UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL OCEAN SERVICE
Office of National Marine Sanctuaries
1305 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

June 2015

Dear Marine Protected Areas Manager:

Special places in the ocean -- marine protected areas -- are critical to America's future, sustaining our natural systems, the local economies they support, and our cultural connections to the sea. I am writing to invite your program's participation in the National System of Marine Protected Areas. Established in 2009, the national system connects and strengthens the nation's diverse marine protected areas, providing opportunities for us all to work together on shared priorities, as called for by Executive Order 13158. Details on the national system are provided in the newly updated *Framework for the National System of Marine Protected Areas of the United States of America*.

Currently, a total of 437 federal, state, territorial and partnership sites are participating in the national system. Through the national system, marine protected area programs have opportunities to collaborate on ocean management initiatives; raise awareness of marine protected areas and the ocean resources they conserve; support targeted regional science and stewardship initiatives; receive training and technical assistance; and build regional marine protected area networks.

The National Marine Protected Areas Center coordinates the national system and maintains the national Marine Protected Areas Inventory, built from data provided by federal and state programs. Based on an analysis of this data, the MPA Center has determined that the sites listed in the attached Program Summary Sheet are potentially eligible for the national system. This nomination package and the list of potentially eligible sites are available electronically here.

Any MPA in US waters must meet three criteria to be eligible for the national system: (1) fit the definition of an MPA; (2) have a management plan that has clear goals and objectives and calls for monitoring and evaluation of those goals; (3) contribute to at least one priority conservation objective of the national system as described in the Framework. In addition, cultural heritage MPAs must meet cultural heritage requirements.

If you would like to nominate some or all of these sites to the national system, please complete the attached nomination form and submit it by August 21, 2015. We have determined that the attached list of potentially eligible sites (Program Summary Sheets) meet criteria #1 and #2. If you believe that they also meet criterion #3 (and cultural heritage requirements, if applicable), please confirm that as well by submitting the attached checklist (fillable PDF). Nomination checklists should be sent to Dr. Mimi D'Iorio (Mimi.Diorio@noaa.gov).
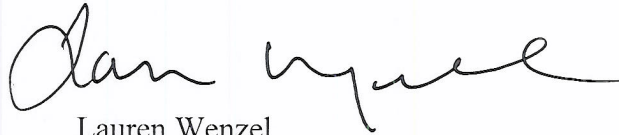
Printed on Recycled Paper

Accurate and current information is essential for effective MPA planning and management. Please review the data for your program on the Program Summary Sheet and verify that it is correct. Any necessary corrections can be made by requesting an excel spreadsheet of data for your program.

The MPA Center will schedule a webinar this summer to discuss the function and benefits of the national system, explain the nomination process and answer any questions. Please have interested staff contact me to participate in the call, or with specific questions about the nomination process or the national system. I can be reached at 301-713-7265 or lauren.wenzel@noaa.gov.

Sincerely,

Lauren Wenzel
Acting Director
National Marine Protected Areas Center

Attachments:
- Nomination Process Fact Sheet
- Checklist for Evaluating Whether Existing Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) Meet Priority Conservation Objectives for the National System of MPAs (in PDF and Excel)
- Instructions and Definitions Sheet for Checklist
- Joining the National System of MPAs: Frequently Asked Questions
- Link to List of Potentially Eligible MPAs for the National System of MPAs (Program Summary Sheets)