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### **Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary**

The Sanctuary's R/V *Shearwater* completed a week-long cruise in support of the California Department of Fish and Game white abalone population restoration project. White abalone are listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act, and this project supports recovery efforts of the National Marine Fisheries Service's Office of Protected Resources. Scientists on-board conducted several remotely operated vehicle dives to locate areas of suitable white abalone habitat and, whenever possible, to collect abalone specimens. Traps were deployed to collect additional specimens, in an attempt to increase the number of broodstock in captivity. At the completion of the project, three abalones had been collected and several hours of underwater video recorded, exceeding the initial goals of the project. Eventually, scientists hope to introduce captive-bred animals to the wild, in the hopes of restoring local populations.

### **Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary**

The construction contractor for the Dr. Nancy Foster Florida Keys Environmental Complex — the future home of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Lower Region offices, and interagency visitors center — physically broke ground on November 24, 2004. Site construction and building construction are proceeding. Progress photos can be viewed on the project web site at [www.nfc.constructware.com](http://www.nfc.constructware.com).

The Sanctuary completed the installation of 46 new sanctuary interpretive signs at boat ramps throughout the Keys and South Miami-Dade County. The new signs are replacing temporary signs that were posted in 1991 after the designation of the sanctuary. The new signs will help educate boaters before they launch and enter sanctuary waters. The National Marine Sanctuary Foundation was a partner on this project.

### **Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary**

On December 5, staff from Gulf of the Farallones joined staff from Congresswoman Anna Eshoo's office for a short boat tour of Pillar Point Harbor and the waters outside. Staff from the Harbor District also participated. Sanctuary-related questions from the staff included such issues as the *Luckenbach*, the radioactive waste dumpsite, resource and program needs (including research, enforcement and vessels), types of marine wildlife, and Mavericks. Also discussed were the Pillar Point Initiative and the harbor's long-range plans for rebuilding Romeo Pier into a multi-use pier that could be used by the Coast Guard, NOAA, and other agency partners.

### **Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary**

The National Marine Sanctuary Program Director and the Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary Manager, Education Coordinator and Communications and Outreach Coordinator met in Atlanta with representatives of the Georgia Aquarium to discuss future Gray's Reef Sanctuary exhibit possibilities. They were given a special tour of the still-under-construction structure and explored the many collaborative possibilities for immediate and future partnerships with this exciting facility. In the meantime, the Aquarium has agreed to become a regional center for a remotely operated vehicle competition. Gray's Reef sanctuary will be collaborating with them next summer on teacher's workshops.

### **Hawaiian Island Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary**

The Sanctuary research team kicked off the Structure of Populations, Level of Abundance and Status of Humpbacks (SPLASH) program for the 2005 winter season to assess the early arrival of the whales to their Hawaii eating and wintering area. This is the second year of an international study of endangered North Pacific humpback whales. SPLASH involves hundred of researchers around the globe in both winter and summer assessments. The sanctuary staff's early documentation included observations of whales off Kona Coast. They were able to capture early season photos and biopsy samples.

### **Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary**

On November 30, the 41-ft S/V *Nordstar* ran aground between Point Ano Nuevo and Ano Nuevo Island in one of the most sensitive protected areas within the Sanctuary. There were no human fatalities or injuries. The vessel was reported to have 230 gallons of diesel aboard and was insured. Gulf of the Farallones and Monterey Bay national marine sanctuaries jointly responded since the vessel was only yards from the boundary of the northern management area. The vessel broke up overnight and was pushed ashore by the seas. Approximately 60 percent of the vessel was recovered. A NOAA Office of Law Enforcement investigation is in progress.

### **Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve and Proposed Sanctuary**

On December 6, an all-day Coral Disease Workshop shared research findings and investigative techniques developed in the main and Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. The workshop drew largely on three years of survey work conducted by Dr. Greta Aeby, a coral biologist whose research in the NWHI is funded principally by the Reserve. The educational outreach event was organized by Dr. Aeby and hosted by the Hawai'i Institute of Marine Biology. Fea-

tured presentations were on fish and coral disease investigation, field techniques, histopathology and molecular and microbiological techniques. During an afternoon field session, participants practiced coral disease survey skills underwater at the workshop site.

