

# MARINE CONSERVATION INSTITUTE

ANNUAL REPORT 2019





MARINE  
CONSERVATION  
INSTITUTE

## MISSION STATEMENT

**Marine Conservation Institute is dedicated to securing permanent, strong protection for the oceans' most important places - for us and future generations.**

Photo Credit: Robert Schwemmer

# PRESIDENT'S LETTER

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For over two decades Marine Conservation Institute has been a leader in conserving marine biodiversity. I use the term biodiversity because it is the only phrase that captures the meaning of what we truly need to protect: diversity of genes, species and ecosystems. Humans are reliant on biodiversity for our health and well-being. We know that the most effective way to conserve biodiversity is to allow marine life to thrive in places where they are not killed or threatened by human activities. Effectively protected places allow for recovery when bad things happen (e.g., oil spills). They provide resilience and diversity in the face of a changing climate, and they provide a reservoir of options for our future.

Protecting places is also more straight-forward and far more cost-effective than re-engineering a solution that nature has already provided. If we can give nature the space it needs, dolphins and whales, sharks and seabirds can all rebound. It is only up to us to provide nature the quality space they need.

Our commitment is to protect critical habitats. We do so because we love, value and respect our families, friends, communities, and co-inhabitants of spaceship Earth. We understand the world is richer and better for the fishes and corals that bring us joy and the many other organisms that provide us a life-giving planet. Living oceans provide water, food, oxygen and climate. With your help we fight to protect them.

Our goal is to encourage strong protection for the places that deliver biodiversity conservation. By recognizing the success of these special Blue Parks, we hope to inspire others around the world to protect the places they care about. Marine scientists credibly argue that at least 30% of the ocean's most important places need to be protected. Our Atlas of Marine Protection tracks the world's commitments to reaching this goal.

I am pleased to update you on our progress in 2019; we recognized six new outstanding marine protected areas as Blue Parks. The Blue Park network now includes 16 sites covering over 644,404 mi<sup>2</sup> (an area approximately the size of Alaska). But this is just the start. We need much more of the ocean protected if we are going to see humanity through this trying time. We continue to advocate for protections from California to the High Seas, to make sure they are enduring and effective.

We ask for your support and hope you will help us spread the word about our work, trumpet the need for a healthy ocean to our leaders, and get out and enjoy our natural world.



President Lance Morgan, PhD



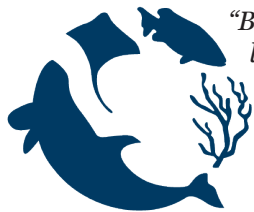
# BLUE PARKS

## From Global Ocean Refuges to Blue Parks

To better communicate our awards which recognize outstanding protected areas that effectively safeguard marine biodiversity, we renamed them the Blue Park Awards. We launched the new name in 2019 and received overwhelmingly positive feedback from our partners as well as the award recipients. The new name does not change the standard for conservation – Blue Parks conserve important areas for biodiversity, enforce the rules and have the right management to succeed.

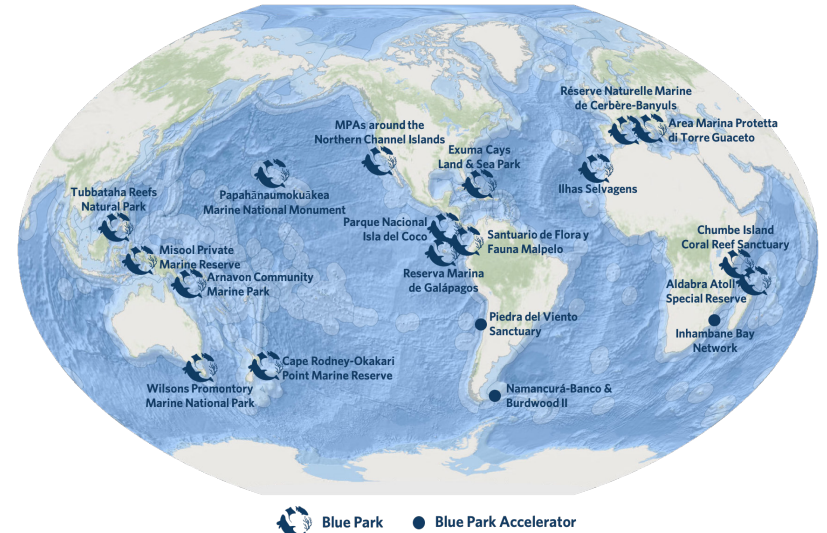


President Lance Morgan (right) presenting the Aldabra Atoll Blue Park Award to the Seychelles Minister of the Environment, Wallace Cosgrov (center), and Project Officer, Seychelles Islands Foundation, Jeremy Raguain (left), at the Our Ocean Conference in Oslo, Norway.



*“Blue Parks are the antidotes to the barrage of threats to life in our oceans. MPAs may not be able to stop climate change impacts immediately, but strongly protected areas in the right places today will enable ecosystems to recover and build resilience for the future.”*

– Dr. Sarah Hameed, Blue Parks Director



## Six New Blue Parks Awarded in 2019

Six outstanding marine protected areas earned Blue Park Awards in 2019 by meeting the highest science-based standards for protection. The Blue Park network now includes 16 sites covering 644,404 mi<sup>2</sup> of ocean. The Blue Park Award recognizes outstanding efforts by nations, non-profits, MPA managers, and local stakeholders that protect marine ecosystems now and into the future. After rigorous review, we welcomed the following Blue Parks to the network:

- Aldabra Atoll Special Reserve, Seychelles
- Area Marina Protetta di Torre Guaceto, Italy
- Arnavon Community Marine Park, Solomon Islands
- Marine Protected Areas around the Northern Channel Islands, USA
- Parque Nacional Isla del Coco, Costa Rica
- Reserva Marina de Galápagos, Ecuador

A growing number of countries and conservation organizations are encouraging new protected areas to reach the world's Sustainable Development Goal of protecting 10% of our oceans by 2020 and the proposed goal of at least 30% by 2030. Marine Conservation Institute is working to ensure as many MPAs as possible meet the conservation standards of Blue Parks. Blue Parks are securing lasting protection for marine biodiversity, and their recognition is inspiring others to work towards the Blue Park standard.

## “Blue Sparks”: The Blue Park Accelerator Program

In addition to awarding Blue Parks, we partner with NGOs, community leaders and governments through the Blue Park Accelerator program to help ensure that their new MPAs meet Blue Parks science-based standards for conservation effectiveness.

In our most recent Accelerator project, we are working collaboratively with Bitonga Divers, Ocean Revolution, and the Inhambane Bay communities to strengthen their conservation management efforts. Inhambane Bay Community Conservation Network (IBCCN), a small-scale network of nine no-take MPAs, protects critically important seagrass and mangrove habitats throughout Inhambane Bay, Mozambique. Seagrass meadows and mangrove forests provide important nursery grounds for fish, support an incredible diversity of invertebrates and sea birds, sequester atmospheric carbon faster than any terrestrial ecosystem and buffer coastlines from storms. The coastal communities of Inhambane province in Mozambique are leading an effort to preserve and protect the vital mangrove and seagrass habitats they have lived alongside for decades. The communities of Inhambane Bay are rediscovering the wisdom of traditional conservation practices called “ocean rules” – community elders selected marine areas that were to be closed to fishing.

Each area in the network is managed by the local community. Non-profit organizations facilitate management planning and federal agencies assist with enforcement. Each conservation area, known as “sidika,” provides breeding, nursery and foraging spaces for species caught in artisanal fisheries as well as endangered reef fish, sea turtles, dugongs and dolphins. The community is fostering stewardship and recommitting to traditional ocean rules. The IBCCN creates a new model for conservation in Mozambique and other communities in developing countries.

