

MARINE CONSERVATION INSTITUTE

ANNUAL REPORT 2020



MARINE
CONSERVATION
INSTITUTE

MISSION STATEMENT

Marine Conservation Institute is dedicated to securing permanent, strong protection for the ocean's most important places — for us and future generations.

Photo © Kip Evans

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

As I write this letter, we are still reeling from the shock waves of 2020. But we remain focused on a healthier planet for all of us and for those who will follow us.

Escalating demands on ocean ecosystems and marine life, accelerating declines in biodiversity, and the fraying boundaries of our wild spaces threaten not just the quality of our lives but our very survival. We need urgent and transformational change in our relationship to nature.

Yet even as the ocean—the beating heart of our planet—faces unprecedented threats from destructive practices and climate disruption, it is also our most important tool for addressing them. A healthy ocean captures and sequesters carbon, serves as a haven of resilience and regeneration zones for threatened species and habitats, and protects and sustains human communities most at risk from the mounting threats of climate disruption. Our recovery plan begins with protecting and restoring marine habitats, and marine protected areas are one of the simplest and best ways to do that.

In 2020, despite the overwhelming challenges, we continued advocating for seamounts off the coast of California and the coral reefs in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. Our team focused on tracking the establishment of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) around the world, and incentivizing effective protected areas and policies that will lead to transformational change, like our flagship Blue Parks initiative.

We are especially proud of the way our Blue Parks initiative is catalyzing effective conservation around the globe. These outstanding MPAs all share a common foundation of strong protections and management that result in measurable conservation outcomes. Growing numbers of countries and MPA managers are seeking Blue Parks status, showing that it is a credible mark of excellence. The Channel Islands MPA in the US and Brazil's Abrolhos Marine National Park are the newest members of our network.

Your support is critical to increasing the number of Blue Parks and spreading the word about them, communicating their stories, and building a network of partners and a virtuous cycle for MPA improvement around the world. Identifying and collaborating with Blue Sparks—ambitious, fledgling MPAs striving to achieve Blue Parks status—leverages our scientific expertise to help local communities and governments join this network and begin the task of restoring our ocean.

We are acutely aware that we are still a long way from our goal of protecting 30% of our ocean by 2030. At the end of 2020, roughly 6.5% of the ocean enjoyed effective protection. But new hope is on the horizon. We now have a much better opportunity to expand our efforts, especially considering President Biden's commitment to protect 30% of federal lands and waters. The global community is also increasingly supportive of the 30% target. We are turning this growing momentum into action.

So, as we acknowledge 2020's hardships and express our gratitude that we survived this stolen year, we are eager to do much more to protect our ocean and its diversity—not just for us, but for those who will inherit our Blue Planet.

We hope you will join us in 2021.

– Lance Morgan, PhD

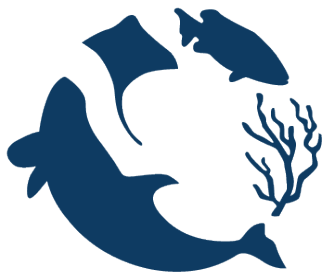
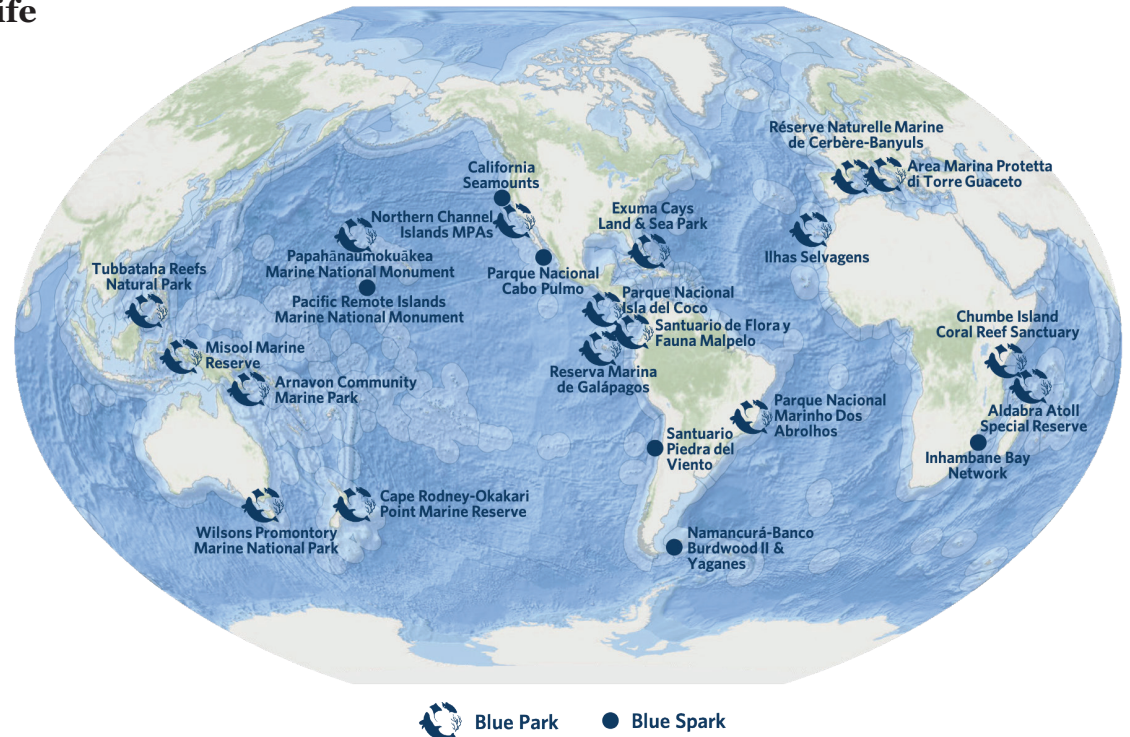
Photo ©Cristina Mittermeier/SeaLegacy

