

# OUR VISION

## FOR AMERICA'S TREASURED OCEAN PLACES



2017-2022

A FIVE-YEAR STRATEGY FOR THE NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY SYSTEM





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# ABOUT US

We are a network of 13 national marine sanctuaries and two marine national monuments, encompassing more than 600,000 square miles of ocean and Great Lakes waters. We seek to protect the extraordinary scenic beauty, biodiversity, historical connections and economic productivity of these areas so they may continue to serve as the basis for thriving recreation, tourism and commercial activities that drive coastal economies. As stewards of these places, through domestic and international partnerships, we help ensure a healthier ocean, now and for future generations.



*The Office of National Marine Sanctuaries headquarters and the Marine Protected Areas Center are located in Silver Spring, Maryland.*





Photo: Matt McIntosh/NOAA



## PLACES

We protect amazing places. Our comprehensive and community-based approach ensures the long-term protection of nationally and internationally significant areas in the ocean and Great Lakes, while supporting sustainable recreation and commercial uses.



## SYSTEM

Our sanctuaries and monuments are part of a larger system of protected areas across the United States and around the world. Together, we connect and strengthen these treasured places for more effective protection.



## PARTNERS

We depend on partners across town and around the globe to fulfill our mission. Key partners include the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation and other nonprofits, state and federal resource management agencies, over 470 advisory council members and 10,000 volunteers. In turn, our small boats, visitor centers and exhibits support community interests.

**“**What we all do together every day makes a difference for the resources we protect and the communities that rely on them.”

— John Armor, Director, Office of National Marine Sanctuaries

*From here forward, unless otherwise qualified, the terms “sanctuary” and “sanctuaries” are used to collectively refer to or include all national marine sanctuaries and marine national monuments managed by the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries.*

# ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

On behalf of NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries, thank you for taking the time to read *Our Vision for America's Treasured Ocean Places: A Five-Year Strategy for the National Marine Sanctuary System*. As the title suggests, this document is designed to set a five-year course for managing some of our nation's most amazing ocean and Great Lakes places. Charged with caring for more than 600,000 square miles, we have multiple responsibilities, finite resources, and increasing needs. And we are growing; as communities around the country recommend new areas for protection, we are responding. With that in mind, we built this document to address [four principal areas](#):

## ACTIONS

To convey to the American public the key actions we will take over the next five years;

## STAFF

To enhance focus and inspire our staff;

## VALUES

To affirm our core values as an organization; and

## STEWARDSHIP

To deliver on NOAA's responsibilities as stewards of nationally significant ocean places.





To meet these needs, our document has a few key components. We begin with our Mission and Vision, both of which reflect the statutory and executive authorities that guide our work. Next, we express our Core Values, not only to illustrate the attributes and qualities of who we are as an organization, but to define the philosophy behind how we work. At the heart of the document are our five overarching goals which, along with

objectives, outline the specific actions we will take through 2022.

Drafting this plan allowed us to reflect and focus on what is most important at this key moment in our history. It is the result of input from many of our staff members and partners. Although not designed to capture everything we do, we plan to use this document to: keep ourselves organized, effective, and efficient; concentrate our people and

resources on empowering communities to protect these important areas; improve our collaboration within NOAA and expand our partnerships with other government and non-governmental partners; more effectively bring ocean issues to the public; plot our course for our 50th anniversary in 2022; and make our office a more diverse and inclusive place to work.

**WE INVITE YOU TO  
WORK WITH US.**



Photo: EdLyman/NOAA Permit 774-1714

*To learn more about  
all we do, visit  
[sanctuaries.noaa.gov](https://sanctuaries.noaa.gov)*



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# MISSION

WE PROTECT TREASURED  
PLACES IN THE  
**OCEAN**  
AND GREAT  
**LAKES**

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# VISION

A THRIVING SANCTUARY  
SYSTEM THAT PROTECTS OUR  
NATION'S UNDERWATER  
**TREASURES**  
AND INSPIRES MOMENTUM FOR  
A HEALTHY OCEAN

# OUR CORE VALUES



## COMMUNITY

We are dedicated to the communities in which we live and work. We connect with others who feel strongly about the future of our natural, cultural, historic and recreational treasures because together we keep these areas thriving.