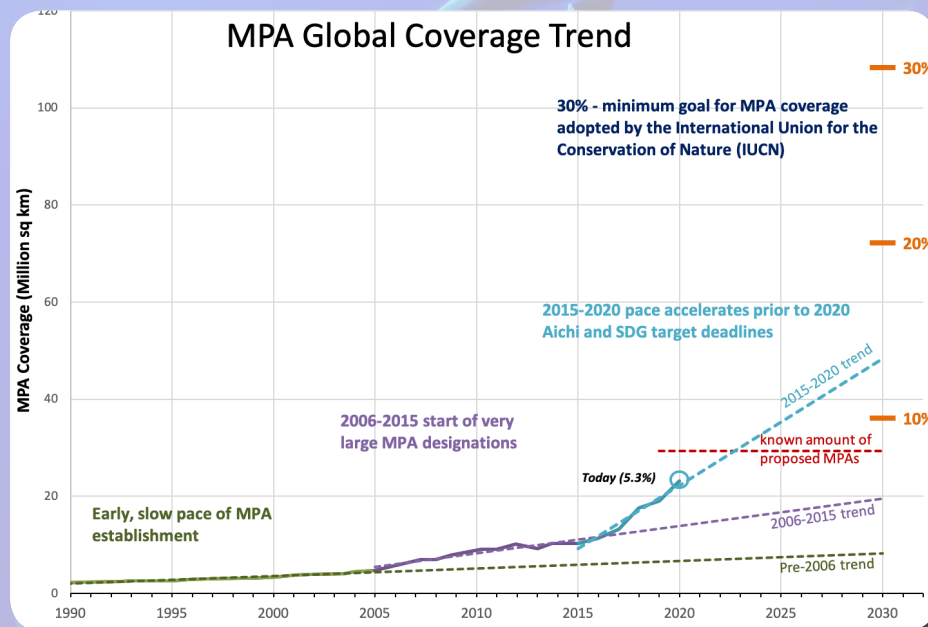
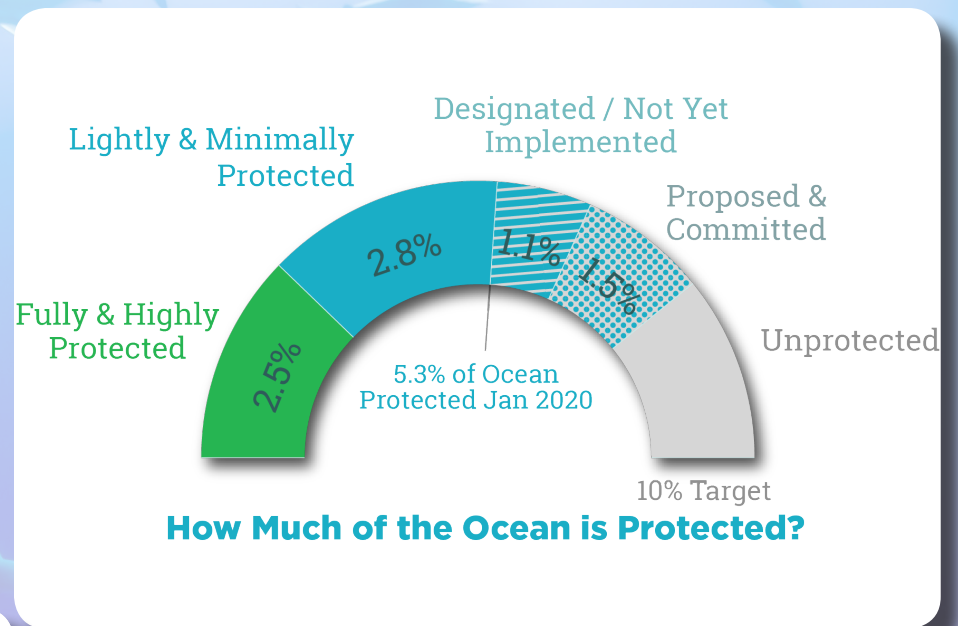
One of our other Accelerator projects is a proposed MPA on the central coast of Chile. Our partners at Rompientes Foundation are engaged with stakeholders and government representatives to support the conservation of rocky temperate coastline. We continue to help local MPA efforts – Blue Sparks – where we can encourage stewardship of our oceans. This is a growing network of projects that is made possible by your support.



# ATLAS OF MARINE PROTECTION

MPAtlas.org is a leading source for global MPA information. Over the last seven years our team has diligently assessed MPA conservation efforts as global MPA coverage has more than tripled. Our team critically evaluates protection levels and the implementation status of MPAs, publishing reports on the status of MPAs as nations strive to meet conservation goals, such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals and Aichi Target 11 under the Convention on Biological Diversity. The Atlas provides key information for the conservation community to use when organizing strategies and communicating ocean issues.

Our platform provides near-real time updates on MPA announcements, posting details from international conferences. By applying best conservation criteria as outlined by emerging assessment tools, the Atlas highlights and reports on highly and fully protected marine areas that best protect the marine environment and provide desired conservation benefits.



Expansion of MPA coverage. At current rate we will reach ~15% by 2030. To meet the 30% target by 2030 the world needs to dramatically accelerate MPA growth.

## Towards 2020 Conservation Commitments & Beyond

As countries race to meet 10% marine protection goals by 2020, the Atlas of Marine Protection stands ready to critically interpret “on the water” protection and incentivize countries to create meaningful and effective designations.

We are increasingly engaged with the MPA science and research community, linking MPA protection classifications and metrics of management effectiveness with the Atlas and making it a more robust resource for all. Our goal is to push the conservation community and governments at all levels to highly protect at least 30% of the global ocean by 2030. The Atlas will be there in 2020 and through the next decade to track national and regional progress every step of the way.

## Defining Protection Levels

The Atlas of Marine Protection team is leading and facilitating MPA science and policy expert working groups to standardize shared definitions for protection levels. As important negotiations are underway about setting post-2020 global conservation targets with the Convention on Biological Diversity, our work is aimed at standardizing a new framework with greater clarity regarding the conservation outcomes and ecological benefits that result from different levels of protection. The MPA Guide partners are influencing government agencies to adopt these new standards for assessing and reporting on MPA coverage. The data collected and analyzed by the MPAtlas team is critical to this effort and we are conducting pilot assessments using the MPA Guide framework. This work is critical to ensuring that conservation targets are met with effective biodiversity outcomes.



MPAtlas team members, Beth Pike (left) and Russ Moffit (right) join colleagues for an MPA Guide Working Group meeting in Cambridge, UK.



Photo credit: Shaun Wolfe / Coral Reef Image

## Global and Country MPA Dashboards

The Atlas website provides maps and information dashboards showing our independent analysis of reported global and country-level MPA coverage to better understand the amount of protection that is implemented “on the water.” The Atlas is used by ~20,000 members of the conservation community each quarter.