BLUE PARKS

Blue Parks unite the ocean's best protected places and the people who champion them in a strategic network that will cover 30% of the global ocean – enough to save life in the sea.

This New Blue Park Safeguards Vibrant Wildlife

On the Abrolhos Bank off the central coast of Brazil, endangered leatherback turtles cruise past fans of fire coral, and red-billed tropic birds soar above volcanic island peaks. This is the site of [Abrolhos Marine National Park](#), the world's newest Blue Park. The area is home to the largest South Atlantic breeding concentration of humpback whales and at least 20 species of coral, including six species that are endemic to Brazil. Its unique chapeirão reefs feature enormous mushroom-shaped pinnacles, which can grow to be over seven stories tall and as wide across as three football fields!



“This is a place brimming with life, and we are so glad that Abrolhos Marine National Park is protecting it so effectively and setting an example for the world. Congratulations to the communities and managers who have worked so hard to make Abrolhos Marine National Park a Blue Park!”

– Cristina Mittermeier, Founder and President of SeaLegacy and the Only One Collective

Blue Parks Accomplishments

- Celebrated the collaborative management of the Channel Islands MPA Network with hundreds of guests during the Blue Park Award event in Santa Barbara, CA (prior to the COVID-19 pandemic).
- Expanded the network to include 17 Blue Parks, covering 1.67 million square kilometers of the global ocean.
- Awarded Blue Park status to Brazil's Abrolhos Marine National Park.
- Mentored eight early career marine conservationists as Blue Parks Interns.
- Recruited four Blue Parks Ambassadors to amplify the initiative worldwide.
- Collaborated with new communications partner, Only One, to promote Blue Parks stories and to announce our 2020 Blue Park Awards and Blue Sparks collaborations.
- Presented the Blue Parks initiative at the International Marine Conservation Congress and the World Congress on Marine Biodiversity.
- Added Blue Parks pages to the new website to help streamline Blue Parks communications and highlight the interconnections between Blue Parks and our other initiatives.



Abrolhos Marine National Park, Brazil.

Photo ©Cristina Mittermeier/SeaLegacy

BLUE SPARKS

Blue Sparks are the Blue Parks of the future—our scientists are working with aspiring MPAs around the world to empower them to live up to their promise and become tomorrow’s leaders in ocean conservation.

In 2020, we supported six Blue Spark collaborations:

[Santuario Piedra del Viento, Chile.](#) Along the shore of Chile’s pending Piedra del Viento Coastal Marine Sanctuary, rare Chilean flamingos wade in the Topocalma wetlands. In deeper water, endangered southern right whales rise to the surface. Growing development threatens these coastal ecosystems, interrupts artisanal seaweed harvesting, and blocks access for surfers. This Blue Spark is the first step towards a network of sanctuaries along this unprotected coastline.

[California Seamounts, US.](#) Off the coast of California, more than 60 underwater volcanoes are home to fishes, rare seabirds, roving sharks, centuries-old deep-sea corals, and mysterious species that are still new to science. Marine Conservation Institute and the California Seamount Coalition are committed to protecting these rich and fragile biodiversity hotspots.

