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NOAA'S MONTEREY BAY SANCTUARY LAUNCHES SUMMER 2004 KAYAKER OUTREACH PROGRAM

More than 50 volunteers and professional naturalists will take to local waters this summer to greet and interact with fellow kayakers. These Monterey Bay Sanctuary docents, known as "TeamOCEAN Naturalists," serve as on-the-water educators who interpret the sanctuary's resources, promote respectful wildlife viewing and protect marine mammals from human disturbance. This is the fourth summer season for the TeamOCEAN Kayaker Outreach Program operated by the NOAA Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary. NOAA is an agency in the U.S. Department of Commerce.

"Our TeamOCEAN Kayaker Outreach Program has been very successful in engaging kayakers and ocean-related businesses as partners in communicating a message of stewardship to all sanctuary users," said Sanctuary Superintendent William J. Douros. "We are especially grateful to our expanding corps of TeamOCEAN volunteer naturalists who are the backbone of the program."

The sanctuary's TeamOCEAN Naturalists will be on the water beginning May 28. They will operate summer weekends Friday through Sunday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. in Elkhorn Slough and along Monterey's Cannery Row area. TeamOCEAN kayaks are distinctively labeled "National Marine Sanctuary," for easy identification.

"We're encouraging everyone to paddle up and ask the naturalists questions about the sanctuary and anything that they want to know about the area," Douros said.

TeamOCEAN Naturalists have no enforcement authority. They will ask kayakers to maintain an appropriate distance from marine mammals and will ask kayakers to back away from animals to avoid disturbing them. The naturalists help kayakers learn to recognize behaviors that animals show when they are nervous, before they become disturbed and swim away.

The sanctuary's TeamOCEAN Kayaker Outreach Program began with a pilot project in 2000 and was officially launched in the summer of 2001. The volunteer group has grown from nine volunteers in 2002 to more than 50 this year.

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Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary stretches along 276 miles of central California coast and encompasses more than 5,300 square miles of ocean area. Renowned for its scenic beauty and remarkable productivity, the sanctuary supports one of the world's most diverse marine ecosystems, including 33 species of marine mammals, 94 species of seabirds, 345 species of fishes and thousands of marine invertebrates and plants.

NOAA National Marine Sanctuary Program (NMSP) seeks to increase the public awareness of America's maritime heritage by conducting scientific research, monitoring, exploration and educational programs. Today, the sanctuary program manages 13 national marine sanctuaries and one coral reef ecosystem reserve that encompass more than 150,000 square miles of America's ocean and Great Lakes natural and cultural resources.

NOAA National Ocean Service manages the NMSP and is dedicated to exploring, understanding, conserving and restoring the nation's coasts and oceans. The National Ocean Service balances environmental protection with economic prosperity in fulfilling its mission of promoting safe navigation, supporting coastal communities, sustaining coastal habitats and mitigating coastal hazards.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of the nation's coastal and marine resources.

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On the Web:

NOAA - <http://www.noaa.gov>

National Ocean Service - <http://oceanservice.noaa.gov>

National Marine Sanctuary Program - <http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov>

Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary - <http://montereybay.noaa.gov>