



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

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 applaud the Administration initiating the designation process 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, hotspots of biodiversity, and productive marine habitats along the California coast. It includes feeding grounds for numerous species of whales and dolphins, sea otter populations, kelp forests, and is home to vital commercial and recreational fisheries. And in the face of climate change, warming oceans, losses in marine biodiversity, and impacts to communities, culture, traditions, and economies, national marine sanctuaries are critically important management tools to conserve marine biodiversity as well as safeguard the local economies and people that depend on a healthy ocean ecosystem.

These waters 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. Their long standing historical relationships with land and sea run deep, producing wellsprings of traditional ecological knowledge and wisdom. The more holistic perspective on stewardship that this knowledge offers is invaluable for equitable, effective, community-led management and collaborative conservation moving forward. As the Biden Administration's recently released America the Beautiful Report acknowledges, "the most effective and enduring conservation strategies are those that reflect the priorities, needs, and perspectives of the families and communities that know, live, work, and care for the lands and waters." 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.

Designation of the Chumash Heritage NMS would also protect submerged historical and cultural resources, including 40 known historic shipwrecks in the region. The area encompassed by the proposed sanctuary includes the wrecks of Honda Point - site of the Navy's worst peacetime loss of ships as well as the gold-laden steamship S.S. Yankee Blade. Sanctuary designation would preserve these wrecks allowing for study and interpretation of these historically, culturally and archaeologically significant historical treasures.

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



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off San Luis Obispo and northern Santa Barbara Counties create an incredibly productive feeding ground that attracts a menagerie of marine wildlife. The proposed sanctuary contains a key transition zone that includes vital upwelling of great bioproductivity supporting kelp forests, wetlands, estuaries and rookeries. Onshore, the Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes are the largest remaining dune system south of San Francisco and the second largest in California. These diverse habitats are crucial for vulnerable species such as the endangered western snowy plover and the threatened southern sea otter. They also constitute critical habitat for several culturally and ecologically important species including the Chinook salmon and the leatherback sea turtle. Sustaining these vulnerable populations requires maintaining ecosystem diversity through protection of this wide variety of representative and unique habitats present within Chumash Heritage NMS.

We support the addition of Chumash Heritage NMS to America's National Marine Sanctuary System. The comprehensive, ecosystem-based approach to protection that sanctuary status brings will promote long term conservation of Chumash cultural resources, sanctuary waters, wildlife, and habitats. The sanctuary would also support the deep, long standing relationships coastal communities have with these waters.

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. 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.

Cc:

Dr. Rick Spinrad  
Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere & NOAA Administrator  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
U.S. Department of Commerce  
1401 Constitution Ave NW  
Washington, DC 20230

William Douros  
Regional Director, ONMS West Coast Region  
99 Pacific Street, Bldg. 100F  
Monterey, CA 93940