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NOAA RELEASES CHANNEL ISLANDS NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

NOAA's National Marine Sanctuary Program has released the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the proposed establishment of marine reserves and a marine conservation area in Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary.

The proposed preferred alternatives presented and analyzed in the FEIS are aimed at protecting marine habitats and sensitive species and would complement an existing network of marine reserves established in the Channel Islands by the state of California in 2003. NOAA intends to make a final decision regarding this action in July 2007.

"Release of the Final Environmental Impact Statement is a significant step towards enhancing long-term protection of the sanctuary's biodiversity," said Chris Mobley, Channel Islands sanctuary superintendent. "This action was developed through an eight-year process, supported by the state of California and NOAA, with extensive community involvement and scientific input."

Once completed, the combined state-federal marine zoning network will provide comprehensive protection to 22 percent of the sanctuary. Fishing in accordance with normal state and federal fishing regulations would still be allowed in the remaining 78 percent of the sanctuary.

Two types of zones would be established under the preferred alternatives: marine reserves and a marine conservation area. Within the marine reserves, all extractive activities and injury to sanctuary resources would be prohibited. The marine conservation area would allow commercial and recreational lobster fishing, and recreational fishing for pelagic species, but all other resource extraction and injury would be prohibited.

In October 2002, the California Fish and Game Commission approved a comprehensive marine zoning network encompassing habitats in both state and federal waters of the sanctuary. The state of California implemented part of the state water zones in 2003 under the California Fish and Game regulations. In 2006, to provide protection to the seafloor and groundfish, NOAA's Fisheries Service designated the federal water portions of the proposed marine zones as habitat areas of particular concern and prohibited bottom fishing under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act.

The final action described in the FEIS would prohibit any other take within the proposed marine zones under the National Marine Sanctuaries Act. Thus, the document released by NOAA today is a key step towards completing the marine zoning network previously adopted by the California Fish and Game Commission and supported by the Pacific Fishery Management Council and NOAA Fisheries Service.

The FEIS was developed with extensive input from the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council, relevant federal agencies, Pacific Fishery Management Council, resource departments of the state of California, and representatives of the public and stakeholder groups.

Copies of the FEIS are available at the CINMS office, attn: Sean Hastings, 113 Harbor Way, Suite 150, Santa Barbara, Calif. 93109, or by calling (805) 884-1472. The FEIS can also be reviewed at the web site channelislands.noaa.gov, or requested by e-mail from cinmsreserves.feis@noaa.gov.

NOAA's Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary was designated in 1980 to protect marine resources surrounding San Miguel, Santa Rosa, Santa Cruz, Anacapa, and Santa Barbara Islands. The sanctuary spans 1,658 square miles extending from island shorelines to six miles offshore, encompassing a rich diversity of marine life and habitats, as well as rich historic and cultural resources.

The NOAA National Marine Sanctuary Program seeks to increase the public awareness of America's marine resources and maritime heritage by conducting scientific research, monitoring, exploration and educational programs. Today, the sanctuary program manages 13 national marine sanctuaries and one marine national monument that together encompass more than 150,000 square miles of America's ocean and Great Lakes natural and cultural resources.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, is celebrating 200 years of science and service to the nation. From the establishment of the Survey of the Coast in 1807 by Thomas Jefferson to the formation of the Weather Bureau and the Commission of Fish and Fisheries in the 1870s, much of America's scientific heritage is rooted in NOAA.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and information service delivery for transportation, and by providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners, more than 60 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts, and protects.

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On the Internet:

NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov>

National Ocean Service: <http://oceanservice.noaa.gov>

National Marine Sanctuary Program: <http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov>

Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary: <http://channelislands.noaa.gov>