



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL OCEAN SERVICE
Office of National Marine Sanctuaries | West Coast Region
99 Pacific Street, Bldg 100, Suite F
Monterey, CA 93940

TO: John Armor, Director

FROM: William J. Douros, Regional Director 

DATE: September 22, 2020

SUBJECT: Recommendation on Five-Year Review of CHNMS Nomination

Summary

In collaboration with various headquarters' units and other west coast sanctuary sites, the ONMS West Coast Regional Office has been leading an agency review of the nomination for Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary (CHNMS) as it approaches its five-year anniversary on the inventory of new sites for potential designation as a national marine sanctuary. This memo and the attached technical report provide our recommendation for your action as director. We recommend the nomination be retained in the inventory for an additional five years.

Background

In November 2019, NOAA further clarified the process this agency will use in reviewing sanctuary nominations already accepted into the inventory but not yet advanced for designation, when they reach the five year anniversary. The CHNMS nomination reaches its five-year anniversary on October 5, 2020. Consistent with that process, ONMS sent a letter to the original nominator, the Northern Chumash Tribal Council, in March 2020, asking for their views on the degree to which the nomination continues to meet, or no longer meets, or is in other ways relevant to the original 11 sanctuary nomination process (SNP) criteria. We opened a public comment period seeking written public comments between May 4 – June 15, 2020; staff also held a virtual public meeting on May 27, 2020. We developed a new web offering to provide information about the five-year review process (CHNMS is the first nomination to go through this process) and host, as necessary, new information relevant to this review.

The public comment period produced a considerable level of interest in the review of the CHNMS nomination, totaling 14,357 comments and signatures (see Background section and Table 1 in the attached Technical Report). Of these comments, 28 people spoke and provided comments at the virtual public meeting, 815 provided unique written comments from diverse geographic perspectives. An additional 13,514 provided comments as either form letters or signatures to several petitions; self-identified hometowns from these commenters were from the area adjacent to the nomination, from around California particularly southern California, and from around the country for one of the petitions. Multiple comment letters were signed by one or several entities on behalf of other like-minded individuals or organizations.

Olympic Coast
National Marine Sanctuary
115 E. Railroad Avenue
Suite 301
Port Angeles, WA 98362

Cordell Bank
National Marine Sanctuary
P.O. Box 159
Olema, CA 94950

Gulf of the Farallones
National Marine Sanctuary
The Presidio
991 Marine Drive
San Francisco, CA 94129

Monterey Bay
National Marine Sanctuary
99 Pacific Street
Suite 455A
Monterey, CA 93940

Channel Islands
National Marine Sanctuary
U.C. Santa Barbara
Ocean Science Bldg 514, MC 6155
Santa Barbara, CA 93106



ONMS requested public comments to seek insights and new information that would guide its determination of the nomination's continued relevance, or not, to the 11 SNP criteria. Roughly 44 of the comments provided additional information or areas to study with regard to at least one of the first 10 criteria. The 11th criterion (MC-7, community support expressed by a broad range of interests for the nomination) was addressed in practically all of the comments; 18 commenters did not provide a position on the question of extending the CHNMS nomination. ONMS staff used these public comments, coupled with staff research, to assess each of the 11 SNP criteria to determine to what degree the nomination is, or is not, still relevant to the criteria. This memo provides very brief synopses of new developments related to these criteria, The attached technical report provides more, yet still summarized, information. In all cases, the analysis focuses on what is new since the nomination was accepted in October 2015.

NS-1 – Natural Resources and Ecological Qualities

The attached technical report identifies considerable new information that has been developed by scientists and others regarding the national significance of the natural resources and ecological qualities of this proposed sanctuary. Examples include:

- Ocean productivity remains high, in particular for forage species, although some declines have been noted
- The area remains critically important to endangered and threatened species, with examples provided regarding humpback whales, sea otters and black abalone
- Important new discoveries regarding new species and deep sea habitats have been made since October 2015

NS-2 – Maritime Heritage Resources

The area remains very important with regard to maritime heritage, with some very significant, new advances regarding:

- Shipwreck discoveries – predominantly the USCG *McCulloch*
- Improved conservation of shipwrecks via national historic register, specifically *Montebello*
- New explorations and science regarding paleo-shorelines

NS-3 – Economic Uses

The area proposed as CHNMS continues to support economic activities that depend on conservation of resources.

- Commercial fish landings in the two ports adjacent to the proposed sanctuary – Morro Bay/Port San Luis and Santa Barbara – resulted in landings of nearly 35 million pounds and a value of \$90.6 million dollars (2018 dollars), between 2015-2018
- As a measure of the importance to tourism, visitors to San Luis Obispo County spent \$1.7 billion in 2017, resulting in \$79 million in tax revenue
- While not dependent on conservation of natural or cultural resources, existing and potential offshore energy production is an important economic factor in this area

NS-4 – Publicly-derived Benefits

There have been some new positive developments related to public access and use of public spaces, both local and state, largely in San Luis Obispo County. Similar changes, or potential changes, to private holdings in Santa Barbara County could provide additional public benefits through coastal access, aesthetic preservation and conservation of coastal resources. Some aesthetic benefits could also result if nascent plans to remove oil and gas platforms materialize. Potential aesthetic impacts in the area could result from wind farms planned in and adjacent to the proposed CHNMS.

