

## A Memorable Evening with Jean-Michel Cousteau June 20, 2016



J-M Cousteau with Prof. Douglas McCauley

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### *From Chapter reports*

The Santa Lucia and Los Padres Chapters of the Sierra Club – comprised of the Club’s California members in San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties -- hosted “An Evening with Jean-Michel Cousteau,” at the Santa Barbara Library’s Faulkner Gallery on June 20.

The free event, co-sponsored by Surfrider, La Isla Fashion Group, the Ocean Futures Society and the Northern Chumash Tribal Council, was the hottest ticket in town, with nearly all 190 seats taken within a day of the Sierra Club’s announcement. Its purpose was to introduce the proposed Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary off California’s Central Coast.

The packed house heard from the legendary explorer and environmentalist, who serves as an ambassador for the Ocean Futures Society and impassioned diplomat for the environment. Along with marine biologist Douglas McCauley, Northern Chumash Tribal Council Administrator Fred Collins and Santa Lucia Chapter Director Andrew Christie, Cousteau spoke to the importance of designating new national marine sanctuaries and took questions from the audience.

The evening began with a brief description by Collins of the cultural connection of the Chumash to Mother Ocean, the coastal waters of central California. McCauley, an assistant professor of ecology, evolution and marine biology at the University of California Santa Barbara, one of the institutions with a research focus on the marine

region proposed for sanctuary protection, followed with a presentation on the comparative rate of change in the terrestrial and marine environment over centuries.

McCauley, who wrote an op ed in the Santa Barbara Independent the week before entitled “Last remnants of ‘wild’ in the wild west,” said it is important to be aware of change underway in the oceans. Unlike much of our terrestrial environment, “wildness in our oceans is still very much alive off our coasts. Today we take on the responsibility of deciding if and how we want to pass the gift of this wildness forward to the next generations of Californians.”

Cousteau was introduced by Christie, who noted that the distinguished explorer and educator was thrown overboard by his father at the age of seven with newly invented SCUBA gear on his back and has been exploring the ocean realm ever since. (Cousteau told the audience, “They put sardines in salt to preserve them; that’s why I dive all the time”).

With more than 80 films to his credit, including a 7-part series for PBS, Cousteau brought footage from his PBS special “America’s Underwater Treasures,” featuring his US National Marine Sanctuary System Expedition Team -- Cousteau, his son Fabien, daughter Céline, and his team of expert divers that set out to investigate for the first time all thirteen National Marine Sanctuaries. The team ventured above and below the water off the coasts of Michigan, Texas, Florida, North Carolina, Georgia, Massachusetts, California, Washington, Hawai’i and American Samoa on a mission to introduce viewers to America’s marine sanctuaries.

“I’ve had the privilege of meeting many of the Chumash people and I started to understand how connected they are to the ocean,” Cousteau told the Faulkner Gallery audience. He graphically described the treasures of the sea as natural capital requiring our investment, but “We’re gobbling up the capital and heading toward bankruptcy.”

In the introduction to his Explore the National Marine Sanctuaries book series, Cousteau wrote, “Created more than 100 years after the national park system, these underwater treasures have been more difficult to explore and we have worked hard to learn their true value. By the time we did, we also discovered they were already at risk. Their very existence speaks to a reality that we now understand. It is clear they protect and promote the abundance and diversity of marine life essential to a healthy ocean. I am gratified that our leaders have seen the wisdom of placing a priority on protecting them now and for the future.”

McCauley told the audience “In the next several decades we will be making the decisions that decide what the future of the oceans will be. It is vitally important that we have the science we need to understand change, but the power and responsibility to use this data to effect change lies with you. Your successes will do more to shape the future of the oceans than ours will – I can’t tell you how excited I am to be here to join in on conversation about how to do this well.”

By the following day, more than a hundred people had signed onto [the Sierra Club's online petition](#) to the White House and NOAA Administrator asking them to begin the designation process for the Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary.



June 20, 2016 Cousteau event