

2023

OCEAN CONSERVATION PRIORITIES THAT DELIVER ON THE AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL INITIATIVE



Photo courtesy of Robert Schwemmer

TRIBAL, INDIGENOUS, AND COMMUNITY-
LED RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADVANCE
OCEAN CLIMATE ACTION, EQUITABLE
ACCESS TO NATURE, AND 30X30

DELIVERING ON OCEAN CONSERVATION PRIORITIES

For years, Tribal and Indigenous communities and other local community leaders have proposed and stewarded conservation actions for our ocean and coasts. Grounded in science, culture, history, and economics, these actions are broadly supported and can contribute significantly toward an ambitious conservation agenda abroad and at home. In 2021, the Biden-Harris Administration released the *Conserving and Restoring America the Beautiful* report with a vision for how to achieve the President's commitment to protect at least 30 percent of U.S. lands and waters by 2030, ensure equitable access to nature, and act on climate.

The following Tribal, Indigenous, and community-led proposals provide a unique opportunity to continue addressing the climate crisis and ensure that all people can benefit from an effective, inclusive, and representative system of ocean and coastal protected areas. These historic initiatives can help the administration deliver on its priorities by the end of 2024.

The resilience of our ocean and the services it provides is dependent upon the health and well-being of the ecosystem and the communities reliant upon it. **Advancing these locally-led efforts now** will sustain people and communities today and provide for generations that follow.

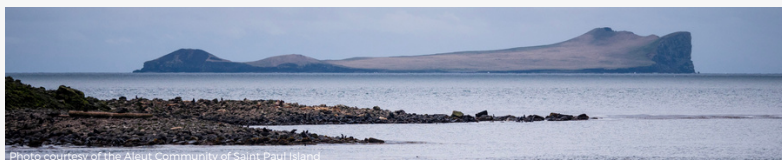
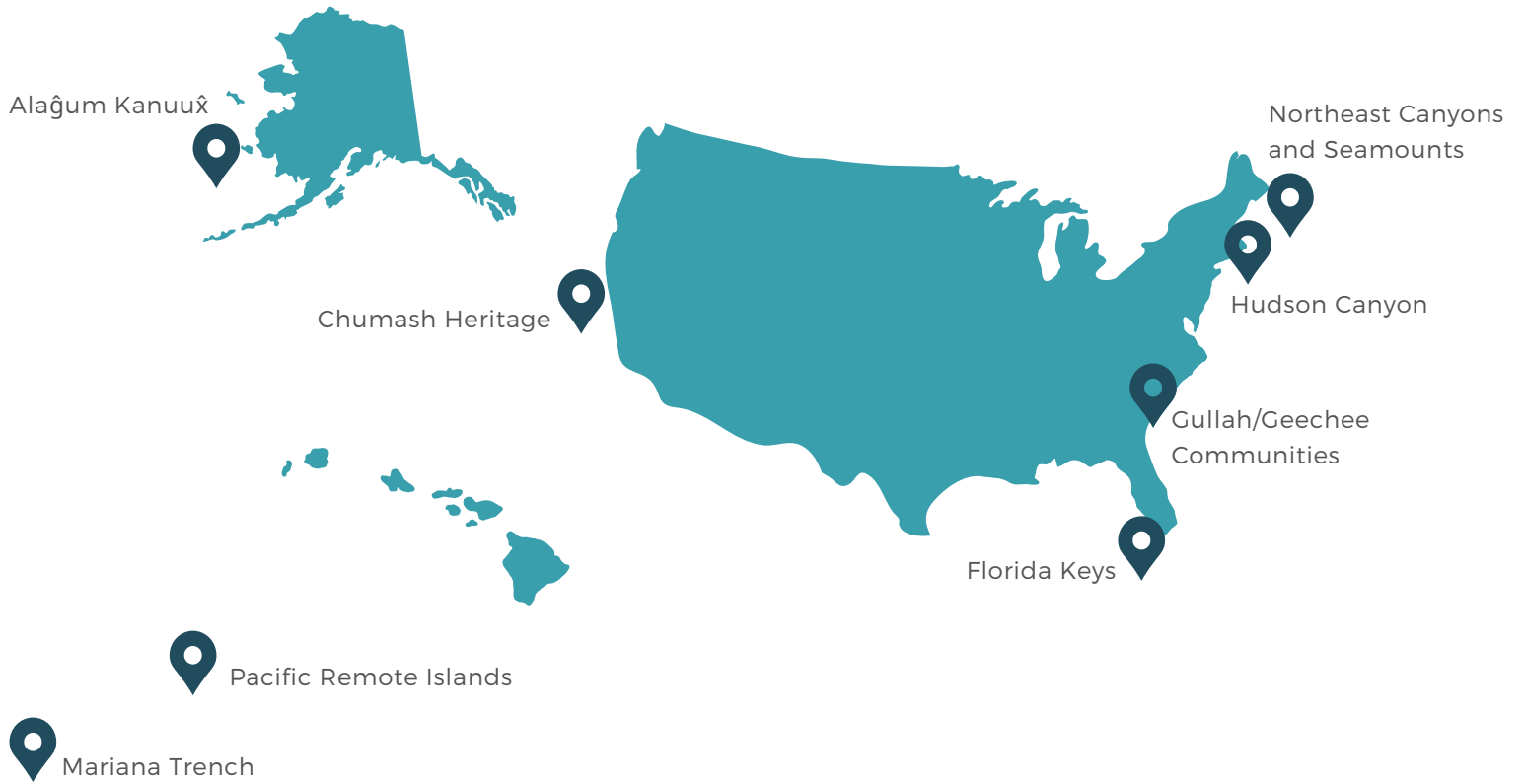


