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**MONTEREY BAY SANCTUARY DISCOVERY CENTER FEATURED IN
NOAA SANCTUARIES REPORT**

The opening of the Coastal Discovery Center — Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary's first public visitor center — at San Simeon Bay, Calif., is one of the major accomplishments highlighted in the 2006 State of the Sanctuaries Report, an annual summary of the NOAA National Marine Sanctuary Program's most significant achievements.

“One of our key jobs at the sanctuary program is to share knowledge with the public about our ocean's vast and rich resources,” said Monterey Bay sanctuary Acting Superintendent Karen Grimmer. “In establishing this new Coastal Discovery Center, we and our partner, California State Parks, have created an educational portal at the southern end of the sanctuary through which the public can learn about the sanctuary in a fun and engaging way. The Coastal Discovery Center is part of our comprehensive facilities and signage plan that also includes plans for a major visitor center in Santa Cruz, Calif. in the northern portion of the sanctuary.”

In addition to the Coastal Discovery Center, the report highlights other accomplishments that took place in Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary in 2006, including the scientific expedition by sanctuary staff to the Davidson Seamount, an underwater mountain covered by ancient coral gardens that is proposed for inclusion in the sanctuary as part of the program's management plan update. Hundreds of pictures of the seamount, along with a wide array of other digital images, can be found on the sanctuary's new searchable photo database also launched in 2006.

The 2006 State of the Sanctuaries Report also details science, education, and resource protection accomplishments throughout the sanctuary system, including establishing the world's largest area of marine protection in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands and shifting shipping lanes to reduce the risks of ship strikes to endangered whales in Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary.

“Our 2006 accomplishments reflect the significant progress being made by the National Marine Sanctuary Program to develop results-oriented resource protection, science, management and educational programs,” said sanctuary program Director Daniel J. Basta. “I am especially proud of our program's five years of hard work with our partners that resulted in the president establishing the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Marine National Monument.”

Information on the Monterey Bay sanctuary accomplishments and more across the sanctuary system, including in-depth features, stunning images and videos, are available on the sanctuary program Web site at <http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov>.

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.

The NOAA National Marine Sanctuary Program, which manages Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, seeks to increase the public awareness of America's marine resources and maritime heritage by conducting scientific research, monitoring, exploration and educational programs. Today, the sanctuary program manages 13 national marine sanctuaries and one marine national monument that together encompass more than 150,000 square miles of America's ocean and Great Lakes natural and cultural resources.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, is celebrating 200 years of science and service to the nation. From the establishment of the Survey of the Coast in 1807 by Thomas Jefferson to the formation of the Weather Bureau and the Commission of Fish and Fisheries in the 1870s, much of America's scientific heritage is rooted in NOAA.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and information service delivery for transportation, and by providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners, more than 60 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.

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On the Web:

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

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

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

NOAA MBNMS SIMoN searchable photo database: <http://www.mbnms-simon.org/other/photos/>