



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. Marine sanctuaries and monuments are home to millions of species, preserve our nation's maritime heritage, and promote access for exploration and world-class outdoor recreation. The conservation and sustainable use of marine ecosystems and biodiversity are vital to maintaining a healthy ocean and Great Lakes, addressing the climate crisis, and underpinning productive coastal economies.

We appreciate the \$2 million increase provided to the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries in FY 2022, and we strongly urge Congress to provide no less than:

- \$72 million for Sanctuaries and Marine Protected Areas, within the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Operations, Research and Facilities (ORF) account; and,
- \$10 million for Marine National Monuments, within NOAA ORF
- \$8.5 million for Marine Sanctuaries Construction, within NOAA Procurement, Acquisition, and Construction (PAC) account.
- \$3 million for Marine National Monuments Construction, within NOAA PAC.

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 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 community 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.

The ocean is central to mitigating climate change; it has absorbed 90 percent of the climate system's excess heat. Climate change is disproportionately impacting the ocean, causing changes in water temperature, ocean acidification, and deoxygenation, which changes ocean circulation and chemistry, raises sea levels, increases storm intensity, and changes the diversity and abundance of marine species. These impacts threaten the physical well-being, economic prosperity, and food security of communities along our coasts and businesses that rely on marine resources and transportation. Climate change weakens marine ecosystems' ability to provide critical ecological services and natural infrastructure for climate resilience. Sanctuaries protect ecologically and biologically significant marine habitats and regulate human activities that can cause environmental degradation. The expansion of the National Marine Sanctuary System and additional marine conservation measures can reduce the ocean and Great Lakes stressors and help build climate resilience.

For sanctuary Operations, Research and Facilities (ORF) funding, we urge Congress to provide at least \$72 million and \$10 million in ORF for marine national monuments. ONMS serves as the trustee for more than 600,000 square miles of marine and Great Lakes waters. These waters span from the South Pacific to the North Atlantic, and from



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the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico. They include our Nation's most significant marine ecosystems including our *largest* monument, Papahānaumokuākea; are deepest underwater seamount in the Serengeti of the Sea, Monterey Bay; and, are only continental barrier reef in the Florida Keys. At its current budget level, ONMS spends on average \$0.14/acre to support management, scientific research, and education in marine sanctuaries and two marine monuments. For comparison, the National Park Service spends an average of \$29.76/acre for units in the National Park System, the NOAA Office of Coastal Management spends an average \$28.08/acre estuaries in the National Estuarine Research Reserve System, and the Fish and Wildlife Service spends on average \$25.01/acre for refugees the National Wildlife Refuge System. ONMS's budget is acutely under-resourced compared to its mission and in comparison to other natural resource management agencies.

The requested increase is an investment in the growing number of communities seeking to expand sanctuaries or nominate and designate new ones, to initiate the sanctuary designation process for Papahānaumokuākea and the Northern Marianas marine monuments, and to increase funds for science, management and public outreach at existing sanctuaries and monuments. Marine sanctuaries and monuments are listening posts to improve our understanding of how climate change impacts marine resources. They are living laboratories to strengthen cooperative science and research to improve management, build resilience, and advance innovative public-private partnerships. Sanctuaries bolster tourism and 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 ecosystems that support our economy and our communities. Sanctuaries are outdoor classrooms for 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 at least \$8.5 million and \$3 million for marine monuments. This funding will support replacement or repair of 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 marine sanctuaries. These efforts include responding to entangled whales, conducting scientific missions, maintaining mooring buoys, testing new technologies and tools, and enforcing regulations. Increasing demands on an aging fleet lead to higher operating costs and near- and long-term challenges to maintaining safe, efficient, and effective operations. To continue on-the-water science and conservation programs that strengthen the 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. Funding would also support improvements for visitor centers, facilities and signage; partnerships with aquariums to provide education and outreach about sanctuaries and monuments; and support ADA compliance. These activities anchor tourism, recreation and public engagement in communities.

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 \$93.5 million in FY 2022. Your support for sanctuaries and monuments sends a powerful message about the benefits of a healthy ocean and Great Lakes, and underscores the continuing ecological and historical value of America's underwater national treasures. Thank you for your consideration of this request.