



NOAA

NATIONAL OCEANIC AND
ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE



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NOAA releases expansion proposal for Gulf of the Farallones and Cordell Bank national marine sanctuaries

NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries has released a proposal to expand the boundaries of Gulf of the Farallones (GFNMS) and Cordell Bank (CBNMS) national marine sanctuaries, two of 14 sites managed by NOAA, located off north-central California. The agency is accepting public and stakeholder comments on the proposal and related regulations through June 30.

The proposal is intended to protect the distinctive marine ecosystem north and west of the sanctuaries' current boundaries. It would include waters and submerged lands off of Marin, Sonoma and Mendocino counties, including North America's most intense "upwelling" site offshore of Point Arena. The nutrients brought to the surface during upwelling events at Point Arena are carried south into the sanctuaries by the prevailing California Current; these nutrients fuel an incredibly productive ocean area protected by GFNMS and CBNMS.

The sanctuaries are destination feeding areas for endangered blue whales and humpback whales, sharks, salmon, and seabirds like albatrosses and shearwaters that travel tens of thousands of miles. Food that results from the Point Arena upwelling center also supports the largest assemblage of breeding seabirds in the contiguous United States on the Farallon Islands.

"The waters off the northern California coast are nutrient-rich and drive a thriving marine ecosystem," said Daniel J. Basta, director of NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries. "These two sanctuaries provide great recreational and educational opportunities for thousands of visitors each year. Public comments are an important part of the process as we look at this proposal to expand the boundaries."

Established in the 1980s, the sanctuaries together protect more than 2,000 square miles of ocean near the coast of San Francisco. Under the proposal, Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary would be extended north and west from Bodega Bay in Sonoma County to a few miles north of Point Arena lighthouse in Mendocino County, including state and federal waters. Cordell Bank National Marine Sanctuary expansion would be extended west and slightly north to protect important subsea features such as Bodega Canyon.

During a review of both sanctuaries' management plans, NOAA received comments from the public in 2001 expressing interest in expanding the boundaries north and west. In response, the revised management plans published in 2008 included a public process to consider possible expansion. Also, California Senator Barbara Boxer and former U.S. Rep. Lynn Woolsey, whose district included areas near the sanctuaries, both introduced legislation several times in Congress between 2004 and 2011 to expand the sanctuaries' boundaries. In 2012, under the authority of the National Marine Sanctuaries Act, NOAA began considering the boundary expansion.

Public hearings are planned for the public to learn more about the proposal and comment on the proposal. Meetings are scheduled for:

May 22: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Bay Model Visitor Center, Sausalito, 6 p.m.

June 16: Point Arena City Hall, 6 p.m.

June 17: Gualala Community Center, 6 p.m.

June 18: Grange Hall, Bodega Bay, 6 p.m.

Comments on the proposal may also be submitted through June 30 via:

- Federal eRulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>. Submit electronic comments via the Federal eRulemaking Portal with Docket Number NOAA-NOS-2012-0228
- U.S. Mail:
Maria Brown, Sanctuary Superintendent
Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary
991 Marine Drive, The Presidio
San Francisco, CA 94129

These comments will be considered when preparing the final rule. For more information on the expansion proposal, visit: http://farallones.noaa.gov/manage/expansion_cbgf.html

Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary encompasses nearly 1,300 square miles of ocean and coastal waters beyond California's Golden Gate Bridge. The sanctuary supports an abundance of species including the largest breeding seabird rookery in the contiguous United States, and other species such as whales and white sharks. Visit <http://www.farallones.noaa.gov>.

Cordell Bank National Marine Sanctuary, with its main feature, Cordell Bank, located about 49 miles northwest of the Golden Gate Bridge, is a destination feeding area for local and migratory marine life. The sanctuary's productive waters and unique undersea topography provide the foundation for a rich and diverse marine community. Visit <http://www.cordellbank.noaa.gov>.

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