

National Marine Sanctuary Program's West Coast Regional Office

2007 Accomplishments



Working to...

- Improve Coordination Among West Coast Sanctuaries*
- Improve Coordination with Other Regional Organizations*
- Improve NMSP Management Effectiveness*

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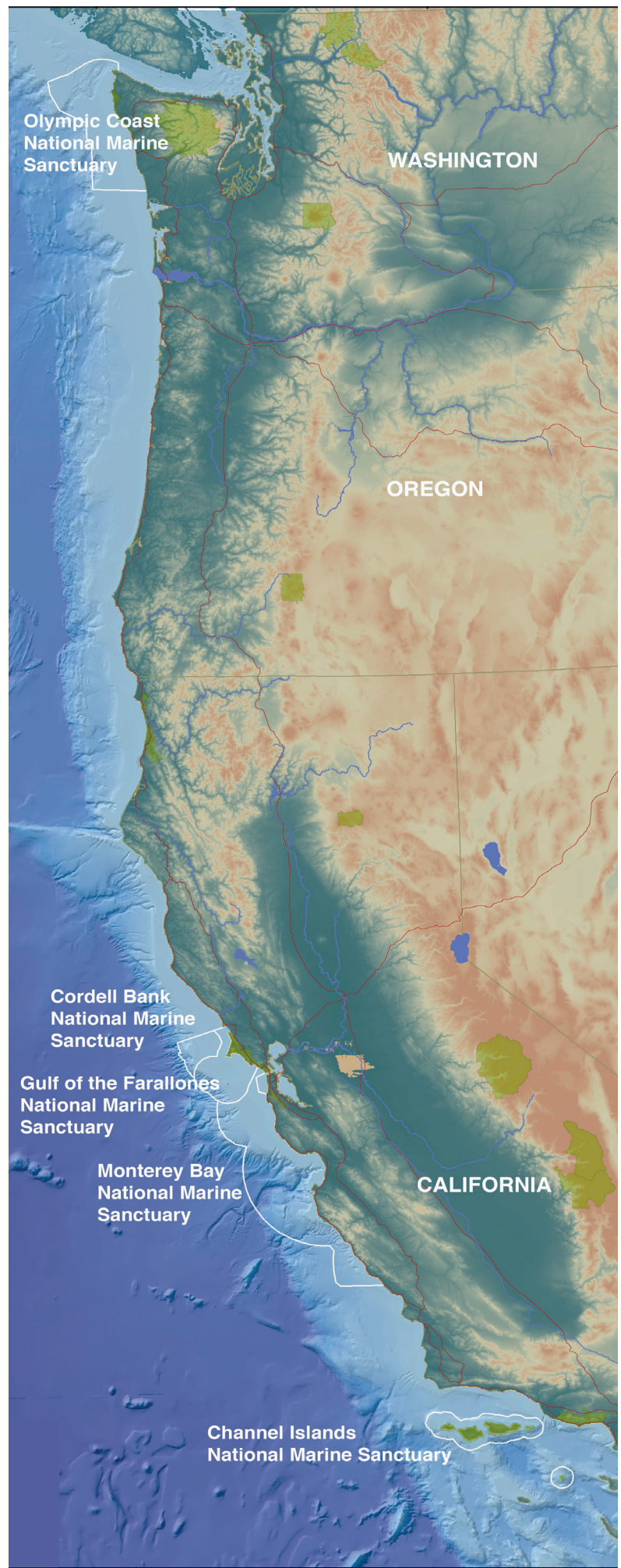
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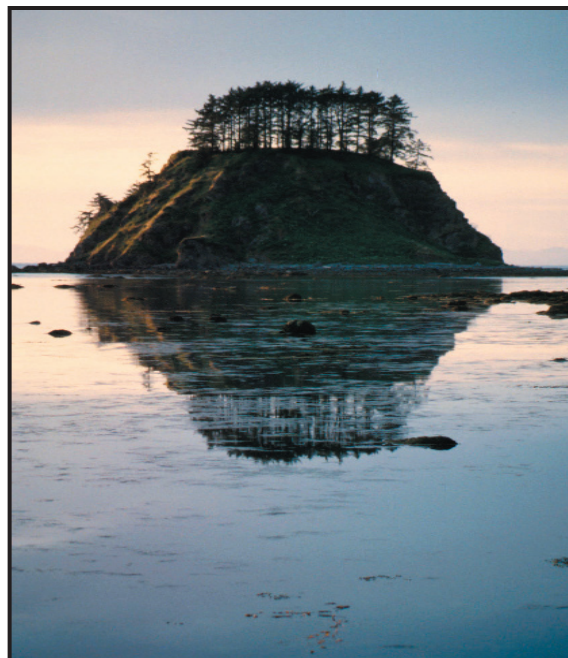


