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Wednesday, February 8, 2023
1:30 – 2:45 PM
In person: ENVS Garden (by Washington Square Hall)
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Examining the Role of MPA Signage in Helping Provide Protection for Marine Environments of Monterey Bay MPAs

Abstract: Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) provide protection for an astonishing diversity of marine life and support the integrity and functionality of marine ecosystems. MPA signage has been recognized as the primary means of informing visitors of MPA presence, purpose, and regulations. This research examined the role of signage in helping provide protection for five MPAs of the Monterey Bay region. Observational methods were utilized to evaluate MPA signage coverage at fifty-five entrance points and visitor engagement with eight interpretive MPA signs at main entrances. The percentage of visitors who stopped to view the signage (attracting power) and the amount of time visitors spent viewing the signage (holding time) were documented. A signage quality rating system, inspired by Martin et al. (2015), was developed to evaluate the signage quality of fifteen interpretive signs in the categories of information, graphics, and location. Results from this research revealed low attracting power of interpretive signage, as just 10.6% of the 2,869 visitors stopped to view the signage as they entered beaches. Holding time was also low with a median viewing time of ten seconds. Forty-seven percent of signage was classified as adequate, followed by good (33%), inadequate (13%), and outstanding (7%). A Spearman's rank analysis revealed signage location was strongly correlated with attracting power ($p < 0.001$) ($R_s = 0.613$). Just over half (54.5%) of the entrance points contained some form of MPA signage, including interpretive signs, no fishing/collecting signs, and "you are here" signs. Overall, this research concludes that signage may not be providing sufficient protection for marine environments. MPA managers should closely consider the locations selected for future signage and reevaluate the current locations and conditions of signage. Due to the low visitor engagement with signage, increasing on-site enforcement and educational outreach efforts may be needed to achieve sufficient protection for marine environments of the Monterey Bay region.

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