## Conservation Priority Mapping

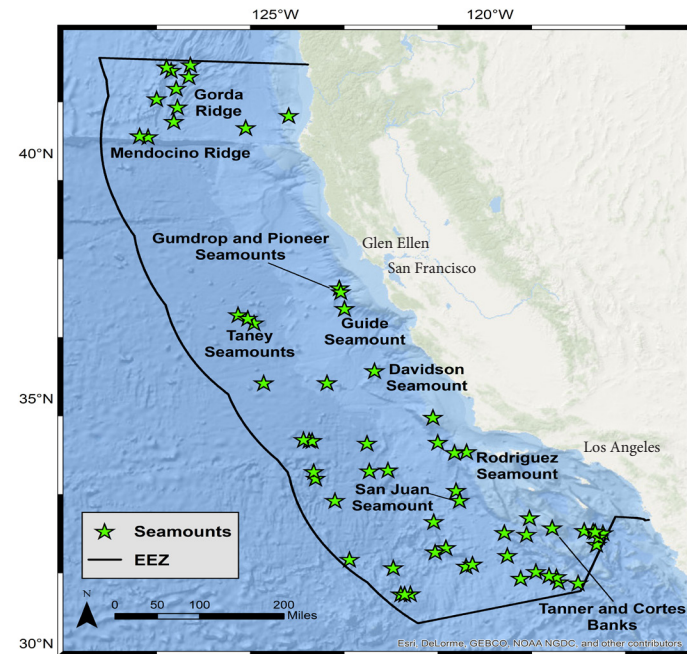
During 2019, our team collaborated separately with the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, and National Geographic Society Pristine Seas to provide protected area analyses for conservation priority mapping exercises.



# CALIFORNIA SEAMOUNTS BECOME A HOPE SPOT

In May, Marine Conservation Institute and Mission Blue officially launched the California Seamount Hope Spot with an event at the Exploratorium in San Francisco. Seamounts are massive underwater volcanoes that support incredibly high levels of biodiversity. They often house extensive sea-floor ecosystems teeming with organisms not found anywhere else, and also support a wide array of water-column life above them, including fish, sea turtles, seabirds, and marine mammals. Scientists estimate that over 60 seamounts exist in California waters, with only one (Davidson Seamount) currently enjoying any protection from harmful human activities.

Improving protection for the California seamounts is one of the primary goals of the California Seamount Coalition, a collaboration of fifteen ocean conservation groups. These fragile deep-sea ecosystems are at increasing risk from destructive fisheries, industrialization from oil and gas development, future mineral mining, and climate change. The coalition is building awareness of these underwater treasures and working to secure their permanent protection.



Hope Spots recognize special ocean places to support local efforts to improve public awareness, conservation, and stewardship. The California seamounts were declared a Hope Spot due to their biological richness, importance for pelagic fishes, seabirds, and marine mammals, and the urgent need for better protection from rising threats. The California Seamounts Coalition is building public support for their long-term protection.

*“Just as we protect the special mountain environments of the Rockies and the Sierras... Just as we have created parks to protect Yosemite Valley, and Giant Redwoods, we must act to protect the great mountains underneath the surface of the ocean and the coral forests that live on them.” -President Dr. Lance Morgan*

Find out more about the Coalition at [CaliforniaSeamounts.org](http://CaliforniaSeamounts.org)



## PACIFIC SEAMOUNT EXPEDITION

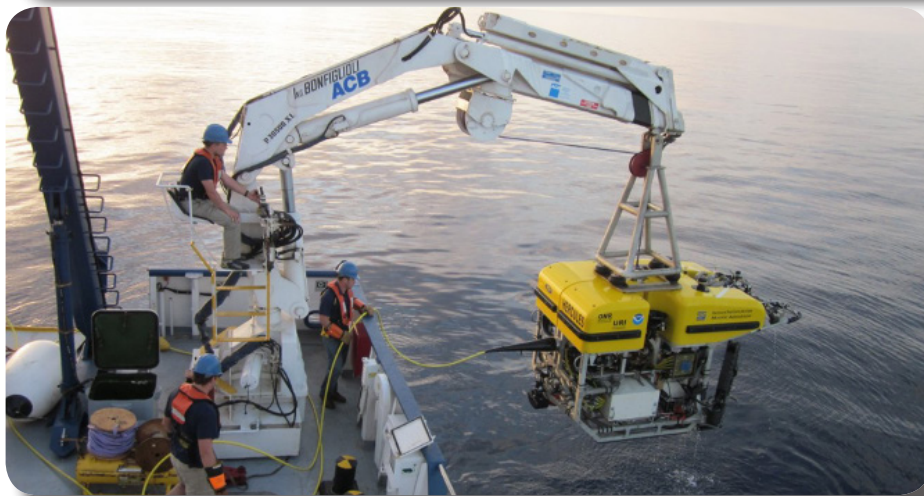
In August, staff scientist Samuel Georgian participated in the E/V Nautilus expedition that explored the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument. The monument's 490,343 mi<sup>2</sup> provides important protections for a wide array of marine life including corals, sponges, fish, sea turtles, seabirds, and marine mammals. However, much of the deep-sea habitats in the monument are unexplored.