## CONSERVATION

We come from different places and backgrounds, but all of us are drawn to the ocean and Great Lakes. We are committed to leaving these places better than we found them because they are critical to communities and to a healthy planet.



## COLLABORATION

We join with a diverse and broad coalition of partners to pursue shared interests. Sanctuaries bring people together and build healthy partnerships.

*“ We are privileged to serve our nation as caretakers of some of the most precious places in our ocean and Great Lakes waters. ”*

— Sarah Fangman, Superintendent, Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary





Photo: Bob Talbot



## RESPECT

The communities and places in which we work reflect diverse cultures, values and ideas. We move forward by acknowledging the past and learning from our different cultural values and experiences.



## ACCOUNTABILITY

We honor our commitment to the American public as stewards of their underwater treasures. We deliver results, practice transparency and strive to exceed expectations.



## CREATIVITY

New ideas and insights are essential to our success. We encourage innovation and flexibility to meet the unique needs of the sanctuary system.



## TEAMWORK

Our success depends on the contributions from everyone on our team. We embrace our diversity of cultures, passions, and talents, and foster a culture of trust, continuous learning, and professional development.

# GOAL ONE

## ENSURE THRIVING SANCTUARIES AND OTHER OCEAN PARKS.

Effective management is essential to protecting marine ecosystems, cultural resources, and the benefits each provide to this and future generations.





## **OBJECTIVE 1.1: Reduce threats to key species and marine habitats.**

### **TO ACHIEVE THIS, WE WILL:**

- Complete the rezoning process for Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.
- Mitigate noise impacts to acoustically sensitive species and habitats.
- Implement vessel strike reduction strategies with the shipping industry and other key partners for West Coast sanctuaries.
- Enhance protection of sanctuary resources by working internationally, including implementing existing and new sister sanctuary agreements.

## **OBJECTIVE 1.2: Protect significant maritime heritage resources.**

### **TO ACHIEVE THIS, WE WILL:**

- Develop and implement system-wide guidance to best meet National Historic Preservation Act requirements.
- Improve understanding and management of heritage resources by completing maritime cultural landscape-focused surveys in at least four sites.
- Work with tribal and indigenous cultural leaders to help protect their resources, properties and practices in existing and potential sanctuaries.

## **OBJECTIVE 1.3: Promote responsible human uses.**

### **TO ACHIEVE THIS, WE WILL:**

- Increase the number of enforcement officers at sanctuaries, working with NOAA's Office of Law Enforcement and other state and federal partners.
- Partner with outdoor recreation groups to better understand access concerns.
- Expand certification programs for boating, charter fishing, and commercial snorkel and dive operations to four additional sanctuaries.
- Develop a comprehensive public engagement program to reduce wildlife disturbance at all sanctuaries.
- Work with boating safety agencies to improve boater awareness of appropriate operating techniques in sanctuaries.
- Install mooring buoys in sanctuaries with sensitive cultural resources (e.g. Thunder Bay) to prevent damage.

## **OBJECTIVE 1.4: Promote resilience and adaptation.**

### **TO ACHIEVE THIS, WE WILL:**

- Assess resources at risk from a changing climate for each sanctuary and initiate adaptation strategies.
- Establish Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary as a sentinel site that brings together science, management and technologies to monitor and raise awareness about ocean acidification.
- Ensure that public education programs incorporate messaging on changing ocean conditions.
- Increase our energy efficiency through the installation of new technologies at two or more sites.



# GOAL TWO

## SAFEGUARD MORE UNDERWATER TREASURES AS NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARIES.

Nationally and internationally significant areas in our ocean and Great Lakes need comprehensive and coordinated protection.