National Marine Sanctuary Program's West Coast Regional Office

2007 Accomplishments

The West Coast Regional office (WCRO) of NOAA's National Marine Sanctuary Program (NMSP) oversees management of and fosters coordination among the five national marine sanctuaries of the west coast, which together protect 12,067 square miles of ocean and coastal waters from Washington to southern California.

This accomplishments report has been produced to inform NMSP staff about the key accomplishments of the WCRO in 2007. Virtually all of these accomplishments involved very close collaboration with site staff from one to all five of the west coast sanctuaries. Often, too, NOAA and NMSP headquarters staff played an integral role in helping achieve these results on the west coast. No doubt about it, it has been a team effort.



Offshore Island Photo: Olympic Coast NMS

Improving Coordination Among West Coast Sanctuaries to Better Protect Sanctuary Resources

WCRO staff spent much of 2007 working to enhance inter-sanctuary coordination on a number of key management issues along the west coast. Whether producing direct management guidance and support, or contributing funds for sanctuary specific initiatives, WCRO staff worked to help maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of west coast sanctuary management. The following provides examples of select 2007 successes.

Funding for Key Programs

A considerable portion of the WCRO's annual budget provides sites with financial support for various priority programs. In 2007, \$290,000 (37%) of the WCR budget went directly to the sites for maintenance of the west coast observations network (\$196,000) continuation of socioeconomic analyses (\$78,000), and water quality protection efforts (\$16,000).

Supporting Management Plan Reviews

Over the past year, WCRO staff provided considerable guidance, direction, and technical support on management plan reviews and their supporting documentation. Management plan reviews continued to play a large role at the Channel Islands NMS and the three sanctuaries of the Joint Management Plan Review (Cordell Bank, Gulf of the Farallones, and Monterey Bay NMSs), and WCRO staff worked closely with site staff to complete key documents efficiently and effectively. For the JMPR, WCRO staff led the effort to negotiate regulatory changes with agency partners, and helped lead a "tiger team" that collected, organized, and wrote responses to the thousands of comments the NMSP received on draft documents.



NATIONAL MARINE
SANCTUARIES



For the Channel Islands NMS management plan, WCRO staff worked shoulder to shoulder with site staff to organize and respond to hundreds of comments and to write a supplemental environmental analysis on water quality issues.

Channel Islands Marine Protected Area Network

One particular highlight of 2007 was completion of the planning process for the Channel Islands NMS marine protected area network. Working closely at various levels within NOAA, the NMSP designated the largest marine protected area network in the continental United States. Our integrated team produced various environmental, legal, and regulatory documents associated with this complex process, all of which were completed in 18 months.

This integrated teamwork highlighted the efficiency and effectiveness that is possible when all three of the NMSP's organizational divisions (site, region, headquarters) work closely on issues of programmatic significance.

Oil Spill Preparedness Planning

While the *Cosco Busan* oil spill demonstrated considerable successes in the interagency response to a small-medium sized spill, it also demonstrated the gaps and challenges facing national marine sanctuaries in responding to such a spill. The WCRO has established an internal regional working group with all five west coast sanctuaries to share lessons learned from the *Cosco Busan* spill, develop mechanisms to share staff and resources efficiently in a spill, complete necessary training for staff and key volunteers, and better interface with regional response partners. In responding to the *Cosco Busan* spill, the tremendous work of NMSP staff, led predominantly by Gulf of the Farallones NMS, has been exemplary and worthy of acknowledgement and accolades.

Regional Planning for NMSP Priorities

WCRO staff provided guidance and technical support on a number of planning documents for management of regional resources and assets. These "needs assessments" outline priorities and provide recommendations for regional-scale management strategies. Throughout 2007, WCRO staff worked with the relevant sanctuary staff on completing needs assessments for water quality protection planning, maritime heritage protection planning, and drafting needs assessments for research, and education and outreach.