Photo courtesy of the Aleut Community of Saint Paul Island

THE FOLLOWING GROUPS ARE WORKING TO SHAPE AND ADVANCE THESE INITIATIVES:



DELIVERING ON OCEAN CONSERVATION PRIORITIES



NEW SANCTUARIES AND PROTECTED AREAS

CENTRAL COAST OF CALIFORNIA

CHUMASH HERITAGE NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY

Leaders of the Northern Chumash Tribal Council have advocated for over 40 years to protect the waters off the Central Coast of California. The sanctuary poses a unique and critical opportunity to support the deep, long standing relationships coastal communities have with these waters, to prioritize Indigenous collaborative management, and to protect cultural and natural resources for future generations. In 2015, a formal sanctuary nomination was submitted to NOAA. In 2020, the proposed nomination underwent a mandatory five-year review to assess its status on the sanctuary nomination inventory and was renewed. In 2021, NOAA initiated the designation process, drawing overwhelming public support. The draft sanctuary designation documents were released on August 25, 2023, kicking off a 60-day public comment period. On October 25, 2023, the final and defining public comment period for the sanctuary closed, drawing more than 98,000 comments, 99% of which were positive.

The Northern Chumash Tribal Council recommends that NOAA complete the sanctuary designation and release final designation documents before June of 2024.



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Photo courtesy of the Northern Chumash Tribal Council

PRIBILOF ISLANDS, ALASKA

ALAĠUM KANUUĶ NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY

The Aleut Community of St. Paul Island (ACSPI) nominated AlaĠum KanuuĶ in December 2021. The Pribilof marine ecosystem is experiencing dramatic changes, including alarming declines of fur seals, sea lions, seabirds, fish, crab, and other invertebrates. ACSPI is proposing a new model for Tribal co-management and sustainable economic development, including Indigenous-led research, with national implications for Tribal self-determination, justice, and equity. The sanctuary nomination was accepted in the inventory in June 2022.

The Aleut Community of St. Paul Island recommends that NOAA designate a National Marine Sanctuary in the Pribilof Islands, enter into a co-management agreement with the Aleut Community of St. Paul Island Tribal Government, and specifically include Tribal co-management and priorities in the establishment language, regulatory documents, and governance structure of the sanctuary. Provide resources and management system integration for local, Tribal government-led research and monitoring, education and outreach, enforcement, regenerative enterprise including subsistence fisheries, and other sanctuary activities. Prioritize the recovery and protection of northern fur seals for immediate management actions.



