

*Anticipating a Community-Based Nomination Process for
NOAA's National Marine Sanctuaries*

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: What is a national marine sanctuary?

A: Congress established the National Marine Sanctuary system in 1972 to recognize and promote the conservation, recreational, ecological, historical, cultural, archaeological, scientific or aesthetic values of special areas of our nation's marine environment. Sanctuaries are established to protect and promote areas that encompass unique or significant natural and cultural features.

Q. Where are the existing sanctuaries located and what marine resources do they protect and promote?

A: The system currently includes 13 national marine sanctuaries and the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument. Two sanctuaries – the *U.S.S. Monitor* off Cape Hatteras, NC and Thunder Bay in Lake Huron -- were established to conserve historic shipwrecks. Four sanctuaries protect ecosystems associated with coral reefs -- Florida Keys, Gray's Reef off the coast of Georgia, Flower Garden Banks in the Gulf of Mexico 100 miles south of the Texas/LA border, and American Samoa. Six sanctuaries protect a variety of marine and near shore habitat – Channel Islands, Monterey Bay, Gulf of Farallones and Cordell Bank off the California Coast, Washington State's Olympic Coast, and Stellwagen Bank off the coast of Massachusetts. The Hawaiian Islands/Humpback Whale sanctuary preserves whale habitat. The Papahānaumokuākea Marine Monument in Hawaii helps to conserve and promote an array of natural and cultural resources.

Q: How does a sanctuary get established?

A: The National Marine Sanctuaries Act authorizes the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Commerce to designate sanctuaries. The President can also use the authority of the Antiquities Act to establish Marine National Monuments to be managed as part of the National Marine Sanctuary System. The National Marine Sanctuaries Act sets out the standards, requirements and process that the Secretary of Commerce must follow in designating new sanctuaries. That process involves extensive public engagement, consultation and coordination, and considers factors such as the proposed goals and objectives, strategies for managing sanctuary resources, and present and potential uses of the area. From start to finish, including all the necessary studies and public comment procedures, the process could take three years or more to complete.

Q: How is the public involved in the designation and management of a sanctuary?

A: Sanctuaries are the result of community-based objectives for resource conservation and use. As such, the nomination, designation and management of the sanctuary occur through inclusive and continuous public processes that include comment periods, public meetings, and workgroups. Advisory councils are one type of public engagement unique to Sanctuaries. They include representatives from all major constituent groups who actively shape and adapt sanctuary management to help ensure that sanctuaries evolve and adapt to changing resource conditions and community benefits to be derived.

Q: What are the benefits of a designation?

A: Sanctuary designations bring a variety of benefits to the communities, states and regions in which they are located. These include economic benefits from increased recreation and tourism, education and career opportunities, financial support, and enhanced conservation efforts to name a few. The Thunder Bay Marine Sanctuary in Michigan and its associated visitor center, for example, has become a major tourism destination for the Great Lakes Region, with a direct and indirect impact of more than \$90 million in sales, \$35 million in personal income and some 1700 jobs.

Q: What restrictions or requirements come with a designation?

A: Sanctuaries are managed to protect and conserve their resources and to allow uses that are compatible with resource protection. There are no pre-determined restrictions on uses, since the types of resources to be considered, the existing and proposed uses, and community objectives for designation and management differ for each sanctuary. Upon designation of a sanctuary or during a periodic review of the management plan, site-specific regulations could be issued that restrict a narrow range of activities, if the activity has been found to be incompatible with the primary mandate of resource protection or is a proactive step necessary for the protection of a specific resource. Any proposed action is subject to public review and coordination with other local, state or federal agencies.

Q: Am I able to enjoy fishing, boating and other recreational opportunities in a National Marine Sanctuary?

A: Recreating on public lands and waters is an American tradition. Sanctuaries provide opportunity to responsibly enjoy special marine places while safeguarding their unique beauty, biodiversity and historical significance for future generations. The Office of National Marine Sanctuaries works with the recreational community to promote responsible stewardship that further our collective conservation goals. To this end, while the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries generally encourages recreational fishing, there are some especially vulnerable places within sanctuaries where limits are

placed on the activity. Any proposed action is subject to public review and coordination with other local, state and federal agencies.

Q: What was the origin of interest for Mallows Bay/Potomac River as a National Marine Sanctuary?

A: For nearly a decade, officials from Charles County Government, MD Department of Natural Resources, and the MD Historical Trust have been seeking to enhance both resource conservation and public access through a Federal/state partnership.

Q: Why Mallows Bay/Potomac River?

A: Mallows Bay is a nationally-significant, historic, cultural and natural resource. It is the location of the largest assemblage of shipwrecks in the Western Hemisphere. This “ghost fleet”, includes over 100 World War I era wooden vessels whose emergency construction often meant the overhaul and full-occupation of more than 50 shipyards in nearly 20 states. It represented a defining period that witnessed the surge of the US as the world leader in shipbuilding and the creation of the US Merchant Marines. This area is also home to a diverse ecosystem whose synergy with the shipwrecks attracts recreational fishing and the beginnings of an ecotourism industry. Mallows Bay would be the first Sanctuary in the Chesapeake Watershed and the first on a major river – the Potomac.

Q: Who supports the nomination of Mallows Bay/Potomac River as a National Marine Sanctuary?

A: This action enjoys broad support across a diversity of community and constituent groups, including but not limited to: the Charles County Commissioners, the MD Historical Trust, the MD Department of Natural Resources, Federal and state elected officials, the Chesapeake Conservancy, maritime museums, local universities and academic institutions, and local residents. There is no known opposition.