

October 13, 2021

The Honorable Brenda Mallory
Chair
Council on Environmental Quality
730 Jackson Place NW
Washington, DC 20506

The Honorable Gina Raimondo
Secretary
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20230

The Honorable Deb Haaland
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Chair Mallory, Secretary Raimondo, and Secretary Haaland:

We urge the Administration to immediately initiate the designation of the Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary and write to express our strong support to include this national treasure within the National Marine Sanctuary System.

The proposed Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary (NMS) would protect sacred Chumash sites, feeding grounds for numerous species of whales and dolphins, sea otter populations, kelp forests, and is home to vital commercial and recreational fisheries. In the face of the dual crises of climate change and biodiversity loss and their resulting impacts to communities, culture, traditions, and economies, national marine sanctuaries are critically important management tools to conserve marine biodiversity and safeguard the local communities and economies that depend on a healthy ocean ecosystem.

The proposed sanctuary protects waters that are essential to the heritage of the Chumash, one of the few ocean-going bands among the First People of the Pacific Coast. The island and marine ecosystems co-evolved with the Chumash and their culture and traditions that continue on today. The more holistic perspective on stewardship that this knowledge offers is invaluable for equitable, effective, community-led management and collaborative conservation moving forward. The sanctuary designation would continue to strengthen indigenous perspectives and cultural values in ocean conservation by supporting locally led and locally designed conservation efforts and providing support for Tribal nation priorities.

The waters off the Central Coast of California are some of the most biologically diverse and ecologically productive regions in the world. Fed by deepwater upwelling and ocean currents, the nutrient rich waters off San Luis Obispo and northern Santa Barbara Counties create an incredibly productive feeding ground that attracts a menagerie of marine wildlife. These diverse habitats are crucial for vulnerable species and constitute critical habitat for several culturally and ecologically important species.

Our national marine sanctuaries conserve areas of national significance in our oceans and Great Lakes for future generations, advance critical scientific research and citizen science, build resilience to address climate change and biodiversity loss, and support education and engagement to allow more students and children to learn about America's rich natural and cultural history.

The devastating oil spill in Orange County, CA that is spoiling beaches, killing marine wildlife, and threatening local wetlands, demonstrates that the Administration must do more immediately to protect our ocean and coasts. We urge the Administration to designate Chumash Heritage NMS to allow current and future generations to enjoy, appreciate, and benefit from these underwater national treasures.

National Marine Sanctuary Foundation
Azul
Brown Girl Surf
The California Academy of Sciences
California Association of Zoos and Aquariums (CAZA)
Center for Biological Diversity
Cordell Marine Sanctuary Foundation
Creation Justice Ministries
EarthEcho International
Environment America
Environment California
Environmental Action Committee of West Marin
Environmental Defense Center
Friends of the Earth
Giant Kelp Restoration Project
Greater Farallones Association
GreenLatinos
Greenpeace USA
Healthy Ocean Coalition
Hispanic Access Foundation
Inland Ocean Coalition
 Alaska Chapter
 Arizona Chapter
 Buffalo Chapter
 Colorado Chapter
 University of Colorado Chapter
 Colorado State University Chapter
 Central Texas Chapter
 Great Lakes Chapter
 Illinois Chapter
 University of Michigan Chapter
 Montana Chapter
 North Texas Chapter
 Utah Chapter
 Washington DC Chapter
 Wyoming Chapter
The League of Conservation Voters
The League of Women Voters of Santa Barbara
The League of Women Voters of The Santa Maria Valley
Marine Conservation Institute
Monterey Bay Aquarium
Monterey MPA Collaborative

Mystic Aquarium
Nassau Hiking & Outdoor Club
National Aquarium
National Audubon Society
National Ocean Protection Coalition
National Parks Conservation Association
Ocean Conservation Research
Ocean Defenders Alliance
Ocean Futures Society and Jean-Michel Cousteau
Only One
San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance
Santa Cruz Climate Action Network
SeaLegacy
Shark Stewards
Sierra Club Santa Lucia Chapter
Surfrider Foundation
The Ocean Foundation
The Ocean Project
WILD COAST
WILD Foundation
Wildlife Conservation Society