

Make Every Day World Oceans Day

Earth911

World Oceans Day, declared by the United Nations as a day to recognize the major role that oceans play in everyday life, passed us quietly on June 8 this year. More immediate needs have dominated activists' attention, and rightfully so.

But protecting the ocean doesn't take place on a single day and it need not detract from our equity and justice efforts. Environmental quality and social and economic equity [intersect and support](#) each other in significant ways.

World Oceans Day

Nowadays it seems like there is a holiday for everything from [doughnuts](#) to [kazoos](#). But not all observance days are trivial.

The United Nations creates international days of observance for important global issues as tools to educate people and accelerate activism. Canada first proposed World Oceans Day at the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit in 1992. Environmentalists began observing the unofficial holiday in 2002. The UN finally made the day official in 2008 when it designated June 8 as [World Oceans Day](#).

The purpose of World Oceans Day is to draw attention to the shared resource that are the world's ocean, to highlight our personal connections to the sea whether one lives near the coast or not, and to inform people of the important ways individuals can help protect our world's oceans.

What the Ocean Does for Us

We talk about the seven seas, but really, one vast ocean covers 70% percent of the Earth's surface. Only 7% of that ocean is protected.

As on land, the ocean contains myriad ecosystems, from shallow [ocean pastures](#) to [coral reefs](#) to deep [ocean trenches](#) and the seabed. Within those ecosystems, scientists have identified more than [400,000 species](#), but estimate that those species make up [less than 10%](#) of the total. Unfortunately, at current extinction rates, many of those species will likely go extinct before they are even discovered.

Oceans serve as the world's largest food source, with more than [3 billion people](#) depending on the ocean as their primary source of protein. As a result, one-third of global fish stocks are overfished. About [150 marine species](#) are listed as [endangered](#) under the U.S. Endangered Species Act. Overharvesting is a significant factor threatening nearly all of them.

Aside from nutrition, a healthy ocean is critical to human life. Although we often hear rainforests called the planet's lungs, oceans produce half of the world's oxygen. The ocean also plays a huge role in climate stabilization, storing 50 times as much carbon as the atmosphere does. Oceanic carbon storage buffers up to a third of the carbon

released by human activity.

Warming [ocean temperatures](#) caused by global climate change can [release that captured carbon](#), increasing the pace of climate change and leading to more severe storms. Warmer waters are also a threat to [coral reefs](#) through [bleaching](#), disease, and predators. Reefs protect coastal communities from beach erosion and storm effects and provide economic benefits.

Roughly three billion people depend on the ocean [for their livelihood](#) through fishing, [tourism](#), or a combination of both. Without protection, [70% to 90%](#) of tropical coral reefs could be lost by 2100. The impact of these extinctions, as well as ocean-level increases, will fall hardest on the poorest and most marginalized communities. Protecting the oceans protects these populations.

World Oceans Day 2020

The United Nations' conservation goal is to maintain at least 30% of the planet in its natural state. This number was [scientifically established](#) as the minimum necessary to arrest climate change, prevent extinctions, and continue to reap the environmental services of a healthy global ecosystem.

During 2020, the focus of World Oceans Day is the global movement to create a network of [marine protected areas](#) (MPAs). The goal is to protect 30% of the world's ocean by 2030. Called 30×30, the campaign to create marine protected areas on the model of terrestrial national parks did not end on June 8.

What We Can Do for the Ocean

It is not too late to sign the [30×30 petition](#) that is collecting signatures from around the world for presentation at the [Convention on Biodiversity COP15 Summit](#). Originally scheduled for October 2020, the summit has been postponed due to the pandemic.

The virtual events celebrating World Oceans Day on June 8 are still available for [streaming online](#) for anyone who wants to learn more. Going forward, we can continue to support the establishment of MPAs like the [Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument](#), which have proven effective in restoring ocean life.

The threat of [pollution](#) from oil and [plastics](#) does not stop at the boundaries of MPAs. But it is a threat that individuals can [help prevent](#) by eliminating [plastic waste](#) and [cleaning up](#) beaches and waterways. These everyday actions are important for protecting the environmental quality of the ocean. In return, a healthy ocean benefits people everywhere in the world.

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