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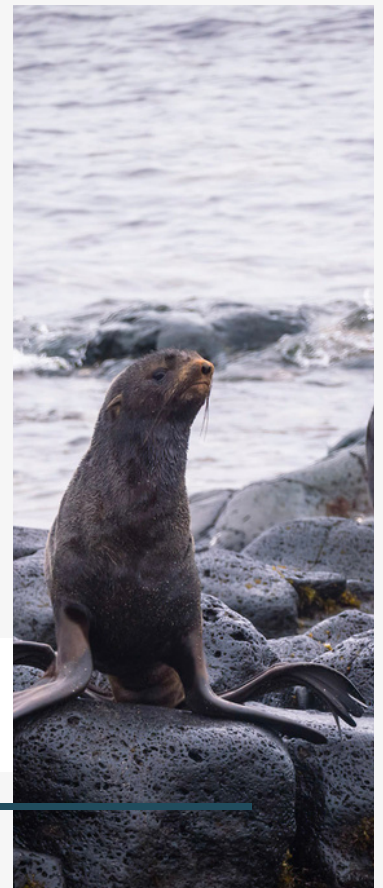


Photo courtesy of the Aleut Community of St. Paul Island

NEW SANCTUARIES AND PROTECTED AREAS

NORTHERN FLORIDA TO NORTH CAROLINA

GREENING GULLAH/GEECHEE COMMUNITIES

The Gullah/Geechee Nation has worked for over a decade to protect their coastline throughout the Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor from North Carolina to Florida. In 2021, Queen Quet, Chieftess of the Gullah/Geechee Nation, and other local leaders worked with the United States Environmental Protection Agency to develop a Greening Gullah/Geechee Communities proposal to create a network of green infrastructure projects that will buffer storm surge and mitigate sea level rise impacts while also protecting local food production, historic sites, and cultural traditions. Also initiated in 2021, the South Atlantic Salt Marsh Initiative aims to ensure no overall loss of the benefits to fish, wildlife and people provided by the South Atlantic states million acres of salt marshes – grasslands that flood and drain with the tides. The initiative brings together federal, state, and local governments, military officials, conservation organizations, and community leaders such as Queen Quet, who recognize the habitat's role helping protect shorelines against flooding and storm surge, serving as vital habitat for wildlife ranging from fish to birds, and supporting fishing and outdoor recreation.

The Gullah/Geechee Nation recommends that the federal government commit funding and technical expertise to support the visions of the Gullah/Geechee Nation for salt marsh conservation including the Greening Gullah/Geechee Communities and South Atlantic Salt Marsh Initiative to advance coastal protections.



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COAST OF NEW YORK AND NEW JERSEY

HUDSON CANYON NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY

As the largest submarine canyon along the U.S. Atlantic Coast, the Hudson Canyon is New York and New Jersey's Grand Canyon. It has repeatedly been recognized as a place of national significance and an ecological hotspot that provides habitat for a range of species including sharks, whales, turtles, seabirds, fishes, and deep sea corals. By designating the Hudson Canyon as a National Marine Sanctuary, NOAA has an opportunity to provide a wide range of benefits for New York, New Jersey, and across the region, as well as for the diversity of wildlife living off our shores.

The Wildlife Conservation Society recommends that NOAA advance and finalize the Hudson Canyon Sanctuary Designation process with consultation from local, state and Tribal governments as well as direct engagement from key stakeholders, including multiple opportunities for public input, which will be critical for this process. For example, NOAA should engage members of the pre-designation Sanctuary Advisory Council to inform the development of a draft environmental impact statement, draft management plan, and proposed rule. A designation should permanently preclude offshore oil, gas, and mineral exploration and development in the canyon. NOAA should continue to sustainably manage fisheries through existing fishery regulatory authorities. NOAA should expand investment in STEM research, monitoring and education, including career workforce development programs targeted for historically underserved communities across the region. We recognize concerns about the name Hudson Canyon given its link to the colonial legacy of Henry Hudson. We call on NOAA to organize an inclusive process to identify and select a name for the proposed Sanctuary.



wcs.org/get-involved/hudson-canyon



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STRENGTHEN PROTECTIONS IN EXISTING MARINE PROTECTED AREAS

PACIFIC REMOTE ISLANDS IN THE WESTERN AND CENTRAL PACIFIC OCEAN

PACIFIC REMOTE ISLANDS MONUMENT AND SANCTUARY DESIGNATION

The Pacific Remote Islands are home to some of the last wild and healthy ocean ecosystems on our planet. The land and sea hold rich history, from ancient Pacific voyaging, to the efforts of the Hui Panalā'au, to the Pacific theater of WWII. The Pacific Remote Islands (PRI) Coalition is requesting to expand protections of the Pacific Remote Islands, honor the area's unique history and cultural significance with a new name, and to adopt a co-management model of the Pacific Remote Islands so that traditional ecological knowledge and modern science can be at the forefront of ongoing and future protections for the Pacific.

