



## **DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**

### **National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

#### **Notice of Availability of a Draft Management Plan and Draft Environmental Assessment for the Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary; Request for Public Comment**

**AGENCY:** Office of National Marine Sanctuaries, National Ocean Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Department of Commerce.

**ACTION:** Notice of availability; request for comments.

**SUMMARY:** The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has prepared a draft management plan (DMP) as part of the Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary (OCNMS or sanctuary) management plan review. The DMP, which replaces a 2011 sanctuary management plan, was developed to evaluate substantive progress toward implementing the goals of the sanctuary, and to make revisions to the management plan as necessary to fulfill the purposes and policies of the National Marine Sanctuaries Act. NOAA also prepared a draft environmental assessment (DEA), which evaluates the environmental impacts of implementing the DMP, and ongoing field activities. NOAA is soliciting public comments on the DMP and DEA at this time.

**DATES:** Written comments should be received on or before 11:59 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time on **[INSERT DATE 60 DAYS AFTER DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE FEDERAL REGISTER]**.

**ADDRESSES:** Copies of the DMP and DEA along with additional background materials are available at <https://olympiccoast.noaa.gov/management/mpr>.

You may submit comments on the DMP and DEA by any of the following methods:

*Electronic Submission:* Federal eRulemaking Portal: <https://www.regulations.gov>. Submit electronic comments via the Federal eRulemaking Portal and search for Docket Number NOAA-NOS-2023-0003.

*Mail:* Written comments may also be mailed to Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary (Management Plan Review), 115 Railroad Ave. East, Suite 301, Port Angeles, WA 98362.

*Instructions:* All comments received are a part of the public record, and the entirety of the comment, including the name of the commenter, email address, attachments, and other supporting materials, will be publicly accessible. Do not submit confidential business information or otherwise sensitive or protected information such as account numbers or Social Security numbers. NOAA will accept anonymous comments through *regulations.gov* (enter N/A in the required fields to remain anonymous).

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** H  l  ne Scalliet, Deputy Superintendent, Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary, Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary, 115 Railroad Ave. East, Suite 301, Port Angeles, WA 98362, or see <https://olympiccoast.noaa.gov/management/mpr>.

## **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**

### **I. Background**

Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary was designated in July 1994. It spans 3,188 square miles of marine waters off the rugged coast of the Olympic Peninsula, covering much of the continental shelf and the heads of several major submarine canyons, with seasonal upwelling that supports locally abundant marine life and seasonal populations of marine mammals and seabirds. Along its shores are thriving kelp and intertidal communities, teeming with fishes and other sea life. In the darkness of the seafloor, scattered communities of deep-sea coral and sponges form habitats for fish and other marine wildlife.

In addition to important ecological resources, the Olympic Coast has a rich cultural and historical legacy. The sanctuary is located within the boundaries of the legally defined usual and

accustomed (U&A) fishing areas of four coastal tribes with reserved treaty rights. These rights were reserved by the tribes via treaties that the United States Government signed with the Makah Tribe under the 1855 Treaty of Neah Bay and the Hoh Tribe, Quileute Tribe, and Quinault Indian Nation under the 1856 Treaty of Olympia, long before OCNMS was designated. The vibrant contemporary communities of these sovereign nations, often referred to as the Coastal Treaty Tribes, have forged inseparable ties to the ocean environment, maintaining traditions of the past while navigating the challenges of the present and future.

The current OCNMS management plan was published in 2011, and is available online at <https://olympiccoast.noaa.gov/management/2011-plan/>. To inform the OCNMS management plan review, NOAA published an updated OCNMS Condition Report in March 2022. The Condition Report assessed the period from 2008-2019 and presented summary information describing the status and trends of sanctuary resources, covering the broad categories of human activities and pressures, water quality, habitat, living resources, and maritime heritage resources. This report also included the status and trends of ecosystem services—the ways humans derive benefits from different ecosystem attributes that they care about for their lives and livelihoods. The report is available online at <https://nmssanctuaries.blob.core.windows.net/sanctuaries-prod/media/docs/2008-2019-ocnms-condition-report.pdf>.