*"Surveying the seamounts dotting the monuments landscape was the purest form of exploration I've encountered as a scientist...casting off into the dark unknown and repeatedly finding it to be teeming with an abundance of wondrous and exotic lifeforms."*

*-Dr. Samuel Georgian, Marine Biographer*



A large Cirroteuthid octopus swims in the water column at a depth of 5,300 feet off the coast of Baker Island. Photo courtesy of Ocean Exploration Trust.



The remotely operated vehicle (ROV) Hercules is launched into the depths off the deck of the E/V Nautilus. Photo courtesy of Ocean Exploration Trust.

On this expedition, it was the incredible biology that stole the show. Highlights included one of the largest deep-water stony coral colonies (*Madrepora oculata*) ever observed in the region. Scientists also observed massive bamboo corals, bright yellow plexaurid corals, pink precious corals, and black corals ranging from pure white to brown (black corals have black skeletons but can be covered by tissue in almost every color!). The coral habitats explored were also found to contain an astonishing diversity of associated organisms including a massive Deepstaria jellyfish, a possibly new species of Cirroteuthid octopus, and a wide array of sponges, brittle stars, sea stars, sea spiders, crabs, and fish.

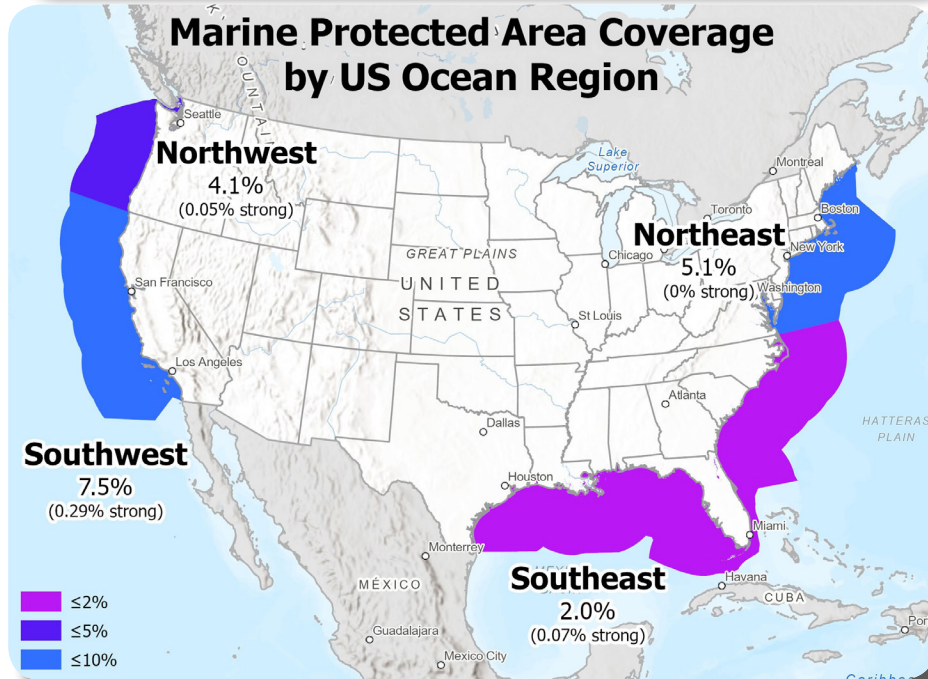
# U.S. MARINE PROTECTION ADVOCACY AND POLICY



Our work over the last few years has focused on preserving the marine conservation gains of the past two decades, a time when both Republican and Democratic leaders created vast new marine national monuments and protected other ocean habitats. Recently, Federal courts resoundingly supported President Obama's creation of the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument in the Atlantic Ocean which had been challenged by fishing interests. This area has been a conservation priority since the late 1990s when Marine Conservation Institute identified the area's need for greater protection.

We continued our defense of a no fishing Rose Atoll Marine National Monument free from fishing interests that want access to this pristine reef and surrounding waters. As part of our defense, we authored an extensive report detailing how Rose Atoll is an integral part of the ecology of the American Samoan archipelago and showing how monument waters are important for marine life from sea turtles to marine mammals and seabirds throughout the region. We documented the economic value of the Rose Atoll monument to tourism and reefs in the rest of American Samoa proving that the conservation value is much larger than the value for any potential fisheries.

We also worked for much greater protection of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. Marine life and coral reefs of the sanctuary are declining as ocean warming, overuse, overfishing, and coral disease take their toll. We supported the strongest conservation options in the Sanctuary Restoration Blueprint including adding a special area called Pulley Ridge to the sanctuary. Our 2014 *Gulf Gems* report identified the southern end of Pulley Ridge, a rare reef in US waters, as worthy of the highest level of protection.



