



# ROAD TO SANCTUARY DESIGNATION



The National Marine Sanctuaries Act allows NOAA to identify, designate, and protect areas of the marine and Great Lakes environment with special national significance due to their conservation, recreational, ecological, historical, scientific, cultural, archaeological, educational, or aesthetic qualities as national marine sanctuaries.

## DESIGNATION PROCESS STEPS

Potential sites for consideration of a national marine sanctuary designation may be identified by NOAA or through a community-based nomination process. NOAA or Congress determines if and when to initiate a designation process for any potential site.

The process for designating a new national marine sanctuary has five steps:



1

**SCOPING:** NOAA seeks input from public and agency partners, tribes, and other stakeholders on possible boundaries for a new national marine sanctuary, resources that could be protected, issues NOAA should consider, and any information that should be included in the draft sanctuary designation documents.



2

**DRAFT DOCUMENTS:** NOAA prepares draft designation documents including a draft management plan, proposed regulations, and a draft environmental impact statement that analyzes a range of alternatives, including boundaries and resource protection strategies. NOAA may also form an advisory council to help inform the proposal and focus stakeholder participation.



3

**PUBLIC REVIEW AND COMMENT:** The public, agency partners, tribes, and other stakeholders provide input on the draft documents. NOAA considers all input and determines appropriate changes.



4

**PREPARATION OF FINAL DOCUMENTS:** NOAA makes a final decision on whether to designate the site as a national marine sanctuary and, if so, prepares the final sanctuary designation documents, including a final management plan, final rule, and final EIS, which includes a response to public comments.




5

**SANCTUARY DESIGNATION:** If NOAA decides to designate the site as a national marine sanctuary, NOAA publishes the final sanctuary designation documents. The sanctuary designation and regulations take effect after the end of a review period of 45 days of continuous session of Congress.

# SANCTUARY SYSTEM BY THE NUMBERS

**629,237**  
**SQUARE MILES** of protected area in the National Marine Sanctuary System

**58**  
 Number of federally **ENDANGERED** and **THREATENED** species



Number of National Marine Sanctuary System **VOLUNTEER HOURS** contributed in 2024



**70,692**

**17** national marine sanctuaries  
**2** marine national monuments

**43**  
 Number of federally **PROTECTED** marine mammal species




Number of teachers, lifelong learners and students **REACHED**

**491,005**

**473**

Number of known **shipwrecks** and **sunken aircraft** protected in the National Marine Sanctuary System



**495** Sanctuary Advisory Council **MEMBERS**

**200**  
 Number of research **PARTNERS**




Year National Marine Sanctuary System was **ESTABLISHED**

