



Dear Members of Congress:

As supporters, stakeholders, and partners of America's National Marine Sanctuary System, we strongly urge Congress to support the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries at no less than \$65.5 million in Fiscal Year (FY) 2020.

We respectfully request that you provide \$57 million for Sanctuaries and Marine Protected Areas, within the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Operations, Research, and Facilities (ORF) account; and, \$8.5 million for Marine Sanctuaries Construction, within NOAA's Procurement, Acquisition, and Construction (PAC) account.

The National Marine Sanctuary System is our essential network of protected waters held in trust for all Americans. Encompassing more than 600,000 square miles of our ocean, coasts, and Great Lakes, national marine sanctuaries conserve some of the Nation's most critical natural, historic, and cultural resources. They are home to millions of species, preserve our nation's maritime heritage, and promote access for exploration and world-class outdoor recreation. Sanctuaries are vital to maintaining the healthy ocean and Great Lakes ecosystems that underpin our productive coastal economies. They generate \$8 billion annually in local economies and support numerous jobs and businesses in fishing, tourism, recreation, and scientific research.

Nationwide, communities are coming together to conserve our ocean, coasts, and Great Lakes with expansions at existing national marine sanctuaries to new nominations and designations for the first time in 19 years. Engaging communities as stewards of these protected waters makes sanctuaries unique and provides a comprehensive, highly participatory approach to managing and conserving marine ecosystems and the Great Lakes for current and future generations.

Public participation is a hallmark of sanctuaries and underscores their dedication to civic engagement and leadership. From nomination to day-to-day management, communities are at the core of national marine sanctuaries. More than 440 sanctuary advisory council members represent stakeholders across these communities in order to provide advice and recommendations directly to sanctuary managers. And thousands of volunteers devote their time and effort to protect sanctuaries for future generations. In 2018, sanctuary volunteers



contributed nearly 130,000 hours across the system, contributing more than \$3.16 million in valuable support.

In 2022, the Nation will mark the 50th anniversary of the National Marine Sanctuaries Act. As the Nation moves towards this anniversary, we need to invest in America's protected waters, and the communities and businesses that depend upon them. We hope that the appropriations request for FY 2020 will serve as the beginning of a deliberate and strategic investment in national marine sanctuaries building up to the 50th anniversary. Robust funding will ensure sound management of these treasured place and the mission critical tools, like small boats; strengthen community engagement and stewardship of sanctuaries; and improve our understanding of marine and Great Lakes ecosystems.

**For sanctuary Operations, Research and Facilities (ORF) funding, we urge Congress to provide \$57 million, including:**

\$3 million to support growth in community-based sanctuaries, respond to the groundswell of communities nationwide seeking to expand sites or propose and designate new ones, and increase funds for management at existing sanctuaries.

\$2 million to conduct cooperative conservation science and research programs within sanctuaries that will improve resources management and advance innovative public-private partnerships.

\$1 million for national blue business stewardship efforts for marine sanctuaries to bolster visitation, enhance visitor experience, and drive growth in the blue economy through fishing, diving, ports and shipping, recreation, hospitality and tourism. Similar to America's national parks, marine sanctuaries support tourism and a robust recreational industry. Such efforts will also set the stage for the 50th anniversary of the National Marine Sanctuary System.

\$2 million for public education, outreach, and awareness efforts at individual sites in the National Marine Sanctuary System to show how the sanctuaries can serve as a model for protecting marine ecosystems around the world, explore beyond our horizons using new technologies, and connect communities to their marine and Great Lakes wonders.



**For sanctuary Procurement, Acquisition, and Construction (PAC) funding, we propose \$8.5 million, including:**

\$4.5 million to replace vessels that are mission critical to operations, management, and enforcement and provide investments that create jobs through shipbuilding.

\$2 million for visitor centers, facilities and signage improvements and ADA compliance that anchor tourism and recreation in communities.

\$2 million in a Sanctuary Challenge Fund. The Sanctuary Challenge Fund is an innovative approach, based on the model of the highly successful National Park Service Centennial Fund, to finance signature projects and programs across the National Marine Sanctuary System. The public investment would be matched at least 1:1 by nonfederal donations to improve the sanctuary visitor experience and strengthen public engagement as part of the ramp up to the 50th anniversary.

We strongly urge you to invest in America's community-based national marine sanctuaries by supporting the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries at no less than \$65.5 million in FY 2020. Your support for marine sanctuaries will send a powerful message about the benefits of a healthy ocean and Great Lakes, and underscore the continuing ecological and historical value of America's underwater national treasures. Thank you for your consideration of this request.