

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Cordell Bank is located at the edge of the Pacific continental shelf, 20 miles due west of Point Reyes, California. In accordance with Title III of the Marine Protection, Research and Sanctuaries Act, as amended, 16 U.S.C. 1431 et seq., this final Environmental Impact Statement and Management Plan proposes the establishment of a National Marine Sanctuary centered on Cordell Bank to facilitate the long-term management and protection of its resources. Part I of this report reviews the authority for Sanctuary designation, the goals of the National Marine Sanctuary Program, the development of this proposal, and the purpose of designating a national marine Sanctuary at Cordell Bank.

Part II, Section I, outlines Sanctuary management goals and objectives in resource protection, research, interpretation and visitor use. The area recommended for the proposed Sanctuary, about 397.05 square nautical miles, provides the habitat for a distinctive assortment of living marine resources. The surfaces of Cordell Bank are populated by an unusual combination of benthic organisms, including nearshore varieties as well as those normally found on offshore seamounts. Bank waters are inhabited by large numbers of rockfish and are used as a feeding ground by marine mammals and seabirds. The abundance of rockfish at Cordell Bank also supports a significant commercial and recreational fishery. The Cordell Bank environment, its living resources, and human activities in the area are described in Part II, Section II.

The plan for managing the proposed Sanctuary is provided in Part II, Section III. This plan contains guidelines to ensure that all management actions undertaken in the first five years after designation are directed to resolving important issues as a means of meeting Sanctuary objectives. Management actions are considered in three program categories: resource protection, research, and interpretation. Resource protection will involve cooperation with other agencies in formulating policies and procedures including the enforcement of regulations for visitor use. Research will include baseline studies, monitoring, and predictive studies to provide information needed in resolving management issues. Interpretation programs will be directed to improving public awareness of the Sanctuary's resources and the need to use them wisely to ensure their viability.

Existing regulatory authorities in the proposed Sanctuary (Appendix II) will be unaffected by Sanctuary designation. In addition to regulation by these authorities, however, the management plan calls for the promulgation of two new regulations when the Sanctuary is designated. One of these regulations will prohibit the discharge into the Sanctuary of oil and other materials that may be harmful to Sanctuary resources, except as specifically permitted for research, educational, salvage or Sanctuary management purposes. The other regulation will prohibit removing, taking, or injuring or attempting to take, remove or injure benthic organisms, except as specifically permitted for research, educational, salvage, or Sanctuary management purposes. Three other activities are potentially subject to regulations; hydrocarbon activities,

anchoring on Cordell Bank, or within the 50 fathom contour surrounding the Bank and taking, removing, or injuring or attempting to take, remove or injure cultural or historical resources.

The administrative framework for managing the proposed Sanctuary (Part II, Section IV) recognizes the need for cooperation and coordination among all participants in Sanctuary management and delineates the roles of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Marine and Estuarine Management Division, the National Park Service, the U.S. Coast Guard, and the Sanctuary Manager and staff in resource protection, research, interpretation, and general administration.

Alternatives in developing the proposal to designate a national marine Sanctuary at Cordell Bank were considered in terms of achieving optimum protection for the ecosystem, improving scientific knowledge of the area, and promoting public understanding of the value of Bank resources (Part III). Based on these criteria, Sanctuary designation was preferred to the alternative of no action, and preferred boundary, management, and regulatory alternatives were selected. The environmental consequences of each of these alternatives are described in Part IV.

The emergence of new issues and other unforeseeable factors may affect specific aspects of Sanctuary management as described in this plan. However, the overall goals, management objectives and general guidelines will continue to be relevant. Throughout the first five years after designation, the aim is to carefully adjust the plan to changing circumstances in light of the experience gained in actual management.