



Proposed Designation of Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary

PUBLICATION



**Nov. 10,
2021**

NOAA opens public comment period for the proposed Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary.

PUBLIC COMMENT

The public is invited to submit comments via [regulations.gov](https://www.regulations.gov) using docket # NOAA-NOS-2021-0080.

ENDS

**Jan. 31,
2022**

NEXT STEPS

PUBLIC MEETINGS

NOAA will hold virtual public scoping meetings. For more information, visit <https://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/chumash-heritage/>



DRAFT PROPOSAL

NOAA prepares a draft sanctuary proposal that includes potential boundaries, regulations, and a management plan.



FINAL DECISION

NOAA will consider all public comments prior to moving forward with a sanctuary designation. If NOAA decides to pursue, the agency will prepare final documents. The governor and Congress review the documents before final designation.



**2-3
years**

About the Nomination

NOAA invites the public to participate in the designation process for the proposed Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary on the central coast of California to protect the region's important marine ecosystem, maritime heritage resources, and cultural values of Indigenous communities.

The nominated approximately 7,670 square-mile sanctuary, adjacent to San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara counties and the boundaries of Monterey Bay and Channel Islands national marine sanctuaries, aims to recognize and preserve Chumash tribal history and protect the area's rich biodiversity, including a world-renowned ecological transition zone where temperate waters from the north meet the subtropics. The area is known for its extensive kelp forests, sandy beaches, coastal dunes, and wetlands, and provides nursery grounds for numerous commercial fish species and important habitat for many threatened and endangered species such as blue whales, southern sea otters, black abalone, snowy plovers, and leatherback sea turtles.

Known shipwrecks in the nominated area are a significant part of the overall maritime landscape of the region. These wrecks are located in one of the nation's most historically important transportation corridors and indicate the potential for discovery of other shipwrecks and submerged cultural sites.

The area includes many coastal communities that enjoy commercial and recreational fishing, boating, kayaking, surfing, diving, wildlife watching, beach walking, and research.



The area proposed for Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary between Monterey Bay and Channel Islands national marine sanctuaries. Image: NOAA

NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY SYSTEM



Scale varies in this perspective. Adapted from National Geographic Maps.

- National Marine Sanctuary
- ▲ Marine National Monument
- Proposed National Marine Sanctuary

Preserving History

Some of the earliest documented human occupation of North America is from this region and various bands of Chumash and other Indigenous tribes have relied upon the natural resources of this area of central California. While much of the coast in San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara counties have been surveyed for Native American artifacts and settlements, the wide and gentle slope of the continental shelf may hold paleoshorelines, including archaeological resources worthy of study and conservation.



A sea otter swims off the California coast. Photo: Robert Schwemmer/NOAA

Numerous threats to natural and cultural resources of the nominated sanctuary were identified. The nominators believe a national marine sanctuary offers solutions in guiding coordinated and comprehensive ecosystem-based management, including organizing and stimulating marine research, education, stewardship, tourism, and recreation. A sanctuary nomination could also provide protection for important native cultural sites.



Point Conception is significant for both its ecological wonders and its importance to the Chumash. Photo: Robert Schwemmer/NOAA

NOAA's National Marine Sanctuary System

The Office of National Marine Sanctuaries serves as the trustee for a network of underwater parks encompassing more than 620,000 square miles of marine and Great Lakes waters from Washington state to the Florida Keys, and from Lake Huron to American Samoa.

For more information

Contact Paul Michel, West Coast Regional Office at: Paul.Michel@noaa.gov.



The oil tanker *Montebello* rests within the proposed national marine sanctuary. Image: Unocal