

“Our national marine sanctuaries are places of inspiration. Within their waters and along their shores, you can find vibrant tapestries of marine life, ancient mysteries of our past and thriving communities of men and women who have relied on the sea for generations. Sanctuaries are places where anyone can go to experience the power and beauty of the ocean and form lasting memories in spectacular natural settings, from the vibrant coral reefs of American Samoa to the towering kelp forests of Monterey Bay. These underwater treasures are sources of national pride, and when we take care of them, we are protecting part of what makes America great.”

NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (<http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/about/>)

Frequently Asked Questions:

What is a National Marine Sanctuary?

National Marine Sanctuaries are dedicated to the conservation of unique and valuable marine ecosystems, as well as economic, cultural and historical resources. They provide diverse opportunities for public use and education, collaborative management, economic growth, commercial and recreational fishing, and scientific exploration. There are currently 18 sanctuaries in the National Marine Sanctuary (NMS) network managed by NOAA, ranging from the Olympic Coast of Washington state to the Florida Keys. Lake Ontario NMS was recently designated off the coast of upstate New York and currently, the Mallows Bay-Potomac River NMS in Maryland is the closest NMS in the Mid-Atlantic.

What are the benefits of designating a National Marine Sanctuary?

An NMS provides many ecological and economic benefits to a region. From a conservation standpoint, a sanctuary will exclude oil, gas and mineral extraction in our ocean backyard. Excluding these activities will help reduce risks associated with oil spills that can be devastating to local wildlife, fisheries, beaches, and other sensitive habitats.

As the largest submarine canyon along the U.S. Atlantic Coast, the Hudson Canyon has repeatedly been recognized as an ecological hotspot, providing habitat for a large diversity of species, upon which many local fisheries depend. The Hudson Canyon NMS can serve as a focal point for marine science and education about ocean ecology and processes, and help spearhead research and management aimed at conserving wildlife and ensuring continued human use of this important area.

Why should NOAA designate Hudson Canyon as a National Marine Sanctuary?

Hudson Canyon is a special place of phenomenal ecological and economic importance in our ocean backyard. It is a hotspot marine wildlife including corals, sharks, whales, and hundreds of species of fishes, sea turtles, seabirds, and invertebrates. It is also an incredibly important place for local commercial and recreational fishermen. The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council took the proactive step to protect deep sea habitat in Hudson Canyon in June 2015. A new NMS will build on this effort to protect wildlife and fishing interests by excluding oil, gas, and mineral extraction from this area. Protecting this area will also direct new federal resources to support ocean research, outreach, and education in the New York Bight. This will help reconnect New Jersey and New York residents to the ocean and coasts, which we have long depended on for food, jobs, commerce, and sheer joy.

Who will manage a new Hudson Canyon National Marine Sanctuary?

NOAA staff will be responsible for developing and implementing a management plan for the new Hudson Canyon NMS. There will be extensive opportunities for the public and stakeholders to provide input. For example, NOAA has established a Sanctuary Advisory Council (SAC) for the proposed Hudson Canyon NMS, comprised of commercial and recreational fishermen, marine scientists, conservation leaders, and other interested stakeholders to help inform NOAA during the designation process. Once designated, NOAA will continue to rely on the SAC to inform management as well as programmatic priorities for the Hudson Canyon National Marine Sanctuary. WCS is recommending that the existing regional and federal entities maintain authority to regulate fisheries in the Hudson Canyon NMS.

What is the status of the proposed Hudson Canyon National Marine Sanctuary?

WCS nominated Hudson Canyon as a National Marine Sanctuary in 2016. The proposed Hudson Canyon is currently in the designation process to become the 19th NMS in U.S. waters. The multi-year designation process provides numerous opportunities for public and stakeholder participation and formal comment. For example, NOAA held a Scoping Period public comment in 2022 when the designation process started. Since then, NOAA formed and holds regular meetings with the proposed Hudson Canyon Sanctuary Advisory Council (SAC) (see details above). WCS and partners are advocating for NOAA to advance the designation process by releasing the draft designation documents (including the draft environmental impact statement, draft proposed rule and draft management plan) for public comment.

What are the boundaries of the proposed Hudson Canyon National Marine Sanctuary?

NOAA is in the process of developing a range of alternatives for boundaries. The alternatives have not yet been shared publicly. WCS expects NOAA will share and seek public and stakeholder input on a range of alternatives for boundaries when the agency releases the draft designation documents. WCS will work with our diverse coalition of industry, scientific, and conservation leaders to review and build support for proposed boundaries when NOAA releases the proposed boundary alternatives for public input.

How does the Sanctuary address commercial and recreational fishing?

WCS and a wide range of partners have advocated that Hudson Canyon remain open to fishing activities and have recommended that commercial and recreational fisheries management around the Hudson Canyon (and even within the Sanctuary) remain under the purview of existing federal and state fishery management authorities, including the NOAA's Highly Migratory Species Division, Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. In addition to WCS, bipartisan members of Congress, the states of New York and New Jersey, as well as a diverse coalition of conservationists, recreational interests, tour operators, commercial fishers, maritime industries, academic institutions, community-based organizations, businesses, and members of the public have advocated for this position.

Where will the funding come from to operate the Sanctuary?

Congress is responsible for appropriating funds to NOAA's National Marine Sanctuary Program to staff the nomination review, designation process, and operation of a new Hudson Canyon NMS. Bipartisan members of the New York and New Jersey Congressional delegations have advocated for increased funding in FY26 for the National Marine Sanctuary Program. As a part of its nomination criteria, NOAA also evaluates commitments or possible commitments for partnership opportunities such as cost sharing, office space, exhibit space, vessel time, or other collaborations to aid the conservation and management of the proposed sanctuary.

How can I support the designation of Hudson Canyon National Marine Sanctuary?

There are a number of ways you can support the designation of Hudson Canyon! Your organization can submit a letter of support to NOAA, join WCS for meetings with decision-makers, help publicize the nomination through your outreach channels, and solicit public comments from your organization's members and supporters. Individuals are encouraged to sign the WCS Hudson Canyon petition to NOAA, call and/or write their elected officials to voice their support for the sanctuary, and reach out to their friends, neighbors, and community members to do the same. Please contact WCS staff Noah Chesnin (nchesnin@wcs.org) for additional information.