



**National
Marine Sanctuary
Foundation**

301.608.3040 | 8601 Georgia Avenue, Suite 510, Silver Spring, MD 20910

Dear Members of Congress:

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, marine sanctuaries, 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 healthy ocean and Great Lakes ecosystems that underpin our productive coastal economies.

We appreciate the \$1 million increase provided to the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries in FY 2020, and we strongly urge Congress to provide no less than \$66.5 million in FY 2021 to support the entire National Marine Sanctuary System. We respectfully request that you provide:

- \$58 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.

Communities across the country are coming together to conserve our ocean, coasts, and Great Lakes with expansions at existing national marine sanctuaries to new nominations and designations. 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 FY 2019, sanctuary volunteers contributed 118,946 hours across the system, contributing more than \$3 million in valuable support and demonstrating the importance of community-based stewardship.

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. Robust funding will ensure sound management of these treasured places through strong community engagement in stewardship; support of mission critical tools, like small boats; active restoration of marine environments; preservation of maritime resources; and improved understanding of marine and Great Lakes ecosystems.

For sanctuary Operations, Research and Facilities (ORF) funding, we urge Congress to provide \$58 million. This is an investment in the growing number of communities seeking to expand sanctuaries or propose and designate new ones, and increase funds for management at existing sanctuaries. Our marine sanctuaries are living laboratories to conduct cooperative science and



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research that will improve resource management and advance innovative public-private partnerships. Sanctuaries bolster tourism and a robust recreational industry, promote sustainable visitation, engage blue businesses in conservation stewardship, and drive growth in the blue economy through fishing, diving, ports and shipping, recreation, hospitality and tourism. They are the epicenter for active restoration to recover healthy, productive marine and Great Lakes ecosystems that support our economy and our communities. Sanctuaries are outdoor classrooms for public education, outreach, and awareness efforts to show how sanctuaries can serve as a model for protecting marine ecosystems around the world, exploring beyond our horizons using new technologies, and connecting communities to their marine and Great Lakes wonders.

For sanctuary Procurement, Acquisition, and Construction (PAC) funding, we propose \$8.5 million. We are requesting \$4.5 million to replace vessels that are mission critical to operations, management, and enforcement and provide investments that create jobs through shipbuilding. ONMS maintains a fleet of small boats that is critical to their mission. These small boats allow managers and partners to assess, monitor, research and protect national marine sanctuaries. This includes: responding to entangled whales to give them a chance for survival; conducting scientific missions to assess ocean and Great Lakes health or preserve maritime history and culture; maintain mooring buoys that support tourism and recreation; test new technologies and tools that advance our understanding of marine ecosystems; and, enforce laws and regulations vital to resource protection and human safety. Increasing demands on an aging fleet are leading to higher operating costs as well as near- and long-term challenges to maintaining safe, efficient, and effective operations. To continue on-the-water science and conservation programs that strengthen management of our ocean and Great Lakes, investment in recapitalizing aging vessels across the National Marine Sanctuary System in addition to upgrades, retrofits, and life-cycle extensions is critical. We are also requesting \$2 million for visitor centers, facilities and signage improvements and ADA compliance that anchor tourism and recreation in communities. Lastly, to spur public-private partnerships, we request \$2 million in a Sanctuary Challenge 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 \$66.5 million in FY 2021. 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.