



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
INTERMOUNTAIN REGION
SUBMERGED RESOURCES CENTER
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P.O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225-0287



IN REPLY REFER TO:
IMRO/SRC

David Alberg,
Sanctuary Superintendent;
Monitor National Marine Sanctuary;
100 Museum Drive;
Newport News,
VA 23602

3/18/16

Dear Mr. Alberg:

I am writing on behalf of the National Park Service's Submerged Resources Center—the unit in the Park Service tasked with the location, documentation and preservation of submerged shipwrecks, aircraft and terrestrial sites in more than 200 of the 407 units of our national system—to express our strong support for the expansion of the Monitor National Marine Sanctuary.

In reviewing the proposals put forth by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to expand the Monitor National Marine Sanctuary—our country's first National Marine Sanctuary—we find the goals of the expansion and potential benefit to the local and national communities through the preservation of submerged resources to be both sound in policy and long overdue. Recent research conducted by MNMS shows the great potential for preserving and understanding the heroic legacy of the WWII Battle of the Atlantic; NOAA and their research partners, many of them drawn from the local communities have already produced significant results that have broadened our collective knowledge as a country of the efforts and losses on both sides of the conflict. Expanding the Monitor Sanctuary will allow NOAA and their diverse partners to continue their research, increasing their discoveries, and bring to light the numerous stories of the sailors and mariners that gave their life in defense of our country.

While the different versions of the proposed expansion will increase the jurisdiction of NOAA, an agency tasked with studying and protecting all that inhabits our oceans, it does not necessarily follow that there will be an increase in regulations within the new boundaries that will restrict recreational activities and commercial industries that rely on Atlantic marine resources. Decades of experience in National Parks and in other NOAA marine sanctuaries has shown that communities and fishing industries have actually benefited from NOAA's presence, especially in the heavily fished Gulf of Mexico states, where fishing stocks remain relatively stable and sustainable. While there may be some who fear new regulations or restrictions on fishing within the newly proposed sanctuary boundaries, it has long been the practice of NOAA to enact policies that benefit the health of fisheries, to ensure that species recover and remain for future generations, and that fish populations remain profitable and sustainable for the businesses who supply our seafood. We believe that this proposal and expansion will do nothing but the same for both recreational and commercial fishing, and if or when new policies are written, we expect that NOAA will work with the local communities per the requirements of policy and law.

As an agency that preserves and protects natural and cultural resources unimpaired for future generations, the NPS applauds NOAA and the Monitor National Marine Sanctuary for putting forth an expansion proposal that will add to the protection of the sunken history within the "Graveyard of the Atlantic," an area shipwrecks that holds hundreds of stories yet to be told. These cultural resources are non-renewable, non-regenerative and merit the sort of efforts to study, protect, and preserve them that NOAA has already demonstrated. Expansion of the sanctuary will allow NOAA and its partners to study the wrecks of ships that are related to wrecks elsewhere along the Atlantic and that, together, comprise a great chapter in our Nation's maritime history. Expansion of the sanctuary does not mean that recreational activities like SCUBA diving will be banned on shipwrecks, and in reality, the research that will be facilitated by NOAA will enrich the public's interaction and connection with these shipwrecks. This additional effort will ultimately be a welcome addition to the economies of the local communities.

In conclusion, we voice our support for the expansion of the Monitor National Marine Sanctuary and would like to point to the success of NOAA sanctuaries elsewhere in our country. Thunder Bay NMS in northern Michigan consistently leads in creating innovative education programs to teach young people about the resources within the Great Lakes with hands-on curriculum that enhances STEM studies. Fisheries within Marine Protected Areas at Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary have rebounded in both size and numbers with minimal areas of protection. The scenic coastlines of The Florida Keys, San Francisco Bay, and the Olympic Coast in the Pacific Northwest have all been protected from future offshore development ensuring the natural beauty of our wide-ranging coastlines remains just as rugged or pristine for years to come. The Monitor Sanctuary expansion will no doubt provide the same for the coastal views above and below the surface of the mid-Atlantic Ocean.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment, and to be a part of this important process.

Sincerely,



David L. Conlin, Ph.D.
Chief, National Park Service Submerged Resources Center

Cc: David Hallac, Superintendent Cape Hatteras National Seashore
Dr. Stephanie Toothman, National Park Service
Dr. Anna Holloway, National Park Service Maritime History Program
Dr. James Delgado, NOAA Maritime History Program
Bert Ho, National Park Service Submerged Resources Center