Researchers use tools such as this Remotely Operated Vehicle (ROV) to investigate deepwater wrecks like the Jacob Luckenbach in the Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary.

This intact lantern is one of over 440 artifacts recovered from the Monitor National Marine Sanctuary when NOAA and the U.S. Navy recovered the famous ironclad’s turret during Monitor Expedition 2002.

NOAA’s Maritime Archaeology Program

NOAA’s National Marine Sanctuary Program serves as the trustee for a system of 13 underwater protected areas, encompassing over 18,000 square miles of waters from Washington State to the Florida Keys, and from Lake Huron to American Samoa. NOAA's National Ocean Service has managed National Marine Sanctuaries since passage of the Marine Protection, Research, and Sanctuaries Act in 1972.
The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s (NOAA) Maritime Archaeology Program (MAP), formally created in 2002, is an initiative of the National Marine Sanctuary Program. Protection of historic shipwrecks and other maritime archaeological sites within the boundaries of the 13 National Marine Sanctuaries has always been an integral component of each sanctuary’s management plan. The new MAP, however, provides a more structured program that includes components for location, protection, management, research, and education.

As with natural resources, numerous user and interest groups—from archaeologists to recreational divers to salvors—seek to interact with submerged cultural resources in various ways. These resources are also impacted by the elements (storms, currents, corrosion, etc.). Therefore, responsible, informed decisions must be made on how to manage these resources since, unlike living resources, archaeological resources are non-renewable. Additionally, the cultural resources within NOAA’s National Marine Sanctuaries, if properly studied and interpreted, can add an extra dimension to our education programs designed to increase public enjoyment and appreciation of each sanctuary’s resources.

The primary mission of the MAP is to assist the National Marine Sanctuaries in their efforts to manage and protect submerged cultural resources within their boundaries. The MAP also will provide assistance and consultation to other Federal and State agencies on issues concerning submerged cultural resources, and seek to develop new methods, tools, and partnerships for achieving program objectives.