[Parque Nacional Cabo Pulmo, Mexico.](#) This extraordinary protected area lies in the transition zone between tropical and temperate environments where the Sea of Cortez meets the Pacific and minerals from the land enrich the water. The park, which is home to the oldest coral reef on the west coast of North America, is the result of 25 years of community efforts to revive the local coral reef and aid in the recovery of shark populations.



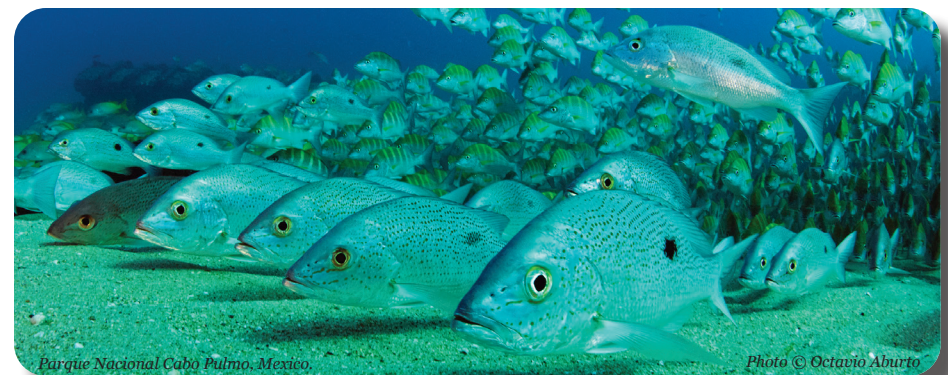
Piedra del Viento Sanctuary, Chile.

Photo © Fariasmoreno



California Seamounts, US.

Photo © NOAA & MARE



Parque Nacional Cabo Pulmo, Mexico.

Photo © Octavio Aburto



Photo courtesy of Ocean Revolution, Mozambique



Photo courtesy of Rewilding Argentina Foundation



Photo courtesy of US Fish & Wildlife Service

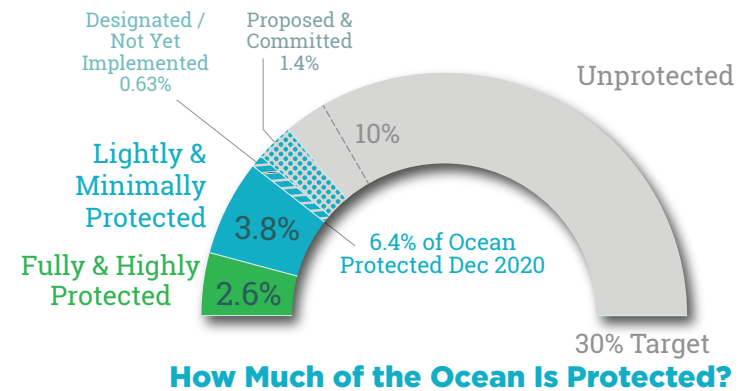
Sidika, Áreas Marinhas Comunitárias Protegidas Na Baía de Inhambane), Mozambique. Historically, village elders—known as Mukhedzisseli, or “the watchers”—determined when and where fishing was allowed. Now, local communities are reviving these traditional rules to protect vital mangrove and seagrass habitats in a network of nine no-take MPAs. These vulnerable nurseries support an incredible diversity of invertebrates, fishes, and seabirds; sequester atmospheric carbon; and buffer coastlines from storms. This is a new model for conservation in Mozambique, bridging traditional ecological management approaches with mainstream MPA management methods.

Namancurá-Banco Burdwood II & Yaganes, Argentina. Thirty-six percent of Argentine territory is sea, and less than 3% is protected. Sin Azul No Hay Verde is working to change that. The conservation program has made history: facilitating a Presidential Decree that named Argentina’s National Parks Administration the authority for future MPAs. The result: the first two marine national parks in Argentina.

Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument, US. Marine Conservation Institute helped make the scientific case to the Bush and Obama administrations to protect these Central Pacific waters. A decade after the creation of the monument, we are guiding effective management for this important place. Spanning seven remote islands and atolls, this monument is one of the largest conservation areas in the world, sheltering millions of seabirds and a stunning diversity of marine life.

MARINE PROTECTION ATLAS

Marine Protection Atlas brings together the best available information on marine protection around the world to hold governments accountable to their commitments and enable the conservation community to work together to protect at least 30% of the world's ocean by 2030.