Integration and Coordination on Policy Issues

In 2007, WCRO staff also provided guidance, technical support, and leadership on a number of policy-based resources protection issues in the region. Working closely with staff from all five sanctuaries in the region, the WCRO helped to organize and produce coordinated regional responses on issues such as section 304(d) consultation under the National Marine Sanctuaries Act, potential aquaculture operations in national marine sanctuaries, review and comment on the US Coast Guard's environmental impact statement for Pacific Area activities, review and comment on the ocean action plan for the West Coast Governor's Agreement, sustainable tourism, and compatible use in the sanctuaries.

Coordination of West Coast Observations Network

The regional office distributed nearly \$200,000 in 2007 to support site operations of the West Coast Observations Network, which is the only regional in situ ocean observing system in NMSP and has opened the door for NMSP participation in the Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS). A special focus of 2007 was to bring the Olympic Coast NMS data backlog into the NOAA/National Coastal Data Development Center (NCDDC) archive and web retrieval pipeline. Leveraging IOOS funds, the automated observations systems onboard the *R/V Fulmar* and *R/V Shearwater* were also made a priority for NOAA/NCDDC data archive and retrieval. In addition the Cordell Bank NMS oceanographic buoy was deployed and became operational. As data from this buoy are transmitted they will also be integrated into the west coast observation network. There are now 24 Sanctuary observing platforms reporting via NOAA's observing system and integrated into the Pacific Coast Ocean Observing System (PaCOOS). If you haven't seen the website for your West Coast Obs network, go to http://www.mbnms-simon.org/sections/obs/nmsp_wco.php

R/V Fulmar Operations

In support of the overall leadership by the Monterey Bay NMS, WCRO staff provided technical and administrative guidance for *R/V Fulmar* operations, including serving as 'comptroller' for use of site based funds to operate and maintain the vessel. This new vessel is the only NMSP asset which routinely services three sites (Monterey Bay, Gulf of the Farallones and Cordell Bank NMSs) making cruise planning, logistics, and cost sharing complicated. As expected, the *R/V Fulmar* has been a major success story with approximately 170 operational days plus an additional 60 maintenance and training days in her first year, which puts her on par with the operational schedules of other NOAA ships.

Maritime Heritage

The WCRO promotes technical support and guidance for all sanctuary maritime heritage activities on the west coast. One significant accomplishment of 2007 was the production of a summary report on the *USS Macon* expedition. This document presented expedition findings not just for NMSP and other NOAA staff, but to expedition team members and partners, the general public, and academic community. WCRO and NMSP headquarters staff are currently working to complete the final report on the *USS Macon* Expedition 2006 for NOAA's Office of Ocean Exploration as well as conducting ongoing artifact identification and research to support the Macon's nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.



USS Macon Bi-plane wing Photo: NOAA/MBARI

In 2007, WCRO staff conducted research and reported on the current condition of known maritime archaeological resources on the west coast, while continuing to build site inventories for historic shipwrecks and shipwrecks that pose environmental threats.

Over the course of the past year, research was conducted on the *Chetzemoka*, *Nika*, and *Austria* (OCNMS); the *S.S. Lewis*, *Annie E. Smale*, *Lucas*,

Noonday and Fort Point Life-Saving Station (GFNMS); the *USS Macon*, *Roanoke*, *San Juan*, *William H. Smith*, and *Sierra Nevada* (MBNMS); and the *Winfield Scott*, *Cuba*, *Goldenborn*, *Del Rio* and *Aggi* (CINMS).

Sustainable Tourism Symposium

In conjunction with the Cannery Row Company, the City of Monterey, the Monterey Bay Sanctuary Foundation, the Monterey Bay Aquarium, and the Monterey Maritime & History Museum, the WCRO hosted a Sustainable Tourism Symposium in late November 2007.

The event brought together over 40 local organizations and nearly 60 participants to discuss coordinating sustainable tourism efforts in Monterey Bay area. Speakers at the event included Leon Panetta, Grand Canyon National Park Superintendent Steve Martin, Sustainability Academy Director Dr. Laura Strohm, and James Dion of National Geographic Society's Center for Sustainable Destinations. The event focused on elevating the awareness of sustainable practices and engaging stakeholders in planning actions to follow. Mayors from three key cities around Monterey Bay joined local constituents in discussions. Participants expressed considerable interest in expanding the ongoing sustainable tourism efforts of county (Monterey and Santa Cruz) visitor bureaus and working together on a potential California coastal geotourism project with the National Geographic Society.