## **II. Management Plan Review**

The purpose of this management plan review is to fulfill the purposes and policies outlined in Section 301(b) of the National Marine Sanctuaries Act (NMSA; 16 U.S.C. 1431(b)) to protect and manage the resources of the sanctuary. As required by Section 304(e) of the NMSA (16 U.S.C. 1434(e)), a management plan review enables NOAA to evaluate the substantive progress toward implementing the sanctuary's existing management plan and the goals for the sanctuary and to revise the sanctuary's management plan and regulations as necessary to fulfill the purposes and policies of the NMSA.

A revised sanctuary management plan enables NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (ONMS) to adjust the allocation of time and resources to focus on new priority issues, partnerships, technologies and opportunities that have emerged since the existing sanctuary management plan was published. A revised management plan also prioritizes use of collaborative and community-based approaches to pursuing sanctuary goals, supported by a variety of partnerships with Federal and state government agencies, tribal governments and communities, the Intergovernmental Policy Council (IPC), scientific entities, non-governmental organizations, and sanctuary volunteers and advisory council members. Additionally, a revised management plan would allow NOAA to better articulate its efforts to respond to key findings of the Condition Report, to implement new tools to safeguard cultural and maritime heritage resources, and to explore innovative management practices to respond to emerging issues in OCNMS, such as changing ocean conditions.

Proposed updates to the OCNMS management plan are based on ONMS evaluation, input from the advisory council and from the IPC on the current management plan, analysis of comments received during public scoping, and findings from the latest OCNMS condition report. Consistent with the information provided in the 2023 Notice of Intent (88 FR 6236, Jan. 31, 2023), NOAA is not proposing modifications to the sanctuary regulations at this time. Through the public scoping process, NOAA received 37 electronic submissions to *regulations.gov* (with 3 additional attachments), 4 mailed letters, 1 email submission, and 82 comments at public scoping meetings held in February 2023, for a total of 127 total public scoping comments. A summary of the public scoping comments is provided in Appendix F of the DEA, which is available at <https://olympiccoast.noaa.gov/management/mpr>.

### **III. Action Plans**

NOAA is proposing to implement a revised management plan that describes the goals, strategies, and activities intended to help conserve and promote the resources in the sanctuary. The proposed management plan consists of 15 action plans organized under four priority themes:

*Priority Theme A: Achieve Effective Collaborative and Coordinated Management*

- Collaborative and Coordinated Sanctuary Management Action Plan: Improved communication, greater collaboration and stronger relationships between ONMS and other agencies and governments with jurisdiction over resources in the sanctuary.
- Community Involvement in Sanctuary Management Action Plan: Increased involvement of Olympic Peninsula communities in sanctuary management issues and ocean conservation.
- Sanctuary Operations Action Plan: Improved efficiency and effectiveness in OCNMS management capacities and capabilities.

*Priority Theme B: Conduct Collaborative Research, Assessments, and Monitoring to Support Management of Resources in the Sanctuary*

- Ocean Conditions Action Plan: Sustain and enhance ocean observations collected on the Olympic Coast to track change over time, and apply ocean data in support of ecosystem-based management efforts.
- Habitats and Marine Species Action Plan: Continue to map and characterize seafloor habitats in the sanctuary and track the status and trends of key habitats and selected marine communities over time in order to elucidate relationships among ecosystem components and support ecosystem-based management.
- Data Management and Application Action Plan: Maintain, manage, and archive data resources to protect them from loss, to ensure their availability for use in sanctuary management, to share sanctuary data with the public, and to support related research efforts, including social science, led by partners.
- Complementary Research Action Plan: Work with Coastal Treaty Tribes and research partners from other fields and disciplines to foster additional appropriate research and deepen our collective understanding of the Olympic Coast.