Cultivating Connectivity

If human health divided the world in 2020, ocean health united it. Although many international meetings were postponed due to the ongoing pandemic, Marine Conservation Institute managed to sit down at the table (virtually, that is!) with colleagues from around the world at the International Marine Conservation Congress—arguably the most important international event for marine conservation.

We co-hosted a workshop introducing the newly developed MPA Guide to participants from more than 15 countries—an opportunity to build a global common language for understanding, classifying, and setting goals around marine protected areas.

We also shared the new and improved Marine Protection Atlas website, which now allows partners from around the globe to contribute to the world's most comprehensive MPA database. At a time of isolation, our MPAtlas team cultivated connectivity; these partnerships will strengthen our ability to make real and lasting change for the ocean.

“We are a small, nimble group that is influencing marine protection at the highest levels. Our work has informed the global discussion about how to effectively protect our ocean. It’s exciting to be a part of this great Marine Conservation Institute team.”

—Beth Pike, Conservation Scientist

This year, the MPAtlas team ...

- Built a new website that shows real-time analysis, so users have access to the latest numbers every time they search
- Transitioned to focused reporting on classified and assessed MPAs
- Created a web-based data entry platform that allows partner organizations from around the world to complete and share MPA quality assessments
- Welcomed five new partners to our MPA Assessment Portal:
 - Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society
 - Oceano Azul
 - Oregon State University
 - University of Algarve
 - University of Colorado – Boulder

**MARINE
PROTECTION
ATLAS**

NEW PROTECTIONS: CHAMPIONING US WATERS

The United States has jurisdiction over 4.3 million square miles of sea, more than the entire nation's land area. US leadership is critical to the fate of the ocean, and Marine Conservation Institute pushes for new and expanded protections for the ocean's most vulnerable places—both close to home, and on a global scale.



How we advocated for new and stronger protections:

- Fought for a complete inventory of Blue Carbon in US waters in the Ocean-Based Climate Solutions Act—along with a plan to conserve and enhance it.
- Successfully advocated for appropriations bills that include more money for NOAA and for the National Wildlife Refuges.
- Supported and worked on legislation that will be reintroduced in the 117th Congress: the Ocean-Based Climate Solutions Act and the Break Free from Plastic Pollution Act.
- Defended Rose Atoll, [Pacific Remote Islands](#), and the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monuments from the administration's threats to rollback conservation.
- Campaigned to better protect the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary—including expanded boundaries, two dozen new fully or highly protected zones, and contiguous protected areas from deep reef to shallow water.

NEW PROTECTIONS: CHAMPIONING THE HIGH SEAS



Big threats make a clear case for better protections.

In July 2020, the world watched as a colossal 300-mile-long international fishing fleet gathered just south of the Galapagos Islands—over 340 boats, bristling with an estimated 30 million fishing hooks. The rogue vessels, mostly Chinese, were poised to capture endangered species that strayed past the MPA border, illuminating the need for greater protections for migration corridors that cross international boundaries.

Against this international backdrop, Marine Conservation Institute continued setting the stage for a new age of [high seas protections](#) and advocating for better protections, as we pursued our mission to safeguard at least 30% of the ocean by 2030.

We coordinated among the nearly 50 High Seas Alliance members to identify the first MPA locations in areas beyond national jurisdictions. We catalogued “High Seas Gems” in a multimedia [Story Map](#) and worked with the High Seas Alliance to create a treaty to advance high seas protections (UN treaty negotiations were postponed until 2021 due to the pandemic—giving us an opportunity to look ahead and strategize for the next round of talks).

“We saved the whales with international agreement, now it is time to save our oceans.”

—Sir David Attenborough

CHANNEL ISLANDS MPA NETWORK WINS BLUE PARK AWARD

In January 2020 we traveled to Santa Barbara to present our prestigious Blue Park Award to three agencies working to protect the marine life of the [Channel Islands](#): the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries, and the National Park Service. The Blue Park Award recognizes the collaborative efforts of state and federal managers in meeting the highest science-based standards for protection and management of the northern Channel Islands MPAs.



L to R: Gail Osherenko, Meg Caldwell, Lance Morgan, Sarah Hameed.



L to R: Lance Morgan, Chris Mobley, Ethan McKinley, John Ugoretz, Becky Ota, and Sarah Hameed.



Channel Islands National Park Service staff with Gary Davis, retired NPS biologist.



