Pacific Seabird Group

DEDICATED TO THE STUDY AND CONSERVATION OF PACIFIC SEABIRDS AND THEIR ENVIRONMENT

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October 22, 2010

Ed Bowels
Fish Division Administrator
Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
3406 Cherry Ave NE
Salem, Oregon 97303

Re: Designation of Marine Reserves and Marine Protected Areas in Oregon

Dear Mr. Bowels:

On behalf of the Pacific Seabird Group (PSG), we strongly support Oregon's use of Marine Reserves and Marine Protected Areas as tools to help protect, sustain, and restore nearshore ecosystems. PSG is an international, non-profit organization that was founded in 1972 to promote the knowledge, study, and conservation of Pacific seabirds. It has a membership drawn from the entire Pacific basin, including Canada, Mexico, Russia, Japan, China, Australia, New Zealand, and the USA. PSG's members include biologists and scientists who have research interests in Pacific seabirds, government officials who manage seabird refuges and populations, and individuals who are interested in marine conservation.

Oregon's approach compliments efforts by Washington and California to manage the California Current in an ecosystem-based manner as expressed in the West Coast Governors' Agreement on Ocean Health. This work is also consistent with the new "National Policy for Stewardship of Our Oceans, Coasts and Great Lakes" which encourages a link between science and management. Successful conservation efforts should include all relevant scientific disciplines to design a system of Marine Reserves and Marine Protected Areas. Seabirds within the California Current System are an integral component of that ecosystem and should be included in any marine biodiversity conservation strategy. In fact, there are over 66 seabird colonies within the three ecological areas that are currently under consideration.

We urge your department to consider the following in its deliberations:

- Support research on forage species ecology and biology and consider banning or restricting forage fisheries within Marine Protected Areas. We have limited information on both seabird foraging distances and the prey species upon which they depend.
- Establish no-disturbance areas (no watercraft) around sensitive seabird colonies during nesting season (500-1000 feet, depending upon the site)
- Protect endangered, threatened and declining seabirds such as Marbled Murrelets, Tufted Puffins, Common Murres, and Black Oystercatchers.
- Protect shoreline areas to conserve sensitive species such as Black Oystercatchers and Harlequin Ducks that forage in the subtidal, intertidal zone and on nearshore rocks.
- Manage activities on public lands adjacent to seabird colonies to deter scavengers and minimize disturbance (e.g., airplane fly-overs, fireworks, light pollution, etc.).

We acknowledge that the Marine Reserve Community Teams face significant challenges in developing a system of marine reserves. We are confident that your approach is sound and can conserve marine habitats and biodiversity, as well as provide a framework for scientific research.

We enclose Point Reyes Bird Observatory's "Wildlife Hotspots in the California Current System" which identifies marine hot spots in the California Current System. The analysis reveals gaps in protection in the coastal area between Cape Mendocino, California, to Heceta Head, Oregon. For more information regarding these conservation strategies and the project visit www.prbo.org.

Finally, we draw your attention to the Marine Important Bird Area (IBA) from Florence to Waldport for Marbled Murrelets, as well as the other Oregon IBAs, specifically Coos Bay/Cape Arago. IBAs have also been designated at Heceta Perpetua and Stonewall Banks and the Salmon and Siletz River estuaries. Please contact us if we can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

Craig S. Harrison
Vice Chair for Conservation

Enclosure

PRBO Conservation Science

Technical Brief

Release:
10 March 2010
www.prbo.org

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Wildlife hotspots in the California Current System

PRBO Conservation Science (PRBO) conducted analyses to identify marine hotspots and inform Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) in the California Current System (CCS). Results indicated that hotspots are well aligned with currently protected areas (e.g., National Marine Sanctuaries) and highlighted a major conservation gap in Northern California/Southern Oregon (from Cape Mendocino to Heceta Bank).

PRBO developed habitat associations for 16 species of seabirds using information from at-sea surveys carried out over a 12-year period (1997-2008). Surveys extended from north of Vancouver Island to the US/Mexico border and out to 600 km from the coast. We related seabird abundance to bathymetric variables, such as proximity of the continental shelf and slope, and satellite oceanographic data including sea-surface temperature, sea-level height and chlorophyll-a. Single-species predictive models were developed using a hierarchical, multivariate statistical procedure (bagged decision trees).

Bathymetric variables were often important predictive variables. Oceanographic variables derived from remotely sensed data were generally less important. Model predictions were applied to the entire California Current for 4 months (February, May, July, October) as a proxy for seasons in each of 11 years. Single-species predictions were combined using three criteria (abundance, importance, and persistence) to identify potential hotspots of multi-species seabird aggregation.

