



HELP SHAPE THE FUTURE

With the publication of the notice of proposed rulemaking, draft environmental impact statement (EIS), and draft management plan, NOAA invites the public to comment on its proposal to designate Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary in the offshore coastal waters of central California, adjacent to San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara counties.

NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY DESIGNATION



NOAA is proposing to designate Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary. Highlights of the designation are:

- The proposed sanctuary represents a unique and special opportunity to recognize and celebrate Indigenous Peoples' modern day and historical cultural connections to the place, and to actively involve tribes and Indigenous communities in collaborative management, inclusive of their values, knowledge, and traditions.
- Collaborative management will provide tribal community members with opportunities to join in sanctuary decision-making processes and cultural programming.
- The sanctuary designation would also conserve the area's rich biodiversity and create new opportunities for research and economic development, including recreation and tourism.
- NOAA's proposed boundary for the sanctuary balances compatible ocean uses and cultural heritage considerations, while protecting natural and cultural resources in the area, including ecological habitats such as kelp forests, rocky reefs, and significant offshore features such as the Santa Lucia Bank, and Rodriguez Seamount.



Photo credit: Robert Schwemmer/NOAA

The area proposed for sanctuary designation would recognize Chumash tribal history and protect an internationally-significant ecological transition zone.

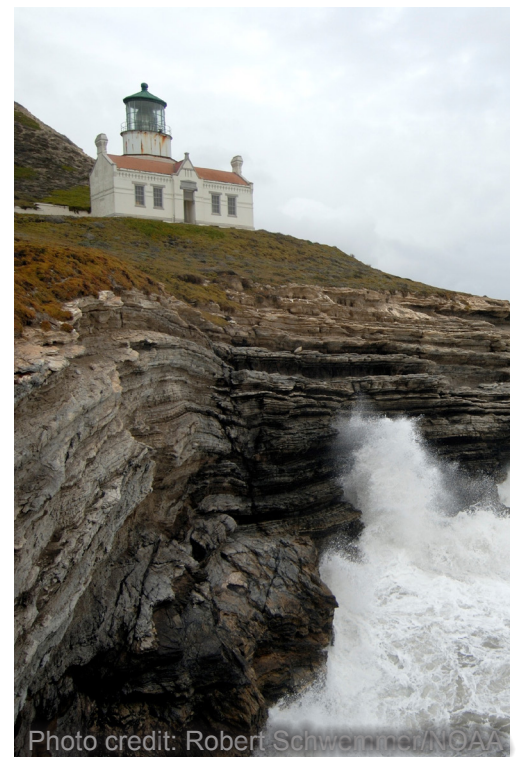


Photo credit: Robert Schwemmer/NOAA



PROPOSED REGULATIONS

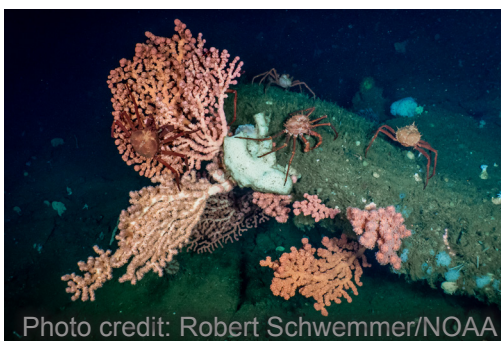
The proposed sanctuary regulations are similar to other California national marine sanctuaries, with standard exemptions and permit processes. In general, regulations for national marine sanctuaries are written as “prohibitions” that restrict or limit an activity. If an activity is not covered by a prohibition, it may occur within a sanctuary. Activities described as prohibited by a sanctuary regulation may still occur if the activity is covered by an exception to a prohibition or allowed through a sanctuary permit.

The proposed regulations would prohibit the following activities:

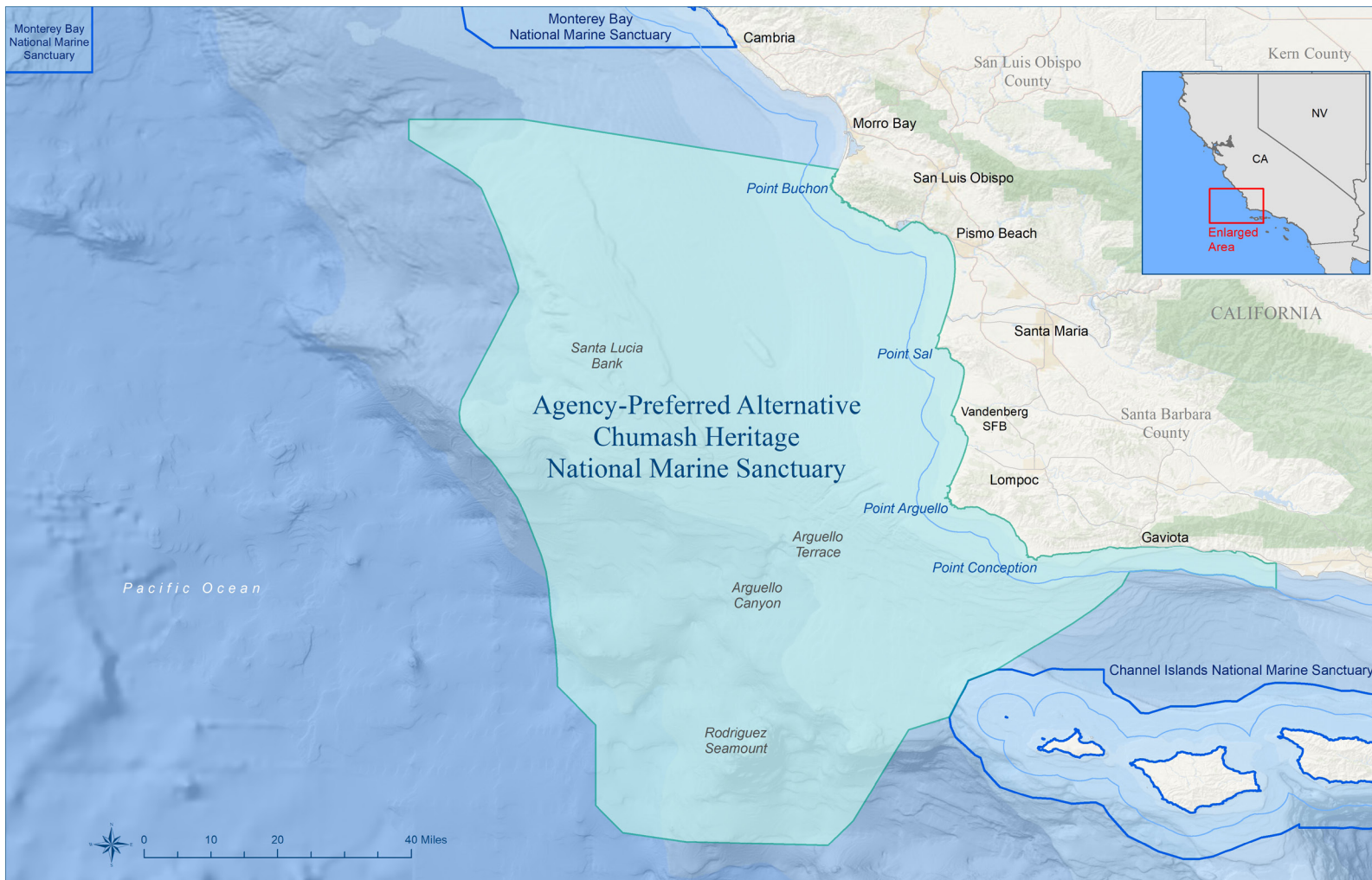
- Oil and gas development other than from existing platforms and reservoirs;
- Discharges—within or into the sanctuary; beyond the boundary that enters and injures; or from a cruise ship;
- Disturbance of the submerged lands;
- Take, disturbance, removal, or possession of a maritime heritage resource;
- Take or possession of a marine mammal, sea turtle, or bird;
- Deserting a vessel or leaving harmful matter aboard a deserted vessel;
- Attracting a white shark;
- Disturbing special resources on, near, or above Rodriguez Seamount (excluding fishing);
- Introducing an introduced species (other than catch and release of striped bass); and
- Interfering with an enforcement action.

DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

The draft EIS document presents the potential environmental consequences of designating a national marine sanctuary in this area. It describes the baseline environment for the proposed sanctuary, including the human environment, and the area’s natural, cultural, and physical resources, and then evaluates how proposed sanctuary regulations and management plan could cause adverse and beneficial impacts on this environment. The draft EIS analyzes the initial proposed boundary, as well as a range of boundary alternatives for sanctuary designation.



For more information on the sanctuary designation process, visit <https://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/chumash-heritage>



SANCTUARY BOUNDARY

NOAA proposes designating the sanctuary with a boundary that encompasses 5,617 square miles of submerged lands and marine waters from Montaña de Oro State Park in San Luis Obispo County to Naples along the Gaviota Coast in Santa Barbara County. It would cover 134 miles of coast, and would be the third largest national marine sanctuary in the National Marine Sanctuary System. This boundary reflects NOAA's preferred alternative (Agency-Preferred Alternative), described in the draft EIS as Alternative 2 (Cropped Bank to Coast) combined with Sub-Alternative 5b (Gaviota Coast Extension). As required, NOAA considered a reasonable range of alternatives to the original boundary proposal and identified the Agency-Preferred Alternative based on an assessment of potential impacts of designating the proposed sanctuary. The preferred boundary allows NOAA to focus its management on key areas historically important to the Chumash tribes and natural resources important to their heritage, while balancing the multiple uses of this area.



DRAFT MANAGEMENT PLAN

Management plans are non-regulatory planning and management documents adopted for all national marine sanctuaries. They focus on protecting sanctuary resources, carrying out important research and monitoring, engaging the public and stakeholders, and effectively implementing and sustaining core operational programs. The draft management plan for the proposed sanctuary includes 11 action plans covering issue-based and program-based themes that are intended to guide NOAA over the coming five to 10 years. They are:



Photo credit: NOAA/USCG

- Indigenous Cultural Heritage
- Climate Change
- Maritime Heritage
- Offshore Energy
- Water Quality
- Blue Economy
- Wildlife Disturbance
- Education and Outreach
- Resource Protection
- Research and Monitoring
- Operations and Administration

The draft management plan for the proposed sanctuary begins with a description of NOAA's proposed framework to involve Indigenous communities in the collaborative management of the new sanctuary. NOAA engaged in a deliberative listening process to seek input and ideas from the diverse tribal communities along the coast about how to best create a bold framework for collaborative management for the sanctuary.

HOW TO COMMENT

NOAA welcomes your input about the proposal during the public comment period, which ends on October 25, 2023. You are invited to submit comments in one of several ways:

- Submit online comments at www.regulations.gov, using docket number NOAA-NOS-2021-0080
- Provide comments at public meetings – meeting dates are published on <https://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/chumash-heritage>
- Mail written comments to:
Paul Michel
NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries
99 Pacific Street, Suite 100F, Monterey, CA 93940



PUBLIC WORKSHOPS

NOAA intends to host public workshops several weeks after publishing the proposed designation to present the proposed action and to answer questions. Please go to NOAA's website for more information: <https://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/chumash-heritage>