*For we, too are oceans,
Or at least beings bobbing in the same boat.
To stand up for our ocean
Is to stand up for our own ship.
— Amanda Gorman, Ode to Our Ocean*

CALIFORNIA SEAMOUNTS

The California Seamount Project aims to establish strong, permanent protection for seamounts in California waters and beyond.

(Virtual) Journey to the Deep

California seamounts are dazzling underwater volcanoes that harbor ancient corals, hydrothermal vents, aggregations of octopuses, and mysterious species that we are still discovering. Our seamounts campaign turned the 2020 push to go virtual into an opportunity. Marine Conservation Institute produced a [series of short videos](#), narrated by Peter Coyote, that took viewers on a journey into these enigmatic ecosystems. We also hosted a [webinar](#), where our resident Ocean Explorer Dr. Samuel Georgian revealed the wonders and realities of being a scientist aboard a research vessel. At a time of global isolation, our immersive seamount media offered opportunities for everyone to become virtual explorers.



“I believe that one of the best ways to protect our changing ocean is by communicating the problem. Our seamount short films bring understanding of these incredible underwater volcanoes to the public: the first step in saving them.”

—Dr. Samuel Georgian, Resident Ocean Explorer

This year, we...

- Published [two multimedia Story Maps](#) revealing expedition highlights and interesting fauna from California seamounts.
- Participated in an experts' workshop hosted by NOAA to determine best practices for modeling the distribution of deep-sea fauna, culminating in a publication in *Frontiers in Marine Science*.
- Contributed to the 2020 PICES Scientific Report on the distribution of deep-sea fauna on seamounts in the Northeast Pacific Ocean.
- Launched the [Seamountaineer Pledge](#), encouraging ocean lovers to sign on to support advocacy and protection for seamounts.
- Published a modeling study describing the impact of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill on deep-sea corals in the Gulf of Mexico.
- Contributed to the 2020 Deep Sea Conservation Coalition technical report on high seas bottom fisheries.
- Modeled the distribution of deep-sea corals and sponges on the Salas y Gómez and Nazca Ridges to support ongoing conservation efforts.
- Announced the [California seamounts as a Blue Spark](#)—one of six promising new MPAs that could become tomorrow's Blue Parks.

