March 31, 2023

Dear Chairman Rogers and Ranking Member Cartwright:

The National Marine Sanctuary System is our network of over 620,000 square miles of protected waters held in trust for all Americans. National marine sanctuaries conserve nationally significant natural, historic, and cultural resources and promote access for exploration and world-class outdoor recreation. Sanctuaries and marine protected areas are vital to maintaining healthy ocean and Great Lakes ecosystems that underpin our productive coastal economies. They provide habitat for endangered, threatened, and rare species and increase resilience to the impacts of climate change. Sanctuaries also protect shipwrecks, sacred heritage sites, and other maritime heritage and cultural resources that tell the stories of America’s history.

National marine sanctuaries promote visitation, bolster tourism and robust recreational industries, and drive the growth of the blue economy by balancing protection with compatible use. Sanctuaries generate billions annually in local economies and support numerous jobs and businesses in the fishing, tourism, recreation, and scientific research sectors.

As you craft the Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies appropriations bill, we urge you to support the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries at no less than $95.5 million in Fiscal Year (FY) 2024. We respectfully request that you:

- Provide at least $87 million for Sanctuaries and Marine Protected Areas, within the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s (NOAA) Operations, Research, and Facilities (ORF) account; and,
- Provide at least $8.5 million for Marine Sanctuaries Construction, within NOAA’s Procurement, Acquisition, and Construction (PAC) account.
- Direct NOAA to prioritize conservation, education, mapping, and research efforts across the agency in the National Marine Sanctuary System.
- Cap NOAA and the National Ocean Service corporate fees to no more than 5 percent of the annual appropriations.
Communities across the Nation can nominate their most treasured places in marine and Great Lakes waters for consideration as national marine sanctuaries. Engaging communities as stewards of these protected waters make sanctuaries unique and provides a comprehensive, highly participatory approach to managing and conserving marine ecosystems and the Great Lakes for current and future generations. Public participation is a hallmark of sanctuaries and underscores their dedication to civic engagement and leadership. From nomination to day-to-day, communities are at the core of national marine sanctuaries. Recent sanctuary designations, nominations, and expansions are the result of passionate citizens and widespread community interest in conserving our ocean, coasts, and Great Lakes.

We are currently celebrating the 50th anniversary of the National Marine Sanctuaries Act. This is an opportunity to invest in America’s waters, and the communities and businesses that depend upon them. Robust funding will ensure sound management of these treasured places through community stewardship; support of mission critical tools, like small boats; active restoration of marine environments; preservation of maritime resources; and improved understanding of marine and Great Lakes ecosystems.

We strongly encourage you to invest in America’s community-based national marine sanctuaries by supporting the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries at no less than $95.5 million in Fiscal Year 2024. Your support for marine sanctuaries will send a powerful message about the benefits of a healthy ocean and Great Lakes and underscore the continuing ecological, economic, and historical value of America’s underwater national treasures. We thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Jared Huffman
Member of Congress

Garret Graves
Member of Congress

Jahana Hayes
Member of Congress

Donald S. Beyer Jr.
Member of Congress

Bill Posey
Member of Congress
Jimmy Panetta  
Member of Congress

Stacey E. Plaskett  
Member of Congress

Suzanne Bonamici  
Member of Congress

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Joe Courtney  
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Nanette Diaz Barragán  
Member of Congress

Nicole Malliotakis  
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Lloyd Doggett  
Member of Congress
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