Hotspots occurred over the shelf of the continental U.S. and southern Canada and aligned well with current National Marine Sanctuary boundaries. Our analysis also revealed gaps in protection, especially in broader areas around the Channel Islands beyond the existing Sanctuary and in the coastal area between Cape Mendocino (Northern California) to Heceta Head (Southern Oregon), where there are currently no marine reserves.

Main Points

- Bathymetric variables were more important than oceanographic variables in predicting hotspots.
- Current protected areas include some of the most important hotspots along the West Coast of the U.S.
- There is a conservation gap between Cape Mendocino in northern California and Heceta Bank in southern Oregon that may benefit from additional protection.

Report Citation

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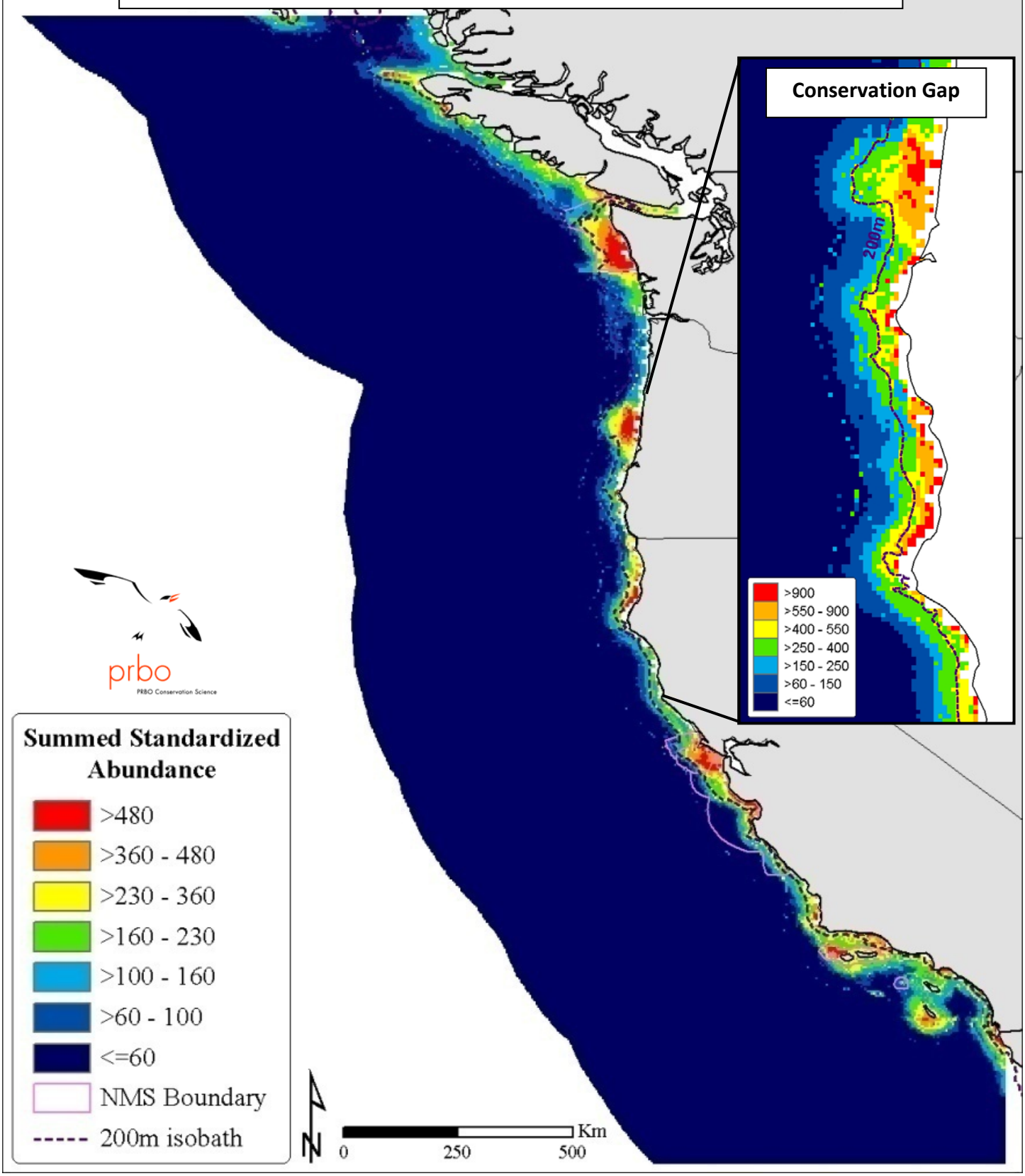
Wildlife hotpots in the California Current System

(Map shows areas of high abundance of seabirds during spring)



For more information regarding PRBO Conservation Science and this project visit www.prbo.org