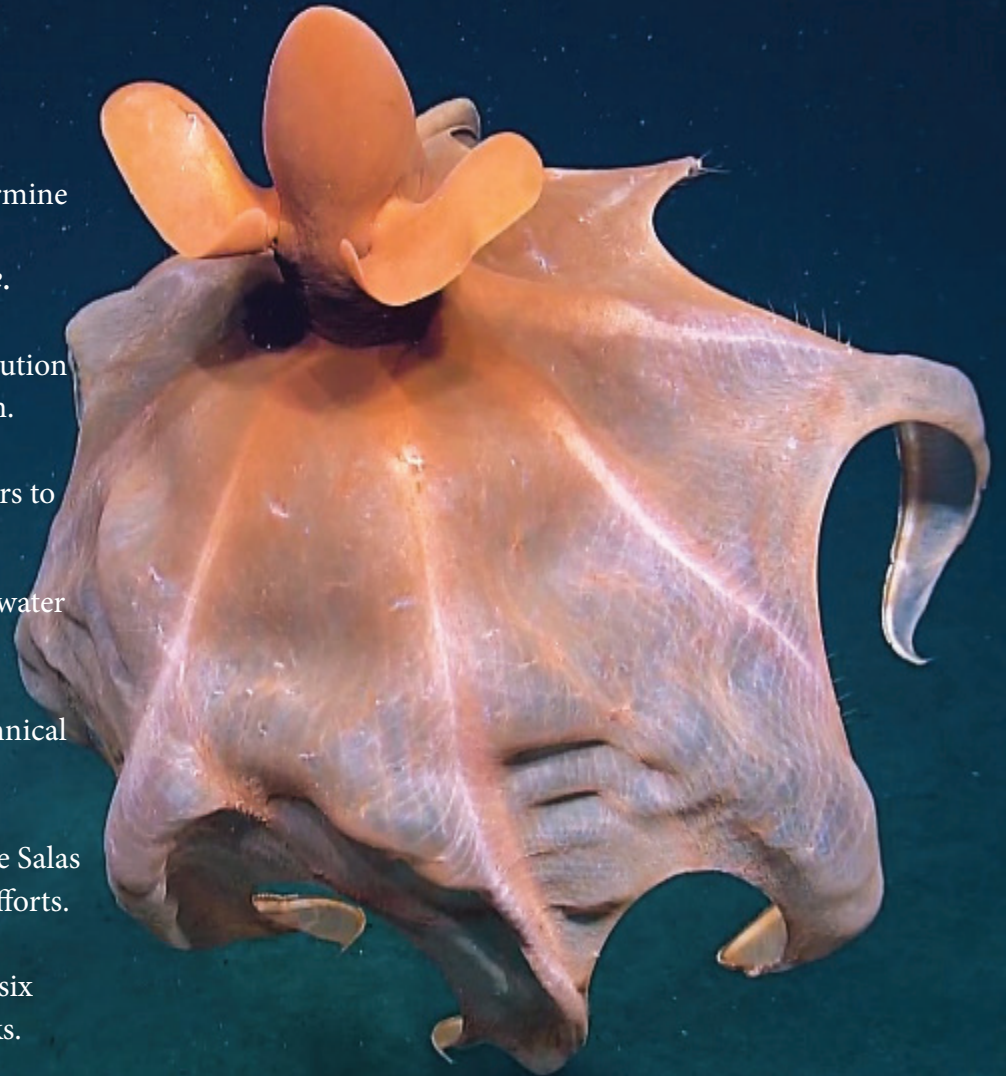


Photo © Ocean Exploration Trust

OCEAN LUMINARIES BRIGHTEN OUR YEAR-END GALA

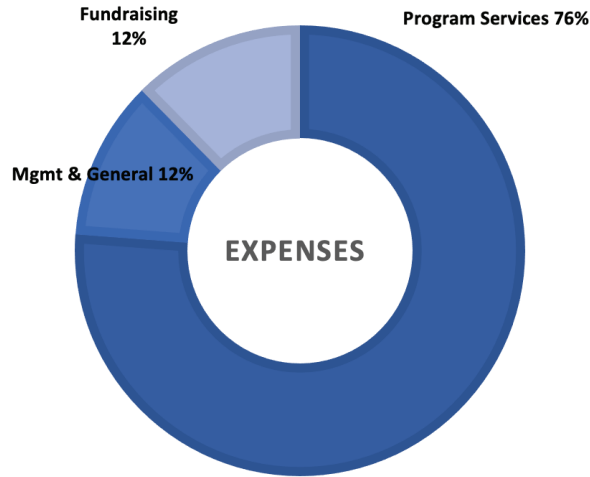
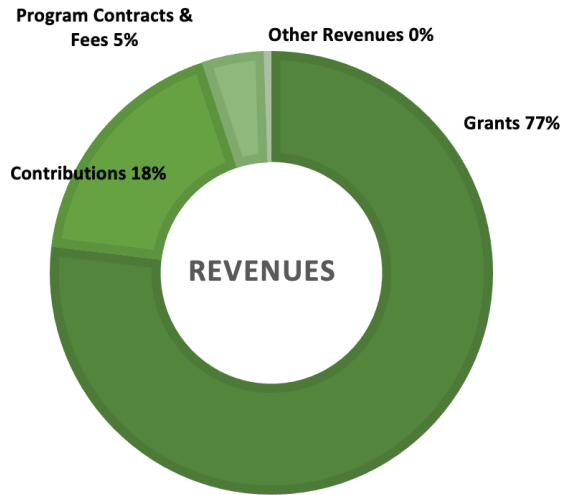
COVID-19 rocked us all in 2020, transforming the way we collaborated with our team and with our international partners, and shaking us each on different and difficult personal levels. We found creative ways to lean into adversity—embracing virtual connectivity. We used this strange time to reflect on global health and strategize strong next steps for ocean conservation as the world seeks a new balance on the other end of the pandemic. But we also struggled with isolation and uncertainty, and we watched as other challenges arrived to compound COVID. Our nation rose up to tackle vital and overdue conversations about equity and racial justice—a conversation that environmental organizations like our own must engage with as we advocate stronger protections for our blue planet. Our California office felt firsthand the pressures of climate disruption as we evacuated due to wildfires. It was a hard year.



