Monterey Bay is home to one of the most productive coastal ecosystems in the world. State and federal marine protected areas, or MPAs, are areas set aside along the coast to help protect special places underwater, just as our national parks and wilderness areas protect special places on land. The Central Coast of California is home to many state MPAs and the federally protected Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary (MBNMS). Together with the Bureau of Land Management’s California Coastal National Monument, which includes all offshore rock outcroppings, these MPAs protect wildlife and restore ecosystems, ensuring the ocean’s bounty and beauty remain for future generations to enjoy.

Things to Know Before You Go:
- Marine protected areas (MPAs) are great places to enjoy recreational activities such as wildlife watching, swimming, wading, boating, kayaking, diving, surfing, and more!
- A sport fishing license is required for any resident or nonresident 16 years of age or older for all fishing and collecting, except for fishing from some public piers or jetties in ocean waters. Fishing report cards may be required for some species.
- It is illegal to fly a drone in many coastal areas of Santa Cruz and Monterey Counties, including Big Sur.
- Harassing, disturbing, or feeding wildlife is harmful to the animals, and often illegal.
- Tidpools are sensitive habitats. Collecting, trampling, or even handling tidepool animals and plants can cause damage. Make sure to practice good tidepool etiquette.
- The ocean is powerful and can be dangerous even for strong swimmers. Know your limits and practice ocean safety by always checking local surf conditions before activities near or on the water, and never turn your back to the ocean.
- If traveling along the beautiful Big Sur coast, remember that there are very few restroom stops, so plan ahead! Please pack out your trash and keep the picturesque Big Sur coastline beautiful.

Help Protect Monterey Bay’s Wildlife
Call The Marine Mammal Center at 415-289-SEAL (7325) if you see a marine mammal in distress. If you observe illegal activities affecting wildlife, call 1-888-334-CalTIP (2258) or text TIP411.
Año Nuevo State Park
Observe massive elephant seals from a safe distance.
Call 800-444-4445 for guided elephant seal walks.

Natural Bridges State Beach
See tidepools brimming with marine life. Call 831-423-4609 for information on tidepool explorations, including docent led tours.

Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary Exploration Center
Located at the base of the Santa Cruz Wharf. Take advantage of free admission and enjoy lots of activities for the whole family!

Santa Cruz Wharf
Take the family fishing at the longest wharf in California. Remember to pack out your fishing line and tackle to keep wildlife safe.

Elkhorn Slough National Estuarine Research Reserve
Walk the nature trails to observe rare birds and endangered sea otters from a respectful distance. Call 831-728-2822 for information on guided tours of Elkhorn Slough.

Monterey Bay Coastal Recreation Trail
Walk your dog on-leash or ride a bike along historic Cannery Row. The Trail stretches 18 miles from Castroville to Pacific Grove and is a great way to see the coast.

Lovers Point Park
Have a picnic on the beach or dip your toes in the chilly Pacific Ocean. Don't forget to pack out your trash when you leave the beach!

Asilomar State Beach
Explore the colorful tidepools. Remember to practice ocean safety by always checking local surf conditions before activities near or on the water, and never turn your back to the ocean.

Point Lobos State Natural Reserve
Hike the many trails and see diverse bird and plant life along the rugged coastline. Call 831-624-4909 for information on docent-led tours.

Point Sur State Historic Park
Step into the past on a walking tour of a historic lighthouse. Tours are available Wednesdays, Saturdays, and Sundays in June, July, and August. Call 831-625-4419 for information on guided tours.

Help Protect the Coast while you explore Monterey Bay and Beyond