WCRO, MBNMS, CINMS, and NMSP headquarters staff helped plan and execute the event (including facilitation of six roundtables sessions). WCRO and MBNMS staff are now working on a symposium summary of the event including action items to be led by the MBNMS to capitalize on opportunities for further community collaboration.

Improving Coordination with Other Regional Organizations to Better Protect Sanctuary Resources

In 2007, WCRO staff also worked closely with a wide variety of State, Federal, nongovernmental and academic partners to enhance understanding of the national marine sanctuaries, address ongoing and new resource management issues in the region, and better protect sanctuary resources from known threats.

Addressing Resource Issues with Partners

Over the course of 2007, WCRO staff worked to build new and strengthen existing relationships with a number of management authorities in the region. Working closely with State agencies like the California Resources Agency, the California Department of Fish and Game, and the California Coastal Commission, Federal agencies such as NOAA Fisheries, the Marine Protected Areas Center, the National Parks Service and the US Coast Guard, academic entities such as PISCO and California State University, Monterey Bay, and non-governmental organizations like the Nature Conservancy and the Marine Conservation Biology Institute (MCBI), WCRO staff provided guidance and advice on a wide variety of resource management initiatives occurring along the west coast. This intergovernmental role includes representing the NMSP on the California Biodiversity Council and in NOAA's western regional collaboration team. In 2007, such issues the WCRO helped address included:

- implementation of the State of California's Marine Life Protection Act
- NOAA Fisheries' proposal for an exempted fishery permit for shallow set longlines
- the MPA Center's West Coast Pilot Project
- the US Coast Guard's EIS for Pacific Area operations
- PISCO's overall monitoring efforts on the west coast
- planning for January '08 conference on Ecosystem Based Management in Santa Cruz
- the California Biodiversity Council's focus on vehicle management in protected areas (e.g., dirt bikes or motorized personal watercraft) and global climate change; and
- MCBF's study on compatible uses in the ocean.

Integrated Ecosystem Research

Through the region's participation in a joint IOOS project with the Northwest and Southwest Fisheries Science Centers, observing data are being integrated into on-line tools to develop Integrated Ecosystem Assessments (IEAs). IEAs are a major component of NOAA's Ecosystem Based Management strategy. The Northwest Fisheries Science Center is evaluating an ecosystem model in central California as part of a joint effort to understand its utility in managing marine protected areas.

Mapping West Coast Sanctuary Habitats

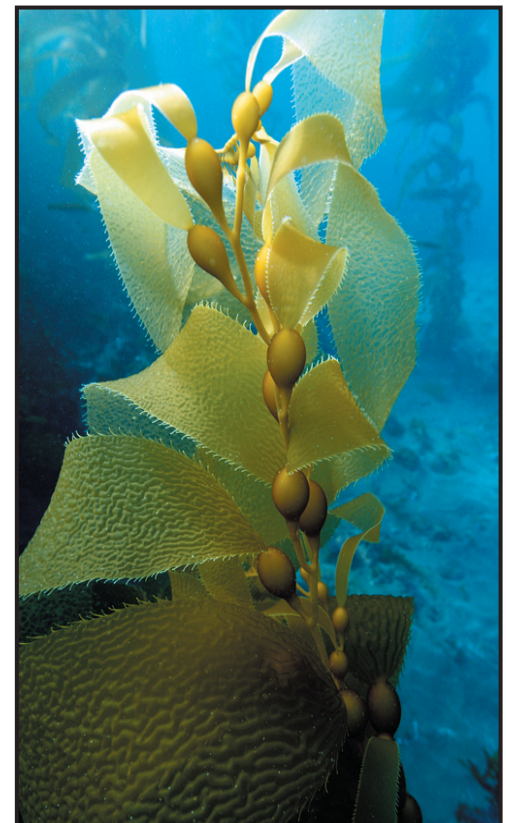
The regional office, with the help of California State University, Monterey Bay (CSUMB) Sea-floor Mapping Lab, has compiled the latest information of the known mapped footprints in the west coast sanctuaries. This information updates the work that NMSP headquarters staff started in 2004. Approximately 47% of the west coast sanctuaries have been mapped by modern multibeam or sidescan sonar. Only a very small percentage of the mapped area has been turned into basic habitat maps. CSUMB has estimated that it will cost approximately \$5.5 million (in 2007 dollars) to map and create basic habitat maps for the unmapped areas. This includes purchase of sonar equipment and basic data processing but does not include ship time. Ship time is estimated to be 250-24hr days with an approximate cost of \$1 million. The next step is to update the priority mapping areas for each of the sanctuaries to share with partners and other agencies.