Amid the tumult, we looked for ways to connect and to be kind. Ocean lovers from around the world joined us for our [Virtual Gala](#) celebrating our newest Blue Park. The evening was as brilliant as our signature “Blue Sparkle” cocktail (whipped up by celebrity chef Duskie Estes), which we sipped while hearing from nature photographer and filmmaker Ian Shive (who spoke about the Pacific marine monuments and his new IMAX movie *Hidden Pacific*), Native Hawaiian elder Sol Kaho’ohalahala, Dr. Lance Morgan, acclaimed photographer Cristina Mittermeier, Abrolhos Park manager Fernando P. M. Repinaldo Filho, “Her Deepness” Dr. Sylvia Earle, and our charismatic host Marshall Behling. Enormous thanks to all of these special guests and to our generous sponsors: Navis, Sand Cloud, Chantecaille, Black Pig Meat Co., and Happy Little Whales. And thanks, of course, to all of our donors who made our work possible during this year of unexpected challenges and changes.

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

Year ending December 31, 2020 (Unaudited)



REVENUES

Grants	\$	932,750
Contributions	\$	218,568
Program Contracts & Fees	\$	55,325
Other Revenues	\$	6,307

TOTAL REVENUES \$ 1,212,950

Prior Years' Funds for 2020 \$ 206,871

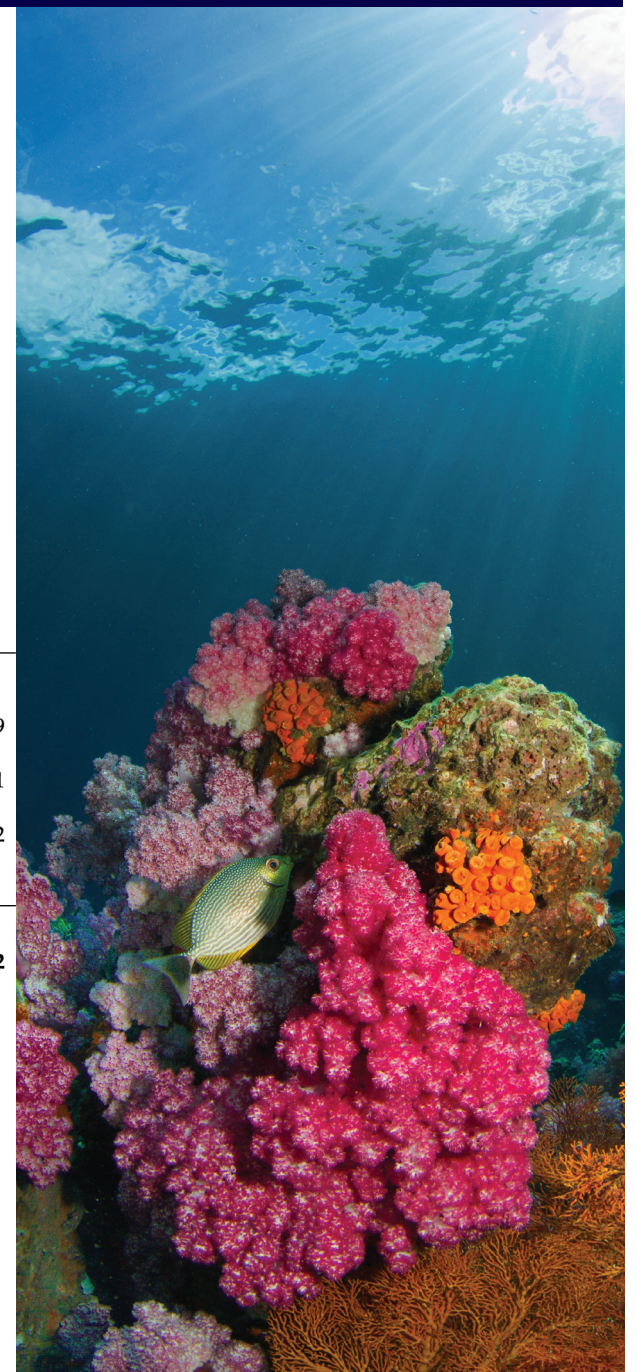
TOTAL SUPPORT & REVENUE \$ 1,419,821

EXPENSES

Program Services	\$	918,279
Fundraising	\$	137,971
Mgmt & General	\$	149,042

TOTAL EXPENSES \$ 1,205,292

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



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We are grateful to the following for their generous support in 2020.

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"The oceans are our lifeblood."

