



National Oceanic and  
Atmospheric Administration  
U.S. Department of Commerce

# Biden-Harris Administration, NOAA designate 3rd-largest national marine sanctuary

Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary in  
California to be managed with tribal and Indigenous  
community involvement

**Focus areas:** Ocean & Coasts

**Topics:** sanctuaries, Tribal Nations and Indigenous Peoples, America the Beautiful

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Aerial view of Government Point, located within Point Conception State Marine Reserve and Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary. This marine protected area contains kelp forests, surfgrass beds, and rocky reefs surrounded by sandy seafloor. It also hosts an abundance of diverse fish, invertebrates, birds, and marine mammals. (Image credit: NOAA)

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Today, the Biden-Harris Administration announced that NOAA is designating 4,543 square miles of coastal and offshore waters along 116 miles of California's central coast as America's 17th national marine sanctuary. [Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary](#) will conserve the area's diverse range of marine life and celebrate Indigenous peoples' connections to the region. It is the third largest sanctuary in the National Marine Sanctuary System.

The sanctuary designation advances [President Biden's ocean conservation legacy](#) and his [America the Beautiful Initiative](#), which supports locally-led collaborative conservation efforts across the country and sets a national goal of protecting, conserving and restoring at least 30% of U.S. lands and waters by 2030. With this designation, the Biden-Harris Administration has now conserved more than 45 million acres of lands and waters.

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“This historic Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary designation, made possible thanks to President Biden’s America the Beautiful Initiative, will help provide critical environmental protections and allow tribal and Indigenous community management of the new sanctuary,” said U.S. Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo. “This milestone in our commitment to Indigenous communities and natural lands will boost recreation, tourism and other local industries along California’s central coast.”

“The Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary is the result of state, territorial, local and Indigenous leaders partnering with the Biden-Harris Administration to show that we can protect culturally and ecologically important waters while building a clean energy future,” said Brenda Mallory, Chair of the White House Council on Environmental Quality. “With today’s announcement, President Biden has now conserved more than 45 million acres of lands and waters while protecting sites that honor Indigenous communities and tell a fuller story of our nation.”

Stretching from just south of Diablo Canyon Power Plant in San Luis Obispo County to the Gaviota Coast in Santa Barbara County, the sanctuary will bring comprehensive community- and ecosystem-based management to nationally significant natural, historical, archeological and cultural resources — including kelp forests, rocky reefs, sandy beaches, underwater mountains and more than 200 NOAA-documented shipwrecks.

“NOAA recognizes and celebrates this unique area’s modern day and historic cultural connections to Indigenous peoples. Tribal and Indigenous communities will be co-stewards, as informed by their values, knowledge and traditions,” said NOAA Administrator Richard Spinrad, Ph.D. “The sanctuary designation will support and conserve the area’s rich biodiversity, create new opportunities for research and economic development, including recreation and tourism, and co-exist with renewable energy, fisheries and other sustainable ocean uses.”

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The sanctuary's boundaries exclude areas where future subsea electrical transmission cables and floating offshore substations could be installed outside the sanctuary to connect the Morro Bay Wind Energy Area to the electrical power grid at Morro Bay and Diablo Canyon Power Plant, ensuring that the sanctuary meets both conservation and clean energy goals. NOAA will consider a potential expansion of the sanctuary in the coming years, after transmission cables have been laid.

This sanctuary designation is the result of a decade of work by Tribes, Indigenous Peoples, community leaders, organizations, businesses, state and local officials, and members of Congress — including then-Senator and now Vice President Kamala Harris — to develop and advance the vision for the Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary.

"The announcement of NOAA designating Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary couldn't have come at a better time," said Violet Sage Walker, chairwoman of the Northern Chumash Tribal Council, the organization that nominated the sanctuary in 2015 under the leadership of her father, the late Chief Fred Collins. "This recognition is a crucial moment for our community. It will not only raise awareness of the Chumash People around the world, but also honor the legacy of my late father and affirm our commitment to the stewardship of our land. I hope we will be remembered for our dedication to actively protecting and nurturing Mother Earth and Grandmother Ocean."

"This sanctuary designation marks a hard-fought victory for the Chumash people, our conservation priorities, and the responsible development of offshore wind as California strives to meet its ambitious clean energy goals," said California Senator Alex Padilla. "Thanks to this designation and sanctuary management plan, the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians will play an active role in preserving their traditions and managing these important cultural and ecosystem resources."

California Governor Gavin Newsom said the new sanctuary will be a step forward for communities and nature alike. "By respecting and supporting tribal leadership and stewardship, we are bringing California one step closer to meeting our

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aggressive clean energy goals while protecting biodiversity — and above all else, honoring the land and waters alongside those who have stewarded this area since time immemorial,” Newsom said.

"Generations of U.S. land and water policies have placed Native Americans at a great disadvantage throughout our history,” said Kenneth Kahn, Chairman of the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians. “Today's announcement is a sign that things are changing. The Chumash tribal government never relinquished its aboriginal right to manage our traditional homelands. We are grateful that NOAA recognizes this inherent sovereignty and welcomed us as a co-steward of the sanctuary that bears our name."

“The Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary is one step closer to being established with the announcement of the Final Rule,” said Congressman Jimmy Panetta (CA-19). “It has taken some time to get to this point, but we are proud that the federal government engages with local leaders at every step of the way to ensure that everybody is at the table as we work to formally protect this biologically diverse marine ecosystem. Through collaboration, we are getting closer and closer to creating the Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary."

“I am grateful to the Indigenous and community leaders who have helped advocate for these protections over the past decade and more,” said Congressman Salud Carbajal (CA-24). “The historic designation of the Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary comes not a moment too soon. As our oceans and our communities are facing unprecedented challenges from a changing climate, this new sanctuary comes at a critical time for our region. I look forward to continuing to work with our local stakeholders and federal partners to implement this sanctuary — which will nearly double the amount of coastline protected along the Central Coast — and build on them to protect every coastal community and ecosystem in our region."

“The Chumash people have played an instrumental role in the stewardship of our lands and waters, especially along our coastline and the Channel Islands. Establishing the Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary is a significant step towards protecting the California coastal region’s important marine ecosystems

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and honoring its historical, cultural and spiritual significance to the Chumash,” said Congresswoman Julia Brownley (CA-26). “I look forward to continuing to work with tribal leaders, regional and national stakeholders, and the U.S. Department of Commerce as we work to preserve and protect the natural resources and cultural heritage of California’s Central Coast.”

Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary is the fifth designated in California and one of the largest in the [National Marine Sanctuary System](#). The sanctuary designation will take effect following 45 days of continuous session of the U.S. Congress, which is anticipated to be in December 2024.

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