*Priority Theme C: Improve Ocean Literacy: Education and Outreach*

- Education Action Plan: Provide and support educational opportunities for teachers and students of all ages in communities adjacent to the sanctuary that lead to greater understanding of ocean literacy, knowledge of national marine sanctuaries and ocean conservation, and increased likelihood of lifelong stewardship behavior.
- Outreach Action Plan: Increase understanding of the value and importance of the sanctuary and public support for the sanctuary through continued community and visitor involvement in events and other opportunities.

*Priority Theme D: Conserve Resources in the Sanctuary*

- Cultural Heritage Action Plan: Respectfully honor, celebrate, and protect the unique cultural heritage connected to the sanctuary through meaningful collaboration and partnership with the Coastal Treaty Tribes.
- Resilience Action Plan: Investigate and improve sanctuary understanding and resilience to changing ocean conditions through research and monitoring, capacity building, collaborative partnerships, and education and outreach.
- Spills Prevention, Preparedness, Response and Restoration Action Plan: Increase protection of resources and habitats within OCNMS from the impacts of an oil or hazardous materials spill. Improve preparedness and coordination for responding to spills affecting marine resources within OCNMS.
- Marine Debris Action Plan: Increase identification and removal of abandoned submerged and floating marine debris. Reduce environmental and aesthetic impacts of debris on coastal beaches.
- Resource Protection Action Plan: Minimize disturbance to wildlife in the sanctuary, improve water quality to ensure protection of natural resources in the sanctuary, mitigate human-caused degradation of marine habitats, and further understand introduced species and minimize their presence and impacts.

- Maritime Heritage Action Plan: Improve understanding of the maritime resources in the sanctuary region and improved communication and partnership between ONMS, the Washington State Historic Preservation Office, the Makah Tribal Historic Preservation Office, the Hoh Tribal Historic Preservation Office, the Quinault Tribal Preservation Office, the Quileute Tribe's cultural resource management representatives, and other maritime heritage partners.

#### **IV. Environmental Compliance and Federal Consultations**

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA; 42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq., as amended) and NOAA's Policy and Procedures for Compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act and Related Authorities: Companion Manual for NOAA Administrative Order 216-6A (June 30, 2025), NOAA has prepared a DEA to evaluate the potential impacts on the human environment of implementing NOAA's proposed action. The proposed action is to update NOAA's management activities conducted within OCNMS that relate to research, monitoring, education, outreach, community engagement, and resource protection. The proposed management activities include implementing routine field activities and existing sanctuary regulations. No significant impacts to resources and the human environment are expected to result from this proposed action. Accordingly, under NEPA, an EA is the appropriate document to analyze the potential impacts of this action. Following the close of the public comment period and the satisfaction of consultation requirements under any applicable natural and cultural resource statutes, NOAA will finalize the EA and determine if a Finding of No Significant Impact is appropriate, or if an Environmental Impact Statement must be prepared.

In addition to NEPA, NOAA must comply with several related statutes and executive orders. The DEA contains information to support effect determinations under the Endangered Species Act; Migratory Bird Treaty Act; Marine Mammal Protection Act; Essential Fish Habitat provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act; National Historic Preservation Act; Coastal Zone Management Act; and Executive Order 13175 on

Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments. Appendix D of the DEA includes additional documentation related to these compliance requirements and consultation processes. In addition, consistent with the policies and principles of Executive Order 14313 of July 3, 2025, NOAA aims to prioritize responsible conservation, restore our lands and waters, and protect our Nation's outdoor heritage for the enjoyment of the American people.

NOAA is seeking public comment on the DMP and DEA, which are available at <https://olympiccoast.noaa.gov/management/mpr> or may be obtained by contacting the individual listed under the heading **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT**.

(Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1431 et seq.; 42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.)

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