

February 2nd 2015
For Immediate Release

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Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary Nomination Proposed for California's Central Coast.

SAN LUIS OBISPO, CA—The Northern Chumash Tribal Council, joined by other groups and individuals, today formally requested the nomination of a new “Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary” in an application to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The proposed marine sanctuary would cover the waters off the coasts of San Luis Obispo and northern Santa Barbara counties. It would protect the vital area between the existing Channel Islands and Monterey Bay national marine sanctuaries.

“The First Peoples of this land have teamed with local communities and organizations to express our deepest passions for these magnificent coastal waters,” said Fred Collins, tribal administrator for the Northern Chumash Tribal Council. “Designation of the proposed Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary for the Central Coast would ensure the continuation of one of the most biologically rich coastlines in the world and the protection of cultural sites that were once the villages of this region’s first inhabitants, now located up to six miles west of the current shoreline.”

The proposed sanctuary area is home to kelp forests, the southern sea otter, gray whale migration routes and one of the most sustainable fisheries in the country including rock fish, crab, squid and hundreds of non-commercial species. It also provides an important stopping point along the Pacific Flyway for migratory birds. The cold water off the coast and fresh water estuaries onshore make it an important nursery for a wide range of species.

“If this area were located on land, it would rival some of our greatest National Parks for biodiversity,” said Michael Thornton, a Sierra Club organizer. “Ensuring its continued health will help the environment and the economy. We are delighted to support this local community effort.”

Unfortunately, the area faces serious threats from offshore oil drilling, water pollution, seismic testing, and climate disruption. National Marine Sanctuary designation would ensure that economic activity in the area works in concert with the natural system, instead of jeopardizing it. As a result of National Marine Sanctuary status, the area would be safeguarded from dirty fuel production.

“The Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary would provide a legacy of prosperity, ensure healthy local coastal waters, preserve unique and coastal ecosystems, and strengthen the tourism based economy of the Central Coast,” said San Luis Obispo County Supervisor, Bruce Gibson.

A recent economic study, commissioned by Sierra Club California, found that the sanctuary designation could add more than \$23 million annually to the local economy and support at least 600 permanent new jobs in San Luis Obispo County.

"A National Marine Sanctuary designation for San Luis Obispo is a win-win," said Enrique Sánchez-Rivera, CEO/Founder of the San Luis Obispo based, La Isla Fashion Group, LLC. "Not only does it protect thousands of species necessary to maintain our ecosystems but it also provides important economic benefits to our county, including drawing new interest from those who will recognize that something special is going on here and who will travel to come see our beautifully protected coastline."

"The new marine sanctuary nomination process is an exciting opportunity to strengthen protections for our precious coastlines and marine ecosystems, and it takes a ground-up, consensus-driven approach with broad-based community support, including local fishermen, tribes, business, and other stakeholders," said Congresswoman Lois Capps, founder and co-chair of the Congressional National Marine Sanctuaries Caucus. "I am pleased that there is a local effort to take advantage of this opportunity and look forward to working with all these local stakeholders to ensure that everyone's input is fully considered as the process moves forward."

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration will now evaluate the proposal for potential inclusion in an inventory of areas to be considered for designation as a national marine sanctuary.

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