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NOAA Announces Revised Regulations for California National Marine Sanctuaries

New regulations for NOAA's four national marine sanctuaries in California are now in effect, providing greater protection for the sanctuaries' valuable marine resources and habitats.

The changes became effective on March 9 for Gulf of the Farallones, Monterey Bay and Cordell Bank national marine sanctuaries, and on March 19 for Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary.

NOAA developed the regulatory changes as part of the revised management plans for each of the four California sanctuaries. The revised management plan for Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary was released in January 2009, while the management plans for the other three sanctuaries were released as a coordinated effort in November 2008. The effective date of the regulations is different from the management plan release as the National Marine Sanctuaries Act requires a review period of 45 days of continuous session of Congress before regulations are considered final.

The revised management plans and regulations are the product of years of study, planning, and extensive public input, and provide a framework for future management and activities at each of the sanctuaries. Highlights of the revised regulations include the addition of the Davidson Seamount to Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, new protections for white sharks in Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary, and the implementation of no-anchoring zones in Tomales Bay in the Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary.

Full summaries of the regulatory changes are available online for the three northern central California sanctuaries at <http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/jointplan> and for Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary at <http://channelislands.noaa.gov/manplan/overview.html>. The management plan documents are also available upon request from the sanctuary offices.

Managed by the NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries, the four marine sanctuaries located along the shores of northern and central California share many of the same resources and issues.

The 1,279-square mile Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary is located west of the San Francisco Bay area. Cordell Bank National Marine Sanctuary encompasses 529 square miles of ocean off Point Reyes, north of San Francisco. Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary stretches along 276 miles of the central coast and covers 6,094 square miles of coastal and ocean waters, including the newly added Davidson Seamount. Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary spans approximately 1,470 square miles surrounding San Miguel, Santa Rosa, Santa Cruz, Anacapa, and Santa Barbara islands.

NOAA understands and predicts changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and conserves and manages our coastal and marine resources. Visit <http://www.noaa.gov>.

On the Web:

Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary Regulations:
<http://channelislands.noaa.gov/manplan/overview.html>

Cordell Bank National Marine Sanctuary Regulations: <http://cordellbank.noaa.gov/management>
Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary Regulations:
<http://farallones.noaa.gov/manage/plan.html>
Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary Regulations:
http://montereybay.noaa.gov/resourcepro/resource_pro.html

Regulatory Changes at Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary

- Harmful discharges from cruise ships and other large vessels are prohibited to protect the sanctuary's water quality.
- Discharges beyond the boundaries of the sanctuary that enter and damage the sanctuary's resources are also prohibited.
- Improved habitat protection in the sanctuary is provided by restricting activities that impact the seafloor, including abandoned materials, and limiting large vessels from approaching within one nautical mile of island shores.
- Introducing or otherwise releasing a non-native species from within or into the sanctuary is prohibited.
- Disturbing or "taking" sensitive wildlife like marine mammals, seabirds and sea turtles is prohibited.

Regulatory Changes at Cordell Bank National Marine Sanctuary

- Harmful discharges from cruise ships and other large vessels are prohibited to protect the sanctuary's water quality.
- Discharges beyond the boundaries of the sanctuaries that enter and damage the sanctuary's resources are also prohibited.
- Activities that impact the seafloor are limited or prohibited in the sanctuary to protect habitat.
- Introducing or otherwise releasing a non-native species from within or into the sanctuary is prohibited.
- Disturbing or "taking" sensitive wildlife like marine mammals, seabirds and sea turtles is prohibited.

Regulatory Changes at Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary

- In Tomales Bay, seven no-anchoring zones have been established to protect sensitive seagrass beds that provide critical habitat for many of the sanctuary's diverse species.
- White sharks receive expanded protections in the Gulf of the Farallones sanctuary, including a prohibition on attracting the sharks anywhere in the sanctuary or approaching closer than 50 meters of a white shark within two nautical miles of the Farallon Islands.
- Harmful discharges from cruise ships and other large vessels are prohibited to protect the sanctuary's water quality.
- Discharges beyond the boundaries of the sanctuaries that enter and damage the sanctuary's resources are also prohibited.
- Abandonment of vessels in the sanctuary is prohibited to protect wildlife and habitat.
- Introducing or otherwise releasing a non-native species from within or into federal waters of the sanctuary is prohibited. (NOAA will be proposing further amendments to this regulation to address concerns raised by the State of California.)
- Disturbing or "taking" sensitive wildlife like marine mammals, seabirds and sea turtles is prohibited.

Regulatory Changes at Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary

- Addition of the Davidson Seamount (a 775-square-mile area) to the sanctuary, ensuring the protection of this pristine undersea mountain habitat.
- Use of motorized personal watercraft is limited to designated areas of the sanctuary.
- Addition of a conditional wintertime zone for recreational tow-in surfing at the famous “Maverick’s” surf break.
- Additional protection of water quality by prohibiting harmful discharges from cruise ships and strengthening requirements for other maritime discharges in the sanctuary.
- Abandonment of vessels in the sanctuary is prohibited to protect wildlife and habitat.
- Disturbing or “taking” sensitive wildlife like marine mammals, seabirds and sea turtles is prohibited.
- Protections for white sharks are extended to federal waters of the sanctuary.
- Introducing or otherwise releasing a non-native species from within or into federal waters of the sanctuary is prohibited. (This regulation, originally proposed to apply throughout the sanctuary, will only apply in federal waters due to concerns raised by the State of California.)