

Dear Mr. Armor,

I am writing to convey to you the support of the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary (MBNMS) Advisory Council for the designation of the proposed Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary, the first tribal-lead designation effort in the history of the national marine sanctuary system.

In 2015, after the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) published the rules to re-establish the process by which American communities nominate a “special place” for inclusion in the National Marine Sanctuary system.

In response, the Northern Chumash Tribal Council, with support from diverse stakeholders in Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo counties, submitted a proposal to nominate the Chumash Heritage NMS (CHNMS), a stretch of ocean between Santa Rosa Creek in northern San Luis Obispo County, to just beyond Point Conception in Santa Barbara County. The northern boundary of CHNMS would be contiguous with the southern boundary of MBNMS, and its southern boundary would touch the northern boundary of Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary.

Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary’s Advisory Council (AC) supports the designation of CHNMS for the following reasons:

1. Named after the local native American tribes, the new sanctuary would reflect the contribution of the coastal Chumash tribes and the First Nation to the health of the ocean. Indeed, their rich maritime heritage underscores the deep significance of the ocean to humanity. The ocean is a living part of their mythology, and they continue honoring their ancestors through a “pilgrimage” to the Island of Santa Cruz in their traditional redwood canoe (Tomol). The AC recognizes the value of diversity in stakeholders and values diverse stakeholder representation supporting this designation, in particular with regard to maritime and Native American heritage. In light of dramatic climactic and cultural shifts occurring now, there is an urgent need for tribal entities and federal agencies to take a cooperative stewardship role.
2. The CHNMS is designed to include the continental shelf as well as the escarpment rich with deep underwater canyons. It is influenced by the California Current and subjected to the yearly upwelling that yields some of the most productive waters on Earth. It provides a link between its three sister sanctuaries to the north (Monterey Bay, Greater Farallones, and Cordell Bank national marine sanctuaries) and the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary to the south, from Point Arena to Santa Barbara. Furthermore, it sets aside a stretch of ocean that would help science better assess the biological productivity of this system and enhance its understanding of ocean dynamics in the context of climate change.
3. By virtue of its designation as a sanctuary, CHNMS would be protected from oil and gas exploration as well as seafloor ocean mining, restrictions which would help protect local fisheries and the clean coast economy. Both of these industrial activities now pose an increased threat to the region. CHNMS would also be able to implement regulations against large ship discharges which has been identified as an environmental problem.

Located near Santa Barbara, only two hours from Los Angeles, and in near proximity with picturesque California Highway 1, CHNMS, as a tourist destination, could become a premier site to promote the sanctuary system and its mission to the Southern California public as well as to national and international visitors.

Sincerely,

Brian Nelson, Chair  
Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council