MC-1 – Research in Marine Science

Perhaps none of the criteria had more new developments, and opportunities, than for MC-1 dealing with research in marine science including marine archaeology. Some highlights, several of which involve ONMS staff, include:

- Paleo-shoreline research, much of which was developed and conducted locally at CINMS by Ocean Exploration Trust
- Historical climate research driven by benthic seafloor sampling
- Deep sea coral and other benthic science endeavors, including seafloor mapping
- Kelp forest community health and resilience; related monitoring of state-designated MPAs
- Collaborative research on the impacts of energy development in partnership with BOEM: wind farm planning and development; oil and gas-related research; and studies on impacts of oil platform abandonment and removal

MC-2 – Opportunities for Education

Staff evaluation of potential collaboration opportunities regarding education noted sanctuary-conducted education related to deep sea science, for instance via the *Nautilus* expeditions, and similar sanctuary-conducted outreach related to maritime heritage resources such as the *Montebello* and *McCulloch* shipwrecks. ONMS grant opportunities such as BWET and Ocean Guardians, both of which have expanded since 2015, also offer opportunities for extending the beneficial outcomes of education and outreach in this area.

MC-3 – Threats

Considerable public input was directed to assessing how threats to the resources in this area have changed – largely all new threats or expanded from previously-identified threats.

- Threats posed from climate change are perhaps the gravest to resources in the proposed CHNMS, including impacts caused by ocean acidification, rising sea levels, and broad-scale ecosystem disruptions like to upwelling or species range shifts
- Threats from offshore energy development are pronounced in this area, including wind farm development, continuing oil and gas production, and abandonment of existing facilities; as noted elsewhere, these are also opportunities to advance marine science as well
- Closure of Diablo Canyon nuclear power plant is now more certain and is expected to have adverse as well as beneficial marine impacts that at present are difficult to quantify with certainty
- The risks and impacts from introduction of introduced species are substantial

MC-4 – Unique Conservation and Management Value

The unique conservation and management value a sanctuary could provide this area remains largely strong and unchanged since 2015. Two commenters noted that the sanctuary nomination process itself is an important mechanism for communities, in particular indigenous communities, to advocate themselves for the importance of their culture and conservation of resources and aesthetics that sustain that culture itself.

MC-5 – A Sanctuary Could Supplement or Complement Existing Management

ONMS staff's assessment of developments that show relevance to MC-5 focused less on regulations and more on examples of the non-regulatory programs that national marine sanctuaries have provided recently in nearby communities that could in turn make a difference at a CHNMS, such as:

- Cultural resource management, a focus on maritime heritage landscapes, and collaborations with indigenous cultures
- Whale conservation programs, including those that reduce the likelihood of ships striking and killing whales, whale disentanglement programs, and initiatives to prevent whale entanglement
- Collaboration with federal fishery managers and joint support for outcomes that both benefit fishermen directly and indirectly through habitat conservation actions

MC-6 – Opportunity for Partnerships

Partnerships were an important part of the nomination in 2015 and continue to be bountiful for a potential CHNMS. The attached technical report goes into more detail about some potential partnerships that are new or expanded since 2015, or were suggested via public comments. Examples are federal partnerships with BOEM and US Fish and Wildlife Service, the latter having already explored expansion of MBNMS's BeachCOMBERS program. CenCOOS and its partners in the area offer science and monitoring partnerships. State collaborations expanded since 2015 include MPA management and the "collaboratives" established with local institutions and organizations; similar collaborations already exist within GFNMS, MBNMS and CINMS. Numerous non-profit partners abound in this area, for example the Gaviota Coast Conservancy works on coastal conservation, preservation and access, and is interested in collaborating on ocean conservation with ONMS. Partnerships with recreational and tourism businesses, including via Get Into Your Sanctuary efforts, are also noted.

MC-7 – Community Support

There was community-based support for the nomination expressed by a broad range of interests in 2015, and again in 2020. As noted above, 14,357 public comments were submitted as unique comments, form letters and signatures on petitions. Of the 843 unique comments: 599 expressed support for the nomination continuing in the inventory; 226 expressed opposition for the nomination to continue in the inventory; and 18 took no position on the nomination's continuation. When the total of form letters and petitions are considered, the number of supporters was approximately 13,805 and opponents was 534.

During the 2020 review period, comments in support were received from members of Congress, state officials and agencies, and local elected officials. Elected officials in opposition included an elected state legislator and a local mayor. Several letters of support from tribal officials were also received

including from the original applicant, the Northern Chumash Tribal Council. A former U.S. Cabinet Secretary wrote in support of the continued nomination. A diversity of support from different “user groups” and other stakeholders were received, such as academics and university students, local businesses, a local land trust, and national and local environmental NGOs. Stakeholders that submitted comments in opposition to maintaining the nomination on the inventory were primarily (but not solely) from the fishing sector, such as businesses or associations related to fishing, ports and harbors representatives, and recreational fishermen. There was also a geographic diversity of supporters from across the country, California and the local area; geographic range of opponents were local through southern California.

Conclusion

NOAA’s review of the CHNMS nomination has highlighted that the national significance of natural and cultural resources of the area still remains, while the threats to those resources have increased. The Chumash and local communities and businesses adjacent to this stretch of coastline continue to rely on a healthy and resilient ocean for a sense of place, indigenous ceremonial events, education, tourism, recreation, and fishing. Threats from climate change, disease, and a growing list of human uses require comprehensive and coordinated approaches that address use compatibility. The nominators, and a broad range of community interest groups, believed in 2015 that a national marine sanctuary would value the local community’s and Chumash people’s dependence on a thriving marine ecosystem and would offer solutions to guide multiple, sustainable uses while protecting the marine environment. That belief and support of the values a sanctuary could provide are as strong, or stronger, in 2020. ONMS staff have concluded from our review of public comments and circumstances of the CHNMS nomination that the nomination is still relevant and responsive to the 11 SNP criteria.