- John Bruno, recurring donor

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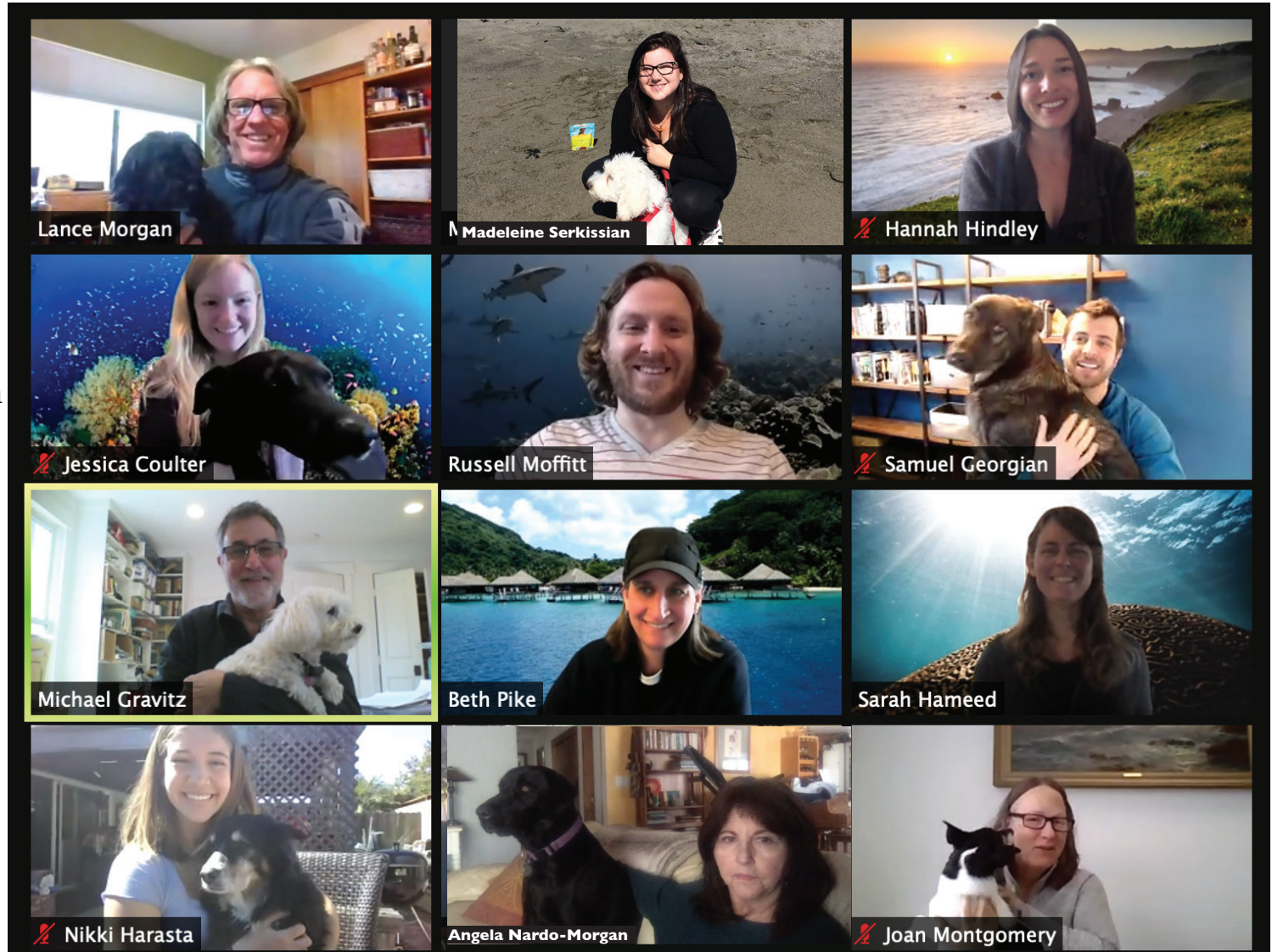
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“Passion, purpose, measurable progress; this is what makes me excited about donating to Marine Conservation Institute! Saving the ocean is saving our planet, what more justification do you need?”

— **Jeff Smith**, tech industry executive, passionate outdoorsman and diver





We are a proud member of the following:

California Seamount Coalition
Coral Reefs on the High Seas Coalition
Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE)
Deep Sea Conservation Coalition
Global Ocean Biodiversity Initiative
High Seas Alliance
Mission Blue
National Ocean Protection Coalition
30x30 Ocean Alliance

“Working in conservation humbles and teaches me every day, that we are not the only beings on this planet and just a small part of the puzzle. Together we can ensure the creation of a global network, consisting of marine protected areas in the right places with the right rules and the right management to safeguard wildlife.”

– Tharaka Sriram, Blue Parks Ambassador

We are grateful to our partners:

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FOR US AND FUTURE GENERATIONS**



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