



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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MBNMS management plan working group:
Wildlife Disturbance-Marine Mammals,
Seabirds & Turtles.

11 April 2003

Dear Working Group Members:

At the 13 March sanctuary overflight meeting, we were asked to provide written justification for inclusion of the Devil's Slide and San Pedro rocks area of San Mateo County into the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary's overflight restriction zone. Below, we have summarized the reasons we believe this area should be included for the protection of seabirds and marine mammals.

Devil's Slide Rock, the Devil's Slide mainland, and nearby San Pedro Rock are important seabird nesting areas (see attached map). San Pedro Rock is also a harbor seal haul-out. San Pedro Rock held a historic Common Murre (*Uria aalge*) colony that was eliminated in the early twentieth century by the commercial murre egg industry. Up until the early 1980s, Devil's Slide Rock held a nesting colony of nearly 3,000 murres. By 1986, this large colony was eliminated because of murre mortality in the nearshore set gillnet fishery, the 1986 *Apex Houston* oil spill, and the severe 1982-1983 El Niño event. Litigation between federal and state resources trustees and the Apex Houston oil company resulted in a settlement in 1994 of \$6.4 million, of which \$4.9 million was allocated to the restoration of the Devil's Slide Rock, San Pedro Rock, and other murre colonies in central California. Since 1996, the Common Murre Restoration Project, led by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in cooperation with Humboldt State University, the National Audubon Society, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and the California Department of Fish and Game has been using social attraction techniques to restore these colonies.

Restoration efforts on Devil's Slide Rock have been very successful thus far. In 1996, six pairs of murres bred for the first time in ten years, and numbers have been increasing every year since (see attached figure). As of 2002, 123 pairs of murres bred on Devil's Slide Rock along with 90 pairs of Brandt's Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax penicillatus*) and smaller numbers of Pelagic Cormorants (*P. pelagicus*), Black Oystercatchers (*Haematopus bachmani*), Western Gulls (*Larus occidentalis*), and Pigeon Guillemots (*Cephus columba*). No recent breeding by murres has yet occurred on San Pedro Rock (though small numbers occasionally visit); however, this rock is a current breeding site for Pelagic Cormorants, Black Oystercatchers, Western Gulls, and Pigeon Guillemots. In addition to the Devil's Slide and San Pedro rock colonies, the Devil's Slide mainland cliffs host a colony of about 200 pairs of Brandt's Cormorants, large numbers of

Pigeon Guillemots, and smaller numbers of Pelagic Cormorants and Western Gulls. Together, these rocks and cliffs host 500 to 600 pairs of nesting seabirds.

The Common Murre colony at Devil's Slide Rock is expected to continue growing in the foreseeable future. It is hoped that the social attraction efforts will reestablish a murre colony on San Pedro Rock. Thus, the Devil's Slide and San Pedro area could hold as many as 1,000 to 2,000 breeding pairs or more seabirds in the coming years. However, to achieve this level of success, certain anthropogenic impacts must be eliminated or reduced to a minimum.

Murres are one of the most susceptible seabird species to aircraft overflight disturbance. When aircraft fly too close to the colony, adults may flush from their nests, breaking eggs or leaving eggs and chicks exposed to avian predation. Data collected at Devil's Slide Rock by the Common Murre Restoration Project has documented a relatively high number of overflights below 1,000 feet above sea level over the Devil's Slide Rock area, as well as the flushing of murres by aircraft. Continued low overflights in this area could jeopardize the restoration efforts that have taken years and millions of dollars to achieve. Thus, additional protection is needed for these colonies if they are to flourish in a self-sustainable manner. Including this area as a flight restriction zone in the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary would be one important way to reduce unnecessary human disturbance to these colonies.