## **OBJECTIVE 2.1:** Incorporate additional nationally significant resources into existing sanctuaries.

### **TO ACHIEVE THIS, WE WILL:**

- Complete the process to expand Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary to include additional reefs and bottom features.
- Complete the process to expand Monitor National Marine Sanctuary to include additional historic shipwrecks.
- Consider sanctuary designation for Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument as part of the interagency management plan development.
- Assess additional boundary change scenarios through management plan review processes.

## **OBJECTIVE 2.2:** Implement designation processes for new areas.

### **TO ACHIEVE THIS, WE WILL:**

- Complete the designation process for the proposed national marine sanctuary at Mollows Bay, Potomac River (Maryland).
- Complete the designation process for the proposed national marine sanctuary at Lake Michigan (Wisconsin).
- Coordinate with NOAA leadership on the initiation of the designation process for additional sites on the sanctuary nomination inventory.

## **OBJECTIVE 2.3:** Identify additional resources of national significance.

### **TO ACHIEVE THIS, WE WILL:**

- Engage with communities, scientists, ocean users and other stakeholders regarding approaches to identify nationally significant resources.
- Synthesize existing information on nationally significant resources into accessible products for communities and decision makers.

**“** *These places represent the innovation, tenacity and entrepreneurial spirit of generations of Americans.”*

Russ Green, Assistant Superintendent, Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary



# GOAL THREE

## INCREASE SUPPORT FOR SANCTUARIES.

Public support is key to effective protection, sustainable use and enjoyment of sanctuaries.



## OBJECTIVE 3.1: Expand recognition of national marine sanctuaries.

### TO ACHIEVE THIS, WE WILL:

- Assess *Earth Is Blue* campaign and web/social media outreach initiatives and expand to an increasingly diversified audience.
- Expand our initiatives with zoos, aquariums and other partner organizations to educate more people about sanctuaries.
- Collaborate with partners to upgrade or establish visitor centers in recently expanded sanctuaries (e.g., Cordell Bank, Greater Farallones and Thunder Bay).
- Increase external investment in sanctuaries, working with the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation.

## OBJECTIVE 3.2: Increase sanctuary engagement.

### TO ACHIEVE THIS, WE WILL:

- Further engage with recreational fishermen, together with state and federal fishery managers, to expand sustainable recreational activities in sanctuaries.
- Increase participation in Get into Your Sanctuary initiatives.
- Grow our volunteer programs for Florida Keys, Flower Garden Banks and Greater Farallones national marine sanctuaries.
- Create new and align existing citizen science programs to meet the science needs and resource protection challenges of sanctuaries.
- Develop a virtual classroom that increases the accessibility of science-based learning for sanctuary communities.

## OBJECTIVE 3.3: Create a vision for the next 50 years of sanctuaries.

### TO ACHIEVE THIS, WE WILL:

- Demonstrate the role of sanctuaries in sustaining coastal communities.
- Work with the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation and other partners to convene ocean experts to advise on future protection of our nation's underwater treasures.
- Provide ocean education programs to inspire the next generation of innovators.

“ Investing in national marine sanctuaries is essential to engage the public in ocean conservation and promote their participation to protect these treasures.”

— Julie Bursek, Education and Outreach Team Lead, Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary



# GOAL FOUR

## DEEPEN OUR UNDERSTANDING OF SANCTUARIES.

Sound science is critical to improving the conservation, management, and sustainable use of marine resources and inspiring ocean stewardship.



Photo: Jeff Kuwabara/UH Marine Option Program

## OBJECTIVE 4.1: Learn more about our sanctuaries.

### TO ACHIEVE THIS, WE WILL:

- Expand partnerships to characterize deep-sea coral and seamount habitats in sanctuaries.
- Expand use of unmanned technologies to better understand impacts from vessel activity and visitor use and to characterize animal behavior.
- Update or replace sanctuary boats, for example Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary's Research Vessel *Tatoosh*, to ensure capacity to study sanctuary resources.
- Expand scientific knowledge about and presence in sanctuaries through partnerships across NOAA and with other research institutions.
- Evaluate the efficacy of management actions in sanctuaries to inform adaptive management.