The Pacific Remote Island Coalition recommends, in line with the Biden Administration's priority to honor Indigenous and Tribal cultures and practices, the administration should use its authority to make history, and honor history, by designating the waters surrounding all of the Pacific Remote Islands to the full extent of the Exclusive Economic Zone as a new National Marine Sanctuary. The proposed NMS should encompass the areas within the existing Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument and extend to the seaward limit of the EEZ around Howland and Baker Islands, and Kingman Reef and Palmyra Atoll. This would add nearly 700,000 square kilometers of highly protected waters, resulting in creation of the world's largest highly protected marine protected area in national waters.



Photo courtesy of the Pacific Remote Islands Coalition



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OFF THE COAST OF NEW ENGLAND

NORTHEAST CANYONS AND SEAMOUNTS MARINE NATIONAL MONUMENT

The Atlantic Ocean's only marine monument is located 130 miles off the coast of Massachusetts. The Monument protects undersea canyons and seamounts, and contains fragile deep marine ecosystems and rich biodiversity, including important deep-sea corals, endangered whales and other marine mammals, sea birds and numerous fish species. The Monument is jointly managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and NOAA.

The New England Monument Coalition recommends that USFWS and NOAA finalize a management plan for Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument and promulgate regulations codifying the prohibition on commercial fishing in the monument as soon as possible, consistent with the proclamation establishing the monument. We also recommend that there be long-term and sustained funding for research, education, and outreach and comprehensive monitoring and enforcement programs developed and implemented in the Monument.



nrdc.org/sites/default/files/northeast-canyons-and-seamounts-marine-national-monument-fs.pdf



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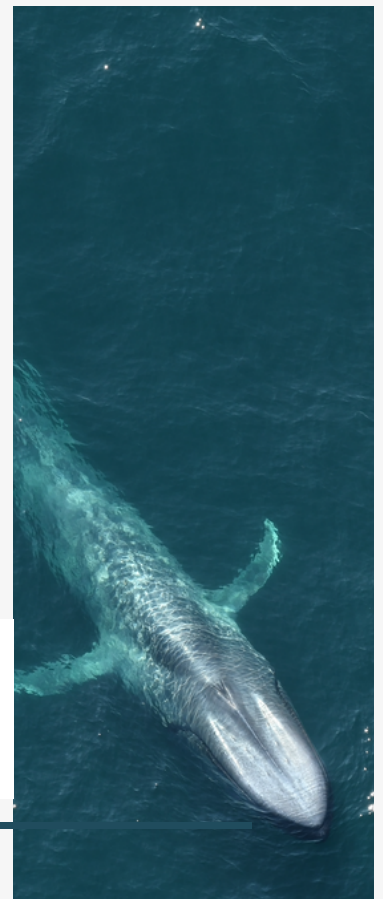


Photo courtesy of New England Aquarium

STRENGTHEN PROTECTIONS IN EXISTING MARINE PROTECTED AREAS

COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS AND GUAM

MARIANA TRENCH MARINE NATIONAL MONUMENT

The Mariana Trench monument was established by President Bush in 2009 under the Antiquities Act. Spanning more than 95,000 square miles in the Western Pacific, the monument encompasses the Mariana Trench seafloor, undersea mud volcanoes, thermal vents, and the waters and submerged lands surrounding the three northernmost islands of the Mariana archipelago. The Monument is home to sharks, whales, dolphins, deep-water fish, over two dozen seabird species, and several species of endangered and threatened sea turtles. The monument also has healthy coral reefs made up of about 300 different coral species. Nearly fifteen years after its designation, the monument still has no management plan and no functioning advisory council. Public comment on the draft management plan closed July 2021.