Improving NMSP Management Effectiveness

Another focus for the regional office is to improve overall management of the national marine sanctuary system by taking on projects and initiatives that may fall beyond the scope of individual sanctuaries on the west coast.

Sharing Information and Ideas on New Site Designation

WCRO staff spent a portion of 2007 working with other regional entities who have expressed interest in having new sanctuaries designated in the region. WCRO staff



Giant Kelp Photo: Robert Schwemmer

talked with interested parties around the region such as the Oregon Ocean Protection Advisory Council to provide information and feedback on questions about the designation process, legal requirements of designation, and socioeconomic impacts of new sanctuaries. Through these consultations, WCRO staff clarified several points about NMSP authority and the role of sanctuaries in local communities, while opening the door for further collaboration and consultation on potential designations in the future.

Connecting Sanctuaries to Congressional Staff

WCRO staff proposed, planned and led a successful educational cruise in August 2007 aboard the *R/V Fulmar* for Washington D.C.-based Congressional staff. Staff and site leadership from Cordell Bank, Gulf of the Farallones and Monterey Bay NMSs helped “show and tell” the wonders of national marine sanctuaries, the importance of the NMSP small boat program and the *R/V Fulmar*, and how visitor centers connect people to sanctuaries. Eight staff from Congressional committees and member offices participated in the two and a half day tour.

International Initiatives

WCRO staff continued to support the NMSP’s international efforts in 2007 by organizing regional visits of foreign officials, maintaining existing relationships with staff from overseas agencies, traveling to international conferences and meetings, and hosting a Chilean MPA practitioner for several months in the west coast regional office. The visit of several government officials from the Republic of Vietnam to the west coast region in July 2007 proved to be very informative and beneficial to a country that is establishing MPAs in competition with booming development and a wide variety of environmental impacts, especially with regard to water quality.

Continued communication and collaboration between WCRO staff and government staff in the Republic of Korea (South Korea) have led to continued growth and opportunities between the two countries in the areas of management planning, visitors centers and other outreach tools, and sustainable tourism.

The bi-lateral program with Italy included WCRO’s organization of a leg of a national protected areas tour that 17 Italian park officials took in Monterey in November 2007. It also included leading the “One Ocean” outreach campaign with the experimental vessel *Proteus*. Outreach events in harbors, involving the media, reached millions of Italians on the challenges faced in all oceans, and the importance of marine protected areas (sanctuaries) in meeting these challenges. *Proteus* is slated to tour U.S. national marine sanctuaries on the east and west coasts in 2008.

NMSA Reauthorization Hearing

In November 2007, the West Coast Regional Director testified on behalf of the NMSP in support of reauthorization of the National Marine Sanctuaries Act at a hearing held by the House Natural Resources Committee’s Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife and Oceans. The Subcommittee asked questions on the types of issues Congress should address in reauthorization, such as the authority to establish marine reserves, clarification of the Act’s primary objective, length of management plan review processes, public representation in NMSP processes, partnering for more efficient and effective management, and the process for designating new sites. The NMSP has made suggestions to address these issues in both the oral and written testimony associated with the hearing, as well as in the follow up questions from the Subcommittee. NMSP testimony and responses, along with testimony from seven other witnesses, provided the Chair and the other Subcommittee representatives with a strong sense for how the Act could be clarified and im-

proved, and the issues the Subcommittee should be aware of as it moves forward with additional hearings on NMSA reauthorization.

Looking Forward to 2008

An incredibly exciting list of activities and priorities lie on the horizon for all of us working in or for the west coast region. Although at the time this report was finalized our budget situation was not clear, most of the following activities will proceed in one form or another during the coming year.

