Citizen Science and MPA Monitoring

The opportunity:

We know that citizen science can provide the rigorous scientific information needed to monitor the statewide network of marine protected areas, but successfully engaging citizen scientists and programs is often challenging. In California's Central Coast we have an opportunity to expand and deepen the links between citizen science and MPA monitoring. As the Central Coast regional MPA network turns the page from baseline to continued monitoring, we are taking stock of the range of citizen science programs operating throughout this region, seeking new ways we can work together, and developing a framework to guide ongoing collaboration.

A new initiative:

With the California Citizen Science Initiative we are using research and engagement to tackle both the challenges and the opportunities for citizen science to play a role in MPA monitoring. What makes citizen science data credible in the eyes of scientists and MPA managers? How can strong links to management add value to citizen science programs? What can we learn from successes and failures in other parts of the world? When is citizen science a cost-effective approach to monitoring? We will draw from literature, and importantly, the experiences of practitioners who have played various roles in citizen science, and we'll share and discuss our progress on our blog: Facing West (link below).

Participating in the initiative:

We're looking forward to working with Central Coast citizen science groups to understand both current and potential connections to management, drawing out lessons learned and identifying opportunities. We will start by collecting insights through interviews, focus groups, and surveys and continue through a regional workshop and discussions on the blog. We want to hear about your experiences with citizen science, and your ideas about how it can, could, or should play a role in MPA monitoring.

What will we—collectively—get out of this initiative?

Through all of these collaborative activities we aim to develop a framework that will guide and support productive engagement between citizen science and MPA monitoring in the California Central Coast and beyond. We also hope to promote a lasting sense of community among coastal and ocean citizen science groups, while growing their presence within the broader community of MPA monitoring scientists, stakeholders, and managers.

About the California Ocean Science Trust

Our mission is to advance a constructive role for science in decision-making by promoting collaboration and mutual understanding among scientists, citizens, managers, and policymakers working towards sustained, healthy, and productive coastal and ocean ecosystems. Through our MPA Monitoring Enterprise program we lead the development and implementation of impartial, scientifically rigorous, and cost-effective MPA monitoring.

Questions or Additional Comments? Contact Us:

Follow the initiative and contribute your views:
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mpa MONITORING ENTERPRISE

CALIFORNIA OST Ocean Science Trust

We are committed to a respectful and mutually productive engagement between citizen science groups and Ocean Science Trust. We respect the autonomy and vision of the people and organizations that participate with us and want to engage through learning and trust. As part of that goal, we have planned for some common considerations in social scientific research.

What is the purpose of the California Citizen Science Initiative, and what activities are involved?

The purpose of the CCSI is to collaborate with researchers, citizen science programs, and other partners to expand and deepen the links between citizen science and marine protected area monitoring. This is also an opportunity to answer some broader questions about productive ways of linking citizen science and natural resource management.

We are talking with citizen science leaders and holding focus groups about citizen science projects, MPA monitoring, and the broader network of citizen science activity along the coast. Participation in all activities is optional and intended to both contribute to our investigation and be useful for the citizen science groups. Participants can choose to not answer some questions and add additional questions as necessary.

How is data recorded?

Information from phone calls and informal conversations will be recorded in project files, a digital version of a research journal. These files are accessible only to CCSI staff members. Focus groups will be recorded by digital tape recorder if everyone in the focus group verbally agrees at the beginning of the meeting. Audio files will be stored on CCSI staff computers for analysis. All data will be maintained for no longer than 5 years after the end of the project, and then deleted.

What happens to the data?

In all communications of results and project progress, we will identify individual answers by the organization to which they refer (e.g. "ReefCheck participants…"). All summarized data and results will be available to participants and funders through the blog Facing West (www.oceanspaces.org/blog). Specific data for each program will be available upon request by leaders in that program. Program leaders will have opportunity for input on profiles of individual programs for blog posts or other public forums. The final outcome of the research will be a framework document, jointly negotiated during a final workshop. This document will be publicly available.

What are the risks and expectations of participation?

Each optional activity associated with the project demands a small investment of time for phone calls, focus groups, and the final workshop. Risks are otherwise minimal and largely associated with increased visibility of some groups: increased interest in volunteering, data requests by new data users, or potential critiques from the general public. Since we also hope to build a social network around active coastal citizen science, hopefully these challenges can be ameliorated by help and advice from others in the network, should they arise.