The Friends of the Mariana Trench recommend that USFWS and NOAA publish the final management plan for the Mariana Trench Marine National Monument. Confirm the territorial nominees to the Mariana Trench Monument Advisory Council and gather input and recommendations on the management of the monument from diverse perspectives in the region. Implement effective co-management of the monument that includes representatives from federal and territorial agencies, as well as the Indigenous communities of the Mariana Islands. Fund proposed renovations of the existing monument contact station on the island of Saipan, and a feasibility study to establish a full monument visitor center. Fund state-level conservation programs and state-level staff positions in the natural resource agencies in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and Guam to address monument issues and activities.



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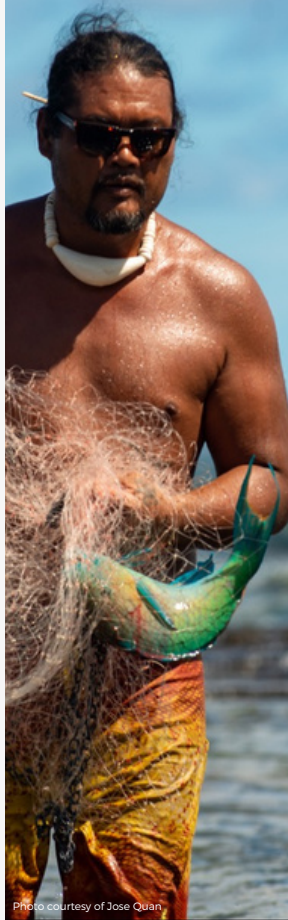


Photo courtesy of Jose Quan

FLORIDA KEYS

FLORIDA KEYS NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY

Congress designated the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary in 1990, encompassing part of the third largest barrier reef in the world. The sanctuary protects open ocean, offshore reef tract and nearshore patch reefs, as well as seagrass meadows, mangroves, and over 6,000 species of marine life. The sanctuary is also home to maritime heritage resources that encompass a broad historical period. A 2011 condition report on the sanctuary detailed declining water quality, habitats and key species due to coastal development, overfishing, vessel groundings, and marine debris, among other factors. Since that report, the Keys have experienced Hurricane Irma, an increase in boat traffic, and significant impacts from coral bleaching and disease. In response to these threats, Sanctuary managers developed the Restoration Blueprint to increase protections for some of the Keys' most sensitive ocean habitats. After two extensive public comment periods in 2019-2020 and in 2022, the Restoration Blueprint final rule and management plan is expected to be released by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) in late 2023 or early 2024.

The Florida Keys Restoration Partnership recommends that NOAA advance the strongest possible management actions and highest protections outlined in the draft management plan and implementing regulations. Expand sanctuary boundaries by 1,000 square miles, including the unique coral habitat of Pulley's Ridge; include large highly protected areas like the Tortugas Corridor, and two shore-to-reef protected areas from Key Largo to Carysfort Reef and Long Key State Park to Tennessee Reef in its final rule. Keep deeper reef areas in expanded highly protected zones closed to all forms of fishing and anchoring. Adopt a sanctuary-wide regulation that would require idle speeds within 100 yards of all shorelines throughout the sanctuary, which would prevent seagrass scars and wildlife disturbance in these important habitats.

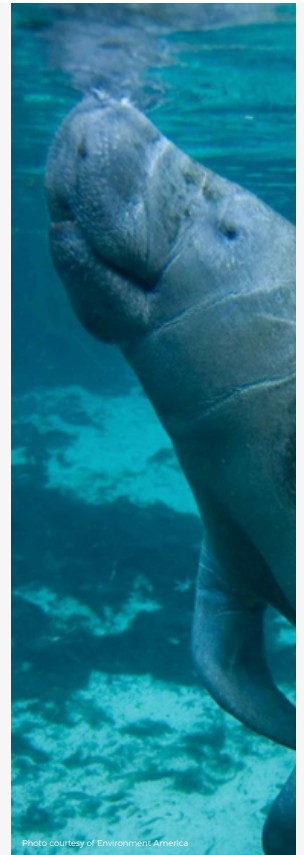


Photo courtesy of Environmental America



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