A Summer of Exploration and Experimentation

The WCRO has been asked by NOAA's Office of Exploration (OE) to conduct cruises aboard the new *Okeanos Explorer* in summer 2008. After a significant retrofit is complete on the new state-of-the-art vessel, OE intends to "shakedown" the vessel's systems and capabilities on the west coast in partnership with the NMSP. Possible missions include mapping, ROV exploration in sanctuary waters and adjacent areas, and towed camera sled operations.

WCRO staff have been serving on the management committee for programming and evaluating the 85' Guardian Marine patrol boat (termed *SRVx*, for "sanctuary regional vessel, experimental"), recently transferred to the NMSP from the University of Washington. We anticipate commencing operations aboard the *SRVx* in approximately June 2008. While the ship's schedule is still being developed at this time, up to 125 days of sea time in 2008 are likely to be used in west coast sanctuaries and adjacent areas of interest. Projects sanctuary staff or partners could conduct include dive operations, net tows, drop camera, ROV and towed camera operations, mapping, and possibly bird and marine mammal observations. The vessel is capable of conducting surveillance patrols and other offshore operations and will reduce operational pressure on the overworked *R/V's Shearwater* and *Fulmar*. WCRO staff will coordinate the missions that will involve west coast sanctuary staff and equipment.

Ocean Access International, a Bay Area marine technology company, has approached the NMSP seeking help in their field-testing of new manned submersible technologies as early as September 2008 (and likely to be in the central California area). The WCRO is leading a NMSP team to provide shore side input on final design of the submersibles and to consider NMSP roles and project goals for field tests.

Implementing MPA Networks

The designation of the Federal water component of the Channel Islands NMS marine protected areas network has been heralded internationally as a major step forward in marine resource protection. The state of California, a partner in this network, has recently designated another MPA network in central California, most of which falls within state waters of the Monterey Bay NMS. These two networks plus closures designated by NOAA Fisheries within Cordell Bank NMS and at the Davidson Seamount (to be added to the Monterey Bay NMS in 2008) create a truly impressive system of special protected areas within national marine sanctuaries. In 2008, the WCRO will help coordinate the NMSP's efforts to implement these networks with partners and integrate monitoring results and outreach efforts so that the full effect of these special closed areas can be known.

Revised Management Plan – Initiating, Completing and Implementing

The WCRO looks forward to supporting the Olympic Coast NMS efforts to initiate its management plan review in Spring 2008. We intend to organize staff from other sites to aid the Olympic Coast NMS in the labor-intensive public scoping process. WCRO staff will also be helping Channel Islands, Monterey Bay, Gulf of the Farallones and Cordell Bank NMSs complete their site management plans in 2008 and then begin the critical phase of prioritizing implementation steps. Completing these plans as soon as possible remains a key regional and site goal.

Completing Regional Needs Assessments

In 2008, with the help of several key staff at west coast sanctuaries, the WCRO anticipates completing needs assessments for regional education and outreach, habitat mapping, and research. An update to the maritime heritage needs assessment is also anticipated. These needs documents are being developed to help guide staff from the WCRO, the west coast sanctuaries, NMSP headquarters, and our partner organizations in understanding and focusing on key priorities in west coast region.



Northern Elephant Seal Photo: Robert Schwemmer

Other Anticipated Key Priorities

WCRO staff expect 2008 will bring considerable attention to boundary expansion issues, in particular those associated with HR1187, which seeks to expand both the Cordell Bank and Gulf of the Farallones NMS boundaries. The *Cosco Busan* oil spill in San Francisco Bay demonstrates, however unfortunately, the risks posed to national marine sanctuaries from oil spills and other maritime accidents.

WCRO staff also hope to help all west coast sanctuaries better integrate their marine debris removal programs. These programs offer important opportunities to clean harmful debris from national marine sanctuaries, and in some cases, to work cooperatively with local fishermen in locating and removing debris.

Other coordination efforts WCRO staff plan to assist with is an effort, initiated in 2007, to integrate reporting from the three beach survey programs conducted in the west coast sanctuaries: the Coastal Observation and Seabird Survey Team (COASST) in Olympic Coast NMS, Beach Watch at the Gulf of the Farallones NMS, and BeachCombers in the Monterey Bay NMS. Each of these programs sample for similar things (beach cast, dead seabirds and marine mammals), and integrating and reporting the data will allow the NMSP to better identify and predict large scale ecosystem changes that dead marine life portend.