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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
Sept. 28, 2010

### **NOAA Requests Comment on Proposed Critical Habitat for Black Abalone**

NOAA's Fisheries Service is seeking public comment on a proposed rule that identifies black abalone critical habitat along the California coast. In February 2009, black abalone was listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act, and the Act requires critical habitat be designated whenever a species is listed for protection.

Once areas are designated as critical habitat, new federal projects or permits and new projects with federal funding are directed to minimize harm to that habitat. Designating critical habitat does not affect citizens engaged in activities on private land that do not involve a federal agency.

Since the 1980s, the black abalone population has plummeted primarily from a bacterial disease known as withering syndrome. Withering syndrome may have been worsened by the warming of coastal waters from long-and-short-term changes in climate or from power plants' discharge of warm water. Other causes that likely contributed to the decline are historical overfishing and current poaching.

Black abalone once existed in intertidal waters from the northernmost reaches of California to the southern tip of the Baja peninsula in Mexico. The edible marine mussel was harvested from the mid-1800s, and peaked in the 1970s as a commercial fishery in California. Today, the species are rarely found north of San Francisco or much further south than the California-Mexico border.

Using agency data and information provided by the public, NOAA's Fisheries Service is proposing that critical habitat for black abalone along the California coast include rocky habitats from the mean higher high water (MHHW) line, or average high tide, to a depth of six meters (approximately 20 feet) in the following areas (see attached map):

- From Del Mar Landing Ecological Reserve to Point Bonita.
- From the southern point at the mouth of San Francisco Bay to Natural Bridges State Beach.
- From Pacific Grove to Cayucos.
- From Montana de Oro State Park to just south of Government Point.
- From Palos Verdes Peninsula from the Palos Verdes/Torrance border to Los Angeles Harbor.
- The circumference of: the Farallon Islands; Ano Nuevo Island; San Miguel Island; Santa Rosa Island; Santa Cruz Island; Anacapa Island; San Nicolas Island; Santa Barbara Island; Catalina Island; and San Clemente Island.

The areas proposed for designation comprise approximately 390 square kilometers (approximately 150 square miles) of critical habitat for the endangered black abalone.

NOAA's Fisheries Service is proposing excluding the area of rocky habitat from Corona Del Mar State Beach to Dana Point from designation, because the economic benefits of exclusion outweigh the benefits of inclusion, and the exclusion will not result in the extinction of the species.

Comments on the proposal for critical habitat designation must be received on this proposed rule, identified as RIN 0648-AY62, by no later than 5:00 p.m. Pacific Standard Time on November 29, 2010 and may be submitted as listed below.

- Submit electronic comments via the Federal eRulemaking Portal, <http://www.regulations.gov>, by following instructions there.
- Send faxes to 562-980-4027 Attn: Melissa Neuman

- Send mail to: Chief, Protected Resources Division, Southwest Region, National Marine Fisheries Service, 501 West Ocean Blvd, Suite 4200, Long Beach, CA 90802-4213.

The proposed rule and supporting documents can be found at [www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr), under “Recent News and Hot Topics.” For more information, contact Melissa Neuman, NMFS, Southwest Region, at (562) 980-4115, or Marta Nammack, NMFS, Office of Protected Resources, at (301) 713-1401.

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[MAP FOLLOWS]

