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Sanctuary Advisory Council
Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary
299 Foam Street
Monterey, CA 93940
(831) 647-4201

December 9, 2010

Daniel Basta, Director
Office of National Marine Sanctuaries
1305 East West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Dear Mr. Basta,

At the October 21, 2010 Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary (MBNMS) Advisory Council Meeting, the council passed a motion in support of requesting from the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (ONMS) an increase in staffing budget for the MBNMS to allow allocation for the Coastal Discovery Center at William R. Hearst Memorial Beach in San Simeon, California.

The Coastal Discovery Center opened in 2006 thanks to the collaboration of California State Parks and ONMS/MBNMS. This vital partnership harnesses a cadre of volunteer docents to staff an educational outreach center at the southern edge of the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary. The Center's theme is connecting land and sea to echo the joint goals of both partners. Packed into a small space are exhibits of the history of San Simeon, elephant seal information, safe wildlife viewing, movies of deep sea exploration and maritime history, watershed education along with a live steelhead aquarium, tidepool messages and a plankton viewing station. The Center is hoping to add a climate change exhibit should funding become available. Volunteer docents perform all sorts of tasks including maintenance on the Center; staffing the interpretive desk, putting on the annual Coastal Fair, teaching visiting school groups, and are representatives for both CA State Park and MBNMS at public events. The school groups that have benefited from this Center include elementary schools throughout this region, alternative high schools, ocean-themed camp programs, Junior Colleges, Universities and adult education programs. 500 students a year visit the center and many more could access the site with increased staffing. Thirty docents volunteer 4,000 hours annually to interpret for 15,000 visitors each year at a center open only on weekends.

The nearest Sanctuary office is nearly 100 miles away from the Center. Currently, there is a single staff person--Carolyn Skinder--allocated to the CDC. Her tasks include coordinating, training and managing of the volunteer docent program,

maintenance and upkeep of the Center, exhibit design, education outreach, resource protection, public relations, and communication with partnering agencies such as the Morro Bay National Estuary Program, California State Parks, U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, National Marine Fisheries service, and many others. In addition, she is involved in creating MPA signage, assisting NOAA and CA State Parks law enforcement, managing water quality and biotoxin plankton monitoring programs and organizing public lectures for the community about the Sanctuary. Due to limited resources and budget cuts to partnering CA State Parks, she has managed to find creative ways to get things done, such as using the local high school students' public service hours to replace a deteriorating deck at the Center.

Because of site budget limitations, the Center is only open three days a week and cannot meet all of the requests of school groups or other visitors. In addition, staff resources for docent coordination are inadequate for dealing with the multitude of other duties such as coordinating the volunteer monitoring program, maintaining and designing new exhibits, and handling resource protection issues and attending intergovernmental planning meetings. We believe that additional resources are necessary to the continuation and effectiveness of the Coastal Discovery Center and Sanctuary program delivery in San Luis Obispo County. The national program should ensure that field sites like the Coastal Discovery Center are as strong as they can be.

Thank you in advance for responding to our request.

Sincerely,

Chris Harrold

Chris Harrold
Sanctuary Advisory Council Chair