



## National Marine Sanctuaries and Marine National Monuments – What is the Difference?

NOAA's National Marine Sanctuary System includes 15 national marine sanctuaries and two marine national monuments. Though similar, they are two different types of [marine protected areas](#). "Marine protected area" is defined by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature as "a clearly defined geographical space that is recognized, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values."

### National Marine Sanctuaries

The **National Marine Sanctuaries Act** (NMSA) is a federal law that protects designated ocean and Great Lakes areas containing America's most iconic natural and cultural marine resources. The NMSA provides the authority for NOAA to develop a management plan and issue regulations for each sanctuary that guide the sanctuary's day-to-day activities. It also allows NOAA to assess civil penalties (up to \$130,000 per day per violation) for violations of the NMSA or its implementing regulations, and to seek damages from those responsible for injuring sanctuary resources. Pursuant to the NMSA, NOAA may also establish sanctuary advisory councils, which are community-based advisory groups, that provide advice to the sanctuary superintendent on the designation and/or operation of a national marine sanctuary.

NOAA may receive a [nomination](#) for a potential new national marine sanctuary from local communities. Upon review of the nomination to determine if it meets the 11 national significance and management consideration [criteria](#), NOAA may accept the nomination to the inventory of areas that it may consider for sanctuary designation. A nominated site remains on the inventory for five years, after which time the nomination will expire unless NOAA decides to move forward with the designation process or maintain the nomination on the inventory. The sanctuary [designation process](#) may take several years to complete. NOAA or Congress may ultimately designate a national marine sanctuary.

Both the nomination and national marine sanctuary designation processes provide multiple opportunities for public engagement and public comment.



Paddlers travel over a shipwreck in Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary. Photo: Nick Zachar/NOAA.

## Marine National Monuments

National monuments are designated by presidential proclamation under the **Antiquities Act of 1906**, which authorizes the president to establish national monuments on lands owned or controlled by the United States that contain “historic landmarks, historic and prehistoric structures, and other objects of historic or scientific interest.” When national monuments are established in the ocean, they are referred to as “marine national monuments.”

Because the president can create a marine national monument by presidential proclamation, monuments can be designated more quickly than NOAA can designate national marine sanctuaries under the NMSA.

Although no public process is required under the Antiquities Act prior to designation, the designation of marine national monuments is often preceded by public engagement. Additionally, the development of marine national monument management plans and regulations may be carried out through a public review process.

Marine national monuments are typically managed by NOAA and the Department of the Interior; however, other federal and state partners may also play important roles. Ultimately, monument management varies depending on the details of the arrangement established in each presidential proclamation. Currently, there are five marine national monuments in the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone: four in the Pacific and one in the Atlantic.

**While most national marine sanctuaries and marine national monuments are distinctly separate, sometimes the two work together.**

Rose Atoll Marine National Monument, for example, was established in 2009 under the Antiquities Act with the direction that NOAA initiate the process to add the marine areas of the monument to Fagatele Bay National Marine Sanctuary. When Fagatele Bay National Marine Sanctuary became National Marine Sanctuary of American Samoa in 2012, it was expanded to include several other areas, including Rose Atoll.

**These special aquatic places are sources of national pride, and when we take care of them, we strengthen our nation now and for future generations.**



Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument protects many native Hawaiian species, including the endangered Hawaiian monk seal. Photo: James Watt/NOAA



Visiting one of our discovery centers is an excellent way to learn more about the natural and cultural treasures protected in the National Marine Sanctuary System. Photo: Nick Zachar/NOAA

For more information, visit: [sanctuaries.noaa.gov/about/monuments-and-sanctuaries-whats-the-difference.html](https://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/about/monuments-and-sanctuaries-whats-the-difference.html)