Regional MPA coverage of marine waters in the continental United States is below 10%. More work is needed to reach this widely accepted target. Source: SeaStates.US

# CONSERVING THE HIGH SEAS AND DEEP-SEA

Marine Conservation Institute maintains an active role in efforts to conserve marine life on the high seas, the largest ecosystem on the planet. We continue working hard to grow support for a policy that encourages nations to commit to strongly protecting at least 30% of each representative area of the ocean by 2030. Progress is being made, but not nearly fast enough in light of continued overfishing, climate change, pollution, marine debris and emerging threats from deep seabed mining. The task is enormous and we have joined forces with coalitions of conservation groups to address these challenges.

## High Seas Alliance

Without an international treaty we are unable to create effective MPAs in two-thirds of the ocean. The global MPA target of 30% is nearly impossible without a mechanism in place for the areas beyond national jurisdiction, or several critical international agreements that will determine the future of marine protected areas around the world. We brought our perspective to the UN negotiations in August in New York City arguing for the need to highly protect areas that are important to biodiversity. Negotiations will finalize in the next year and we will continue advocating for marine biodiversity.

## Deep Sea Conservation Coalition

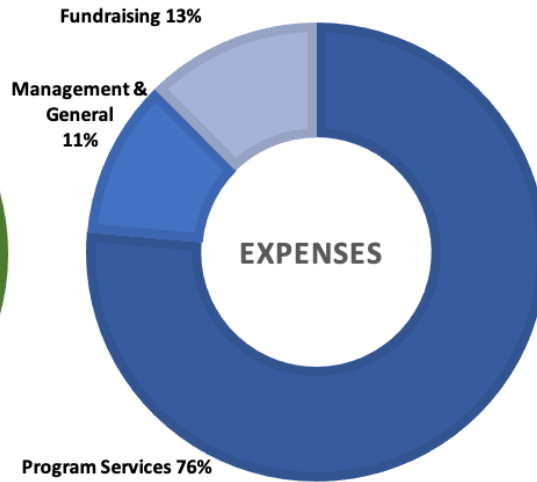
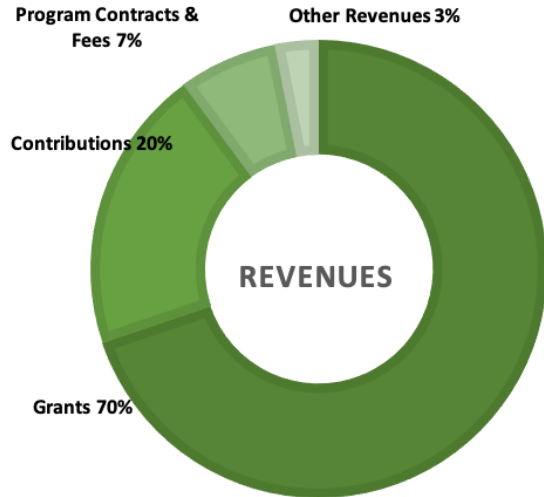
Scientists have warned that biodiversity loss will be inevitable if deep-sea mining is permitted to occur and that the loss will be permanent for human timescales. Along with the DSCC's 80+ members we are calling on a moratorium of deep seabed mining until the environmental, social and economic risks are comprehensively understood, and it can be clearly demonstrated that deep seabed mining can be managed to ensure the protection of the environment and without the loss of biodiversity. Without strong safeguards in place first biodiversity protection cannot be ensured.

Our fight to protect seamounts is an example of why we need effective regulations in place before activities start. Nearly 15 years after a global decision to protect these vulnerable habitats, we are still working to end bottom trawling on seamounts. These biodiverse hot spots need permanent protection.

