

# NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY SYSTEM

## America's Ocean and Great Lakes Treasures

NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries serves as the trustee for a system of 14 marine protected areas encompassing more than 150,000 square miles of America's ocean and Great Lakes waters. Within the National Marine Sanctuary System's protected waters, majestic humpback whales breed and calve their young, coral reefs flourish, and shipwrecks tell stories of our maritime history. The mission of NOAA's national marine sanctuaries is to conserve, protect and enhance the biodiversity, ecological integrity and cultural legacy of these special underwater places. The system is able to do this with one of the strongest pieces of ocean protection federal legislation, the National Marine Sanctuaries Act.

## A Leader in Marine Conservation

Resource protection is at the core of the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries' mission. With the addition of the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument in June 2006, the sanctuary system reached a true milestone in marine conservation.

The monument, which encompasses nearly 140,000 square miles of ocean waters surrounding the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, is the largest conservation area in the world, dwarfing Yellowstone, Yosemite and Grand Canyon national parks combined. It protects a treasure trove of thriving coral reefs and some of the world's most exotic species — a quarter of which are found nowhere else on Earth.



Photo: Robert Schwemmer

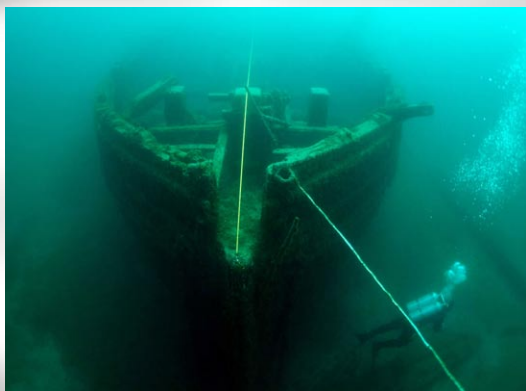


Photo: Tane Casserley

This is just one example of sanctuary system's commitment to leading the nation in stewardship of our precious marine resources. Throughout the system, sanctuary personnel develop effective and innovative management strategies, including marine reserves in California's Channel Islands and the Florida Keys, habitat restoration programs and marine debris removal efforts.

## World-Class Science Informing Management

Strong science-based management is a top priority for the National Marine Sanctuary System, and it devotes extensive resources to ensure ocean leaders have the information necessary to make effective and timely management decisions. For example, research conducted by scientists at Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary played a major role in the International Maritime Organization's decision to shift Boston shipping lanes, a move that studies indicate will drastically reduce the risk of ship strikes to endangered whales.

<http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov>



Sanctuary science programs are also helping us understand more about the sanctuaries and how different human and natural factors are causing changes within them. Five years after establishing the largest no-take reserve in Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary's Dry Tortugas region, studies revealed increasing numbers and sizes of commercially and recreationally important fish species and other marine life within the reserve.

### Educating the American Public

National marine sanctuaries are living classrooms where people can see, touch and learn about our nation's underwater treasures. In partnership with the state of California, the sanctuary system created the successful "Thank You Ocean" public ocean awareness campaign, bringing together an alliance of more than 200 ocean communicators to promote ocean stewardship to millions of people. Through innovative technologies like telepresence, sanctuary educators have also been able to reach out to students and teachers in coastal and landlocked areas alike.



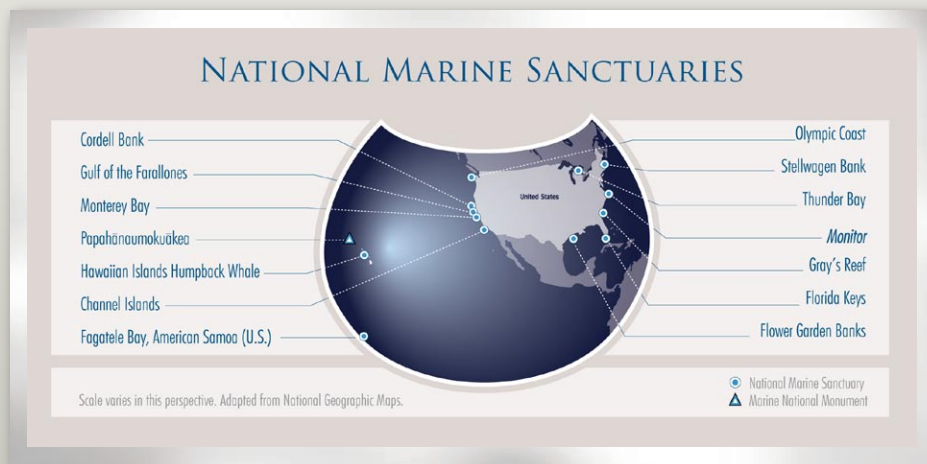
Photo: Greg McFall

### Preserving Our Nation's History

Protecting and documenting historically significant shipwrecks and artifacts is essential to preserving the stories of America's maritime history. The Office of National Marine Sanctuaries has made stewardship of all significant archaeological, cultural and historical resources within the waters of the National Marine Sanctuary System a priority, so that history is not lost beneath the waves. The very first national marine sanctuary, designated in 1975, was created to preserve the wreck of the famous Civil War ironclad USS *Monitor*, one of the most significant vessels in all of American naval history. The sanctuary system's dedication to maritime heritage did not stop with the designation of *Monitor* National Marine Sanctuary, however, and expeditions into the sanctuaries regularly yield new information and unexpected discoveries.

### Protecting Past, Present & Future

Whether discovering deep-water corals in northern Pacific waters off the Olympic Coast or increasing marine life abundance through the establishment of the Florida Keys Tortugas Ecological Reserve, the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries is the nation's leader in ocean stewardship, protecting and conserving America's ocean and Great Lakes treasures today and for generations to come.



*To learn more about these and other accomplishments, visit [sanctuaries.noaa.gov](http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov)*

