



# NOAA Backgrounder

## NOAA's National Marine Sanctuaries

### Conservation



Sanctuaries provide food, shelter, and nursery areas for marine life.

### Education



Sanctuaries are living classrooms.

### Exploration



Discovery of the marine world unlocks the mysteries of our planet.

### Our National Marine Sanctuaries

In 1972, in response to a growing awareness of the intrinsic environmental and cultural value of our coastal waters, Congress passed the National Marine Sanctuaries Act. The Act authorizes the Secretary of Commerce to designate discrete areas as national marine sanctuaries to promote comprehensive management of their special conservation, recreation, ecological, historical, research, educational or aesthetic resources. National marine sanctuaries may be designated in coastal and ocean waters, in submerged lands, and in the Great

Lakes and their connecting waters. To date, the nation has designated 13 marine sanctuaries. They include nearshore coral reefs and open ocean, and range in size from less than one to over 5,300 square miles.

Sanctuaries harbor a fascinating array of plants and animals, from the great whales to tiny, brightly colored sea snails. These protected waters provide a secure habitat for species close to extinction, and protect historically significant shipwrecks and prehistoric artifacts. They serve as natural classrooms and laboratories for school children and researchers alike.

### A WORD ABOUT NOAA . . .

*The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) conducts research and gathers data about the global oceans, atmosphere, space, and sun, and applies this knowledge to science and service that touch the lives of all Americans.*

*NOAA warns of dangerous weather, charts our seas and skies, guides our use and protection of ocean and coastal resources, and conducts research to improve our understanding and stewardship of the environment which sustains us all.*

*A Commerce Department agency, NOAA provides these services through five major organizations: the National Weather Service, the National Ocean Service, the National Marine Fisheries Service, the National Environmental Satellite, Data and Information Service, and Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research; and numerous special program units. In addition, NOAA research and operational activities are supported by the Nation's seventh uniformed service, the NOAA Corps, a commissioned officer corps of men and women who operate NOAA ships and aircraft, and serve in scientific and administrative posts.*

*For further information: NOAA Office of Public Affairs, 14th Street and Constitution Avenue NW, Room 6013, Washington, D.C. 20230. Phone: (202) 482-6090.*



NATIONAL MARINE  
SANCTUARIES™

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Sanctuaries are also cherished recreational spots for diving and sport fishing, and support valuable commercial industries such as fishing and kelp harvesting. Thus, part of the challenge of managing these areas is balancing environmental protection with economic growth. The marine sanctuaries are part of our collective riches as a nation. They are treasures that belong to all of us as citizens, that we have the right to enjoy and the responsibility to protect for future generations.



Scale varies in this perspective.  
Adopted from National Geographic Maps.

### Maritime Culture



Sanctuaries are part of our nation's historical heritage.

### Recreation



Sanctuaries contain our cherished places where we enjoy nature's beauty.

### Science



Understanding our environment benefits our economy and health.