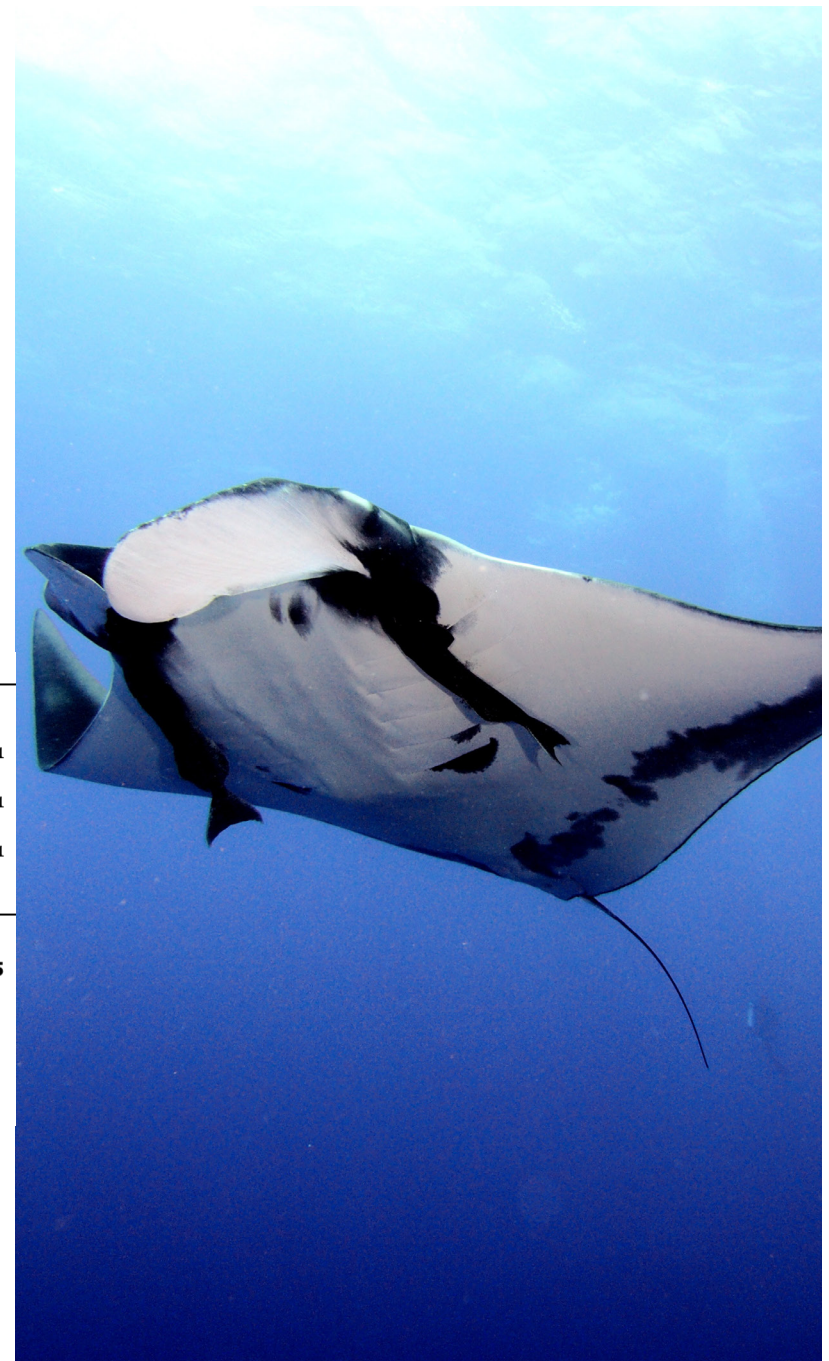


# FINANCIAL STATEMENTS & DONORS

Year ending December 31, 2019 (Unaudited)



| REVENUES                           |                     | EXPENSES              |                     |
|------------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
|                                    | 2019                |                       | 2019                |
| Grants                             | \$ 741,055          | Program Services      | \$ 777,171          |
| Contributions                      | \$ 214,338          | Management & General  | \$ 114,061          |
| Program Contracts & Fees           | \$ 74,255           | Fundraising           | \$ 126,291          |
| Other Revenues                     | \$ 32,641           |                       |                     |
| <b>TOTAL REVENUES</b>              | <b>\$ 1,062,289</b> | <b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b> | <b>\$ 1,017,585</b> |
| Prior Years' Funds for 2019        | \$ 367,089          |                       |                     |
| <b>TOTAL SUPPORT &amp; REVENUE</b> | <b>\$ 1,429,378</b> |                       |                     |



Marine Conservation Institute received a Platinum rating from GuideStar ensuring transparent and honest accounting of your donations.

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*“Ma o ke kai pili ai kakou.”  
The ocean connects us all*

\* Ocean Guardians are individual supporters giving \$1,000 or more annually. Thank you!

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Yeti Restaurant

# SPECIAL EVENTS

Marine Conservation Institute participated in, and organized many events in 2019. Here is a glimpse at a few.

*“Nothing is more important than the oceans, and no one does more with less than Marine Conservation Institute. Too bad they don’t have a navy.”*

*- David Johns, Professor of Political Science Portland State University*



Dr. Lance Morgan meeting with owners and founders of Chantecaille Beaute, Sylvie and Alex Chantecaille. NYC, NY.



Summer Ocean Event at Lagunitas Brewing Co. Petaluma, CA.



Marine Conservation Institute staff at a staff retreat in Glen Ellen, California.



Staff at the Sonoma County climate strike march, with Ocean Guardian Alain Serkissian. Santa Rosa, CA.



Dr. Sarah Hameed introducing interns to Dr. Sylvia Earle at California Seamount Hope Spot launch

## STAFF & INTERNS

### Staff

Jessica Coulter  
Samuel Georgian  
Michael Gravitz  
Sarah Hameed  
Russell Moffitt  
Joan Montgomery  
Lance Morgan  
Angela Morgan  
Beth Pike  
Madeleine Serkissian



Above: Staff and interns in San Francisco, CA, for the California Seamounts Hope Spot launch. Below: Staff in Seattle, WA office.