### **Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary**

The sanctuary, the Cape Cod Museum of Natural History and the Massachusetts Audubon Society co-sponsored the Stellwagen Bank Christmas Bird Count on Saturday, December 18th. Clear skies, calm seas, and little wind helped to make this an ideal day at sea despite chilly temperatures. In addition to the alcids, gulls, gannets and other birds, the participants also viewed a number of whales, including humpbacks, finbacks, a minke whale, and a pod of Atlantic white-sided dolphins. Simon Perkins from Massachusetts Audubon Society was the official counter. Twenty-six hardy birdwatchers participated in the seven-hour cruise, along with two sanctuary staff.

### **National Marine Sanctuary Program**

On December 6-9, staff of the NMSP and NOAA Fisheries' Office of Protected Resources held a strategic planning meeting in Long Beach, California, to determine what joint projects the two programs will pursue in the future. This meeting brought together key protected resource players from all relevant sanctuaries and NMFS regions to review current collaborations and prioritize the best future projects and consider resource needs for those projects, including other possible partners. The outcomes of this process will be designed to dovetail in the Planning, Programming, Budgeting and Execution System process.

The week of November 29, the NMSP hosted a group of select congressional, Commerce and NOAA staff in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary to demonstrate the successes and challenges in managing this complex ecosystem. There were field trips to coral reef restoration sites and the Dry Tortugas Ecological Reserve; briefings on marine mammal stranding response by NOAA Fisheries; law enforcement efforts in the sanctuary; the sanctuary's Key West Harbor dredging and the Navy Mole Pier coral rescue project; the sanctuary's Key West Nancy Foster Eco-Discovery Center; and sanctuary education and other programs. The trip was deemed a success in conveying the importance in the role of NOAA's NMSP and other programs, and our partnerships. Guests included Amy Frankel - Senate Democratic Counsel, Senate Commerce; Dave Whaley - House Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation Wildlife and Oceans; Jeff Petrick - Democratic Chief Counsel, House Committee on Resources; Emily Lindow - DOC Senior Policy Advisor; Bridgett Walsh - Deputy Legislative Director, Office of Senator Nelson; Shelley Miklas - Legislative Assistant for Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen; Jason Shadid - NOS budget analyst; and Jennifer LaBarre - NOAA Legislative Affairs.

From Dec. 1-4 the NMSP participated in the United States Coral Reef Task Force in Miami, Florida, including presentations and/or workshops on responsible dive practices, damage assessment protocol, links between science and management, and sanctuary education efforts. Billy Causey, Florida Keys NMS superintendent received the “Coral Reef Champion” award in recognition of his life-long coral reef management and restoration efforts. NMSP participated in the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement event between the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and NOAA, with a focus on the Florida Keys sanctuary. The NMSP presented an award to concrete company Rinker Materials for 10 years of support to the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Reef Restoration Program for supplying concrete for the constructing the artificial reef modules used in restoration efforts.

On December 6, the Pacific Region’s maritime archaeologist joined a team of National Park Service and Navy divers to return the remains of Pearl Harbor survivor Thomas C. Moley, Photographer’s Mate 2nd class. The USS *Utah* was one of the first ships attacked by Japanese planes on the morning of December 7, 1941. Two torpedoes struck forward on the vessel’s port side, and at 8:05 AM the order was passed for all hands to abandon ship. The *Utah* capsized, snapping her mooring lines as she rolled. Six officers and 52 enlisted men were lost. Pounding from the inside of the ship indicated the position of trapped survivors, who were later rescued. The Navy ceremony, followed by returning the remains to the interior of the vessel through a forward hatch, was a moving reminder of the significance of the event at a very personal level.

The American Zoo and Aquarium Association (AZA) is planning to launch their National Awareness Campaign in February 2005. This national strategic communications plan aims at raising the public’s awareness of AZA-accredited zoos and aquariums as the trusted experts on animal care, wildlife conservation, and public education about wildlife issues. The 2005 theme for the campaign, “Wonders of Water,” will show multiple ways AZA members connect the public to the ocean world. Since the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding with the AZA, the National Marine Sanctuary Program has worked to increase the visibility of the sanctuaries in AZA member institutions. In addition, NMSP and AZA are discussing other ways sanctuaries and AZA can partner to promote the American public’s greater awareness of the world oceans and national sanctuaries.