

NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARIES

and the St. George nomination

National marine sanctuaries are areas in U.S. waters that are identified to protect special natural and cultural resources while allowing people to sustainably use and enjoy those waters.

For many generations, the Pribilof Islands marine environment—including its fish, seals, sea lions and birds—has sustained the Unangan (Aleut) way of life and been recognized as a globally significant ecosystem. The creation of the St. George Unangan National Marine Sanctuary will protect the extraordinary treasures of these waters.

Facts about sanctuaries

What sanctuaries do NOT do: Sanctuaries do not manage fishing. In fact, commercial and recreational fishing and shore-side operations exist in virtually every national marine sanctuary. Under the *National Marine Sanctuary Act*, sanctuaries are adaptively managed and promote multiple uses. In the case of the St. George sanctuary, the North Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Council and the State of Alaska would retain management and regulatory authority over St. George's fisheries. If a fishery issue were to arise within sanctuary waters, sanctuary staff and the sanctuary advisory council would work with federal and state managers to understand and address the issue cooperatively.

National Marine Sanctuaries are very different from Marine National Monuments. There are currently 13 national marine sanctuaries throughout the U.S. and two marine national monuments (Hawaii, American Samoa). The sanctuary designation process and the management of sanctuaries relies heavily on stakeholder participation and cooperation. Marine National Monuments are designated by Presidential Order or Proclamation (not by NOAA), do not require stakeholder consultations, and can result in the prohibition of all or several types of uses such as fishing or other commercial activities.

How sanctuaries are created

Community nomination: The national marine sanctuary process begins when a community submits a written nomination to NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries. Among other things, nominations explain why a particular marine area's natural resources and ecological qualities are of national significance, and how the area supports or has the potential to support economic uses. If NOAA determines that the nomination meets its 11 criteria for sanctuaries, NOAA will put the nomination into an "inventory" of potential sanctuaries that could one day be "designated" as a national marine sanctuary. NOAA has determined that the St. George nomination meets the criteria for a national marine sanctuary and has placed the nomination into its inventory. The next step in the St. George process is commencement of the designation process.

The designation process: By law, the designation process is highly open, public and participatory, and creates many opportunities for all interested parties—e.g., community members, traditional councils, native corporations, industries, government agencies, elected officials and user groups in general—to share their perspectives on the proposed sanctuary and work together toward cooperative, consensus-driven approaches to the marine area's use and protection. When the consultations and scoping process

has been completed, NOAA drafts a customized sanctuary management plan reflecting the result of the process, an environmental impact statement and a proposed rule creating the sanctuary. These documents are made available for review and comment by the public and elected officials prior to finalization. The process typically take 2-3 years to complete.

What sanctuaries do: Sanctuary management plans outline regulatory and non-regulatory activities to be undertaken to protect the marine environment, while identifying uses that would be consistent with resource protection. This includes commercial and recreational fishing, non-commercial uses of the waters, and related economic development, such as promoting tourism. When a sanctuary is designated, NOAA hires a sanctuary manager and professional staff to implement the management plan and manage sanctuary activities in consultation with a sanctuary advisory council. The advisory council comprises representatives from local communities and other relevant stakeholder organizations who apply for a seat. Sanctuary offices coordinate numerous activities of direct benefit to communities and the marine environment, such as research, monitoring, education, training, student internships, pollution control and prevention, and other resource protection initiatives.

Why the City of St. George nominated its waters to become a sanctuary



The sanctuary would protect St. George's resources and heritage: The sanctuary would protect St. George's Unangan maritime and cultural heritage, and subsistence rights. Moreover, through the development of scientific, monitoring, educational and other activities addressing the various specific threats to St. George's marine environment (e.g., climate change, increased vessel traffic, waste, plastics, invasive species), the sanctuary would conserve resources for future generations of St. George residents and for those throughout the region and beyond who rely on those resources.



The sanctuary could help the renovation of St. George's harbor: National marine sanctuaries are compatible with harbor redevelopment. In fact, the designation of a national marine sanctuary brings additional attention and significance to marine areas, and often increases investments in infrastructure improvements, such as harbor renovations. The St. George nomination anticipated the renovation of the city's harbor by specifically including a buffer zone around the harbor entrance in the proposed sanctuary boundaries.



The sanctuary process is participatory and open: Through the creation of a sanctuary advisory council, the sanctuary would promote open communication and cooperative decision-making, strengthen local capacity, and, for the first time, give St. George residents a seat at the table of government decision-making that affects their community's waters.



The sanctuary would provide urgently needed help to the local economy: Today, St. George urgently needs economic development. The experiences of other national marine sanctuary communities make clear that a St. George Unangan Heritage sanctuary would increase tourism, research and environmental education activities, and create crucially needed local jobs and revenues. That is why St. George residents regard creation of the St. George Unangan Heritage National Marine Sanctuary as a cornerstone of the community's economic redevelopment vision and an essential step toward addressing the injustices and unfulfilled promises that the community has experienced over many decades.



For more information about national marine sanctuaries, see <https://sanctuaries.noaa.gov>