MPA Watch will continue to collaborate with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) along with local agencies, NGOs and the public to improve the management and enforcement of MPAs statewide. From January through December 2025, Orange County Coastkeeper trained 37 new MPA Watch volunteers. Orange County MPA Watch partners with local organizations including the Ocean Institute to enhance the scale and scope of our MPA monitoring. MPA Watch makes our human use data available on our website so it is accessible to partners, resource agencies, municipalities, and other interested parties. One of the goals of MPA Watch is that our volunteers 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. 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. If you see an activity that violates MPA regulations, please call CalTip to report the violation at (888)-334-2258.

For questions about this report contact Ray Hiemstra at ray@coastkeeper.org. For more information about the work OC Coastkeeper does to conserve California's MPAs and other conservation projects, please visit coastkeeper.org.