### Interns

Jenny Carmichael  
Nikki Harasta  
Carl Hendrickson  
Christina Hoenow  
Nicholas Kirkham  
Armand McFarland  
Caitlin McGinnis  
Savannah Smith  
Alyssa Taylor





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*“Bringing cutting-edge science to bear on matters of policy, the small but mighty Marine Conservation Institute team is turning parks on paper into resilient Blue Parks to sustain marine systems for future generations.”*

*- Gail Osherenko, Film maker & Oran Young, Professor Emeritus Bren School of Environmental Science and Management UC Santa Barbara*



Marine Conservation Institute Board of Directors at a meeting in San Francisco, CA 2019.

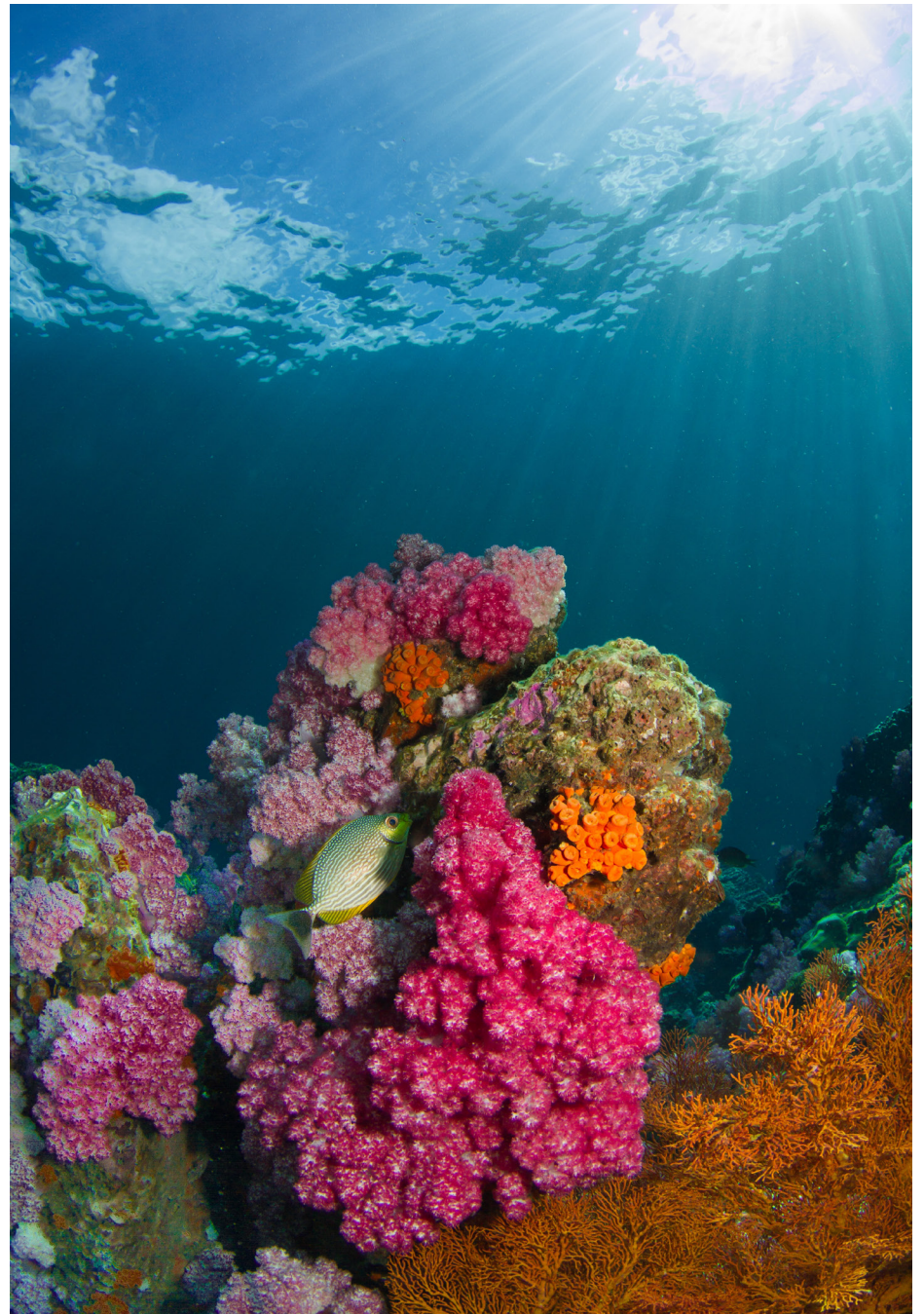
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## **Marine Conservation Institute is a proud member of the following coalitions:**

California Seamount Coalition  
Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE)  
Deep Sea Conservation Coalition  
Global Ocean Biodiversity Initiative  
High Seas Alliance  
Mission Blue  
National Ocean Protection Coalition

## **We are grateful to our partner organizations:**

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# SAVING WILD OCEAN PLACES, FOR US AND FUTURE GENERATIONS

  
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Credit: Cristina Mittermeier/SeaLegacy