## OBJECTIVE 4.2: Track and predict conditions and trends.

### TO ACHIEVE THIS, WE WILL:

- Identify and track ecosystem services provided by sanctuaries and their resources.
- Develop condition reports documenting status and trends of natural and cultural resources in conjunction with management plan review processes.
- Synthesize information on predicted impacts to sanctuaries to inform management decisions.
- Develop and implement plans to control invasive species in sanctuaries.

## OBJECTIVE 4.3: Understand the value of sanctuaries to our nation.

### TO ACHIEVE THIS, WE WILL:

- Complete assessments of the type, distribution and intensity of uses in Gray's Reef and Florida Keys and the proposed Mallows Bay, Potomac River (Maryland) and Lake Michigan (Wisconsin) sanctuaries.
- Conduct valuation studies to characterize the impact of our education and citizen science programs.
- Assess, document and communicate the value of the sanctuary to whale watch operators in Channel Islands and dive and fishing operators in Florida Keys.

“

*We marvel at nature's pulse and power. Our conservation science programs help us understand and protect this vital ocean.”*

— Steve Gittings, Chief Scientist, Office of National Marine Sanctuaries



# GOAL FIVE

## ENSURE THE OFFICE OF NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARIES IS A GREAT PLACE TO WORK.

Our people are our most important asset. Their competence, commitment, diversity and creativity are vital to achieving NOAA's mission and our nation's interests.



## OBJECTIVE 5.1: Encourage a culture of collaboration, inclusion and respect.

### TO ACHIEVE THIS, WE WILL:

- Create opportunities for staff growth and collaboration through short-term assignments and team-building activities.
- Enlist diverse and talented professionals through fellowships, internships and volunteer opportunities.
- Empower our diversity and inclusion committee to provide leadership strategies for sustaining positive change that promotes a safe, welcoming and professionally challenging work environment.

## OBJECTIVE 5.2: Increase staff satisfaction and performance.

### TO ACHIEVE THIS, WE WILL:

- Ensure supervisors promote a positive work-life balance.
- Create opportunities for staff to provide feedback to leadership and supervisors.

## OBJECTIVE 5.3: Invest in our people and their professional development.

### TO ACHIEVE THIS, WE WILL:

- Encourage employees and supervisors to assess and prioritize employee training and develop individual development plans.
- Establish an orientation for new staff, including information on employment, performance management, time and attendance, and travel.
- Develop a Core Policies and Procedures Handbook and ongoing training for best business practices and performance.
- Support leadership and management training for supervisors and team leads.
- Encourage and facilitate formal and informal mentoring opportunities.

“*Sanctuaries aren't just places; they're communities. By investing in people and diversity, we invest in the future of our ocean and Great Lakes.*”

— Liz Weinberg, Social Media Coordinator, Office of National Marine Sanctuaries/National Marine Sanctuary Foundation



# ■ MAKING IT HAPPEN

A strategic plan must be put into action. The ideas, initiatives and priorities in this plan are only of value when we collectively integrate them into our day-to-day activities throughout NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries.

*We are committed to having our team and our partners recognize the goals set out in this plan and, more importantly, their role in helping to achieve them. We intend to track results, ensuring our actions are having the desired impact. We look forward to working with all of you to make this happen.*





## TO DO SO, WE WILL:

- Create an environment that invites our staff and partners to be active participants in achieving our mission, objectives and priorities.
- Prioritize the actions identified in existing planning documents that align with this strategy.
- Align revisions to sanctuary management plans and employee performance plans with the intent of this strategy.
- Use this strategy to guide future decisions, including resource allocation and staffing prioritization.





NATIONAL MARINE  
SANCTUARIES