

Your Comments Are Due on the Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary

Be a part of history in the making

The finish line is in sight for the biggest environmental win for the Central Coast in living memory.

On August 25, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) released for public review the Environmental Assessment and draft management documents for the proposed [Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary](#).

A 60-day public comment period is now underway, which will be followed by an internal review, which will be followed by the designation of the marine sanctuary.



This means the last chance for the public to weigh in with NOAA on the proposed designation documents -- which will determine the final boundaries, permitted activities, and general regulations of the marine sanctuary -- is right now, and ends on October 25.

More than 30,000 people, including [hundreds of Central Coast residents](#), elected officials, more than [30 regional businesses](#), and eight conservation organizations with local Central Coast chapters expressed support for the marine sanctuary during [NOAA's initial designation scoping process](#) in January 2022. We're looking to generate similar levels of support during this final comment period.

We are carefully reviewing the draft environmental assessment and management plan and will have suggested comment language soon. We already know the boundaries proposed to NOAA have been shortened. As originally proposed, the marine sanctuary would cover 7,000 square miles of ocean spanning 156 miles of coastline between Cambria in San Luis Obispo County and Point Conception in Santa Barbara County. It would bridge the gap between the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary and the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary. The alternative version proposed by NOAA would cover 5600 square miles of ocean spanning 134 miles of coastline, from Montaña de Oro State Park south to Goleta and the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary.

Designation of the marine sanctuary is important because these waters include internationally significant undersea features, wildlife habitat, and submerged Chumash sites dating back more than 9,000 years. Unique to this region, the proposed marine sanctuary encompasses the western slope of the underwater Santa Lucia Bank at the base of the continental shelf, a 3,000-meter-deep submarine canyon, three major nutrient upwellings, spawning areas and rookeries, and feeding areas and migration lanes for 13 species of whales and dolphins.

It has been estimated that a national marine sanctuary off the Central Coast will generate at least [\\$23 million in economic activity and create 600 new jobs.](#)

Want to be a part of history? If you are a Sierra Club member in San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara or Ventura Counties, you are about to get a postcard with a QR code you can scan with your phone and add your name to our support petition to NOAA.

You can also submit your own comments online or by mail (Check chumashsanctuary.org for talking points)

Submit all electronic public comments through the Federal eRulemaking Portal, www.regulations.gov. Search for "NOAA-NOS-2021-0080." Click the "Comment" icon, complete the required fields, and enter or attach your comments. Or submit by mail to:

Paul Michel
NOAA Sanctuaries West Coast Regional Office
9 Pacific Street, Building 100F
Monterey, CA 939409

Public Comment Meetings

ONMS will host in-person and virtual meetings on the dates listed below. Members of the public can comment on any aspect of the proposal.

Oral public comments given at both the in-person and virtual meetings are limited to three minutes. Individuals who plan on attending the virtual public meeting to give oral comments are encouraged to register in advance of the meeting using the registration link below. In order to provide oral public comment during the virtual meeting, participants must join the webinar online.

All public comments received, including any associated names, will be captured and included in the meeting minutes transcript, will be public, and will be maintained by NOAA as part of its administrative record. All comments will be publicly available via regulations.gov. NOAA may take audio recordings of the public meetings, including the public comment portion of the meetings.

Public Comment Meeting 1 (in-person):

Date and time: Monday, Sept. 25, 2023; 5 PM PDT
Location: County of San Luis Obispo Board of Supervisors Hearing Room
Address: 1055 Monterey Street, San Luis Obispo, CA 93408

Public Comment Meeting 2 (in-person):

Date and time: Wednesday, Sept. 27, 2023; 5 PM PDT
Location: Dick DeWees Community Center
Address: 1120 West Ocean Avenue, Lompoc, CA 93436

Public Comment Meeting 3 (online):

Date and time: Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023; 1 PM PDT
Registration: <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/7569323252287031132>

Reading Material

[Washington Post – front page](#) Sunday, July 30, 2023 – “Tribe fights to preserve California coastline and its own culture.”

[San Luis Obispo Tribune – Sunday Special Edition](#) – “What’s in the ocean water off SLO County’s coast? Scientists are listening to find out.” NOAA research piece about the passive acoustic monitoring studies in Chumash Heritage waters, with a map of species identified and where they’re located. [Watch the underwater footage.](#)

[NPR - Morning Edition](#) – “After decades, a tribe’s vision for a new marine sanctuary could be coming true.”



Karl Kempton



At the boundary waters

On August 18, the mural “Tomol Rides Wishtoyo” by Chumash artist John Khus, dedicated to the First Peoples of the Central Coast, was unveiled on the wall of the Cambria post office, near the proposed northern border of the Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary.