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Community Geography Reflection

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COMMUNITY GEOGRAPHY REFLECTION

By Leo Kepcke

In the Spring semester of 2021, I took Dr. Amy Rock's Community Geography course (GEOG 471) which gives students real world experience. Through this course I was teamed up with a classmate and a community partner, in our case the California State Parks. Our objective was to [map all of the Marine Protected Areas \(MPAs\) in northern California](#) using ArcGIS online to provide an educational resource for the State Parks to use with their education programs.

When I began this daunting project, I sat down, turned on my computer, and started mapping. It seemed overwhelming at first, but then the patterns began to take shape and formed themselves into something more cohesive. There are over twenty-five MPAs on the Northern California coast. They range from small offshore rocks that provide crucial space for wildlife, to mating areas for shore birds, to large swaths of beach which host massive Stellar sea lions. These protected areas are key in maintaining and sustaining the wonderfully diverse marine life that are vital to the ecosystems in which they reside.

Through this course I learned about the inner functions of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and nonprofits, along with their crucial role in providing services and support where other systems cannot, have not, or will not. As a geography major, many of the exciting opportunities that will eventually be available to me can be found within this realm. Getting hands-on experience working for a community partner and learning about nonprofit work are two important pieces in preparing me for the geographical job market after I graduate.

This focus on real world experience is one that I have noticed many times throughout my geography courses, and it is perfectly encapsulated within Community Geography. Building lifelong skills is what a university education should be about. I feel extremely lucky to be a part of a program that values that and understands the importance of education outside of a lecture hall.

While doing this project for the State Parks, I learned a lot about conservation efforts and wildlife on the Northern California coast. While I am interested in these subjects, I never expected them to be a part of my education. But through luck and good guidance, my classes have taken me much further than I ever thought possible. Additionally, I learned professional skills and began the tall task of networking and building my resume. This experience has helped me round out my professional and educational profile, and given me a taste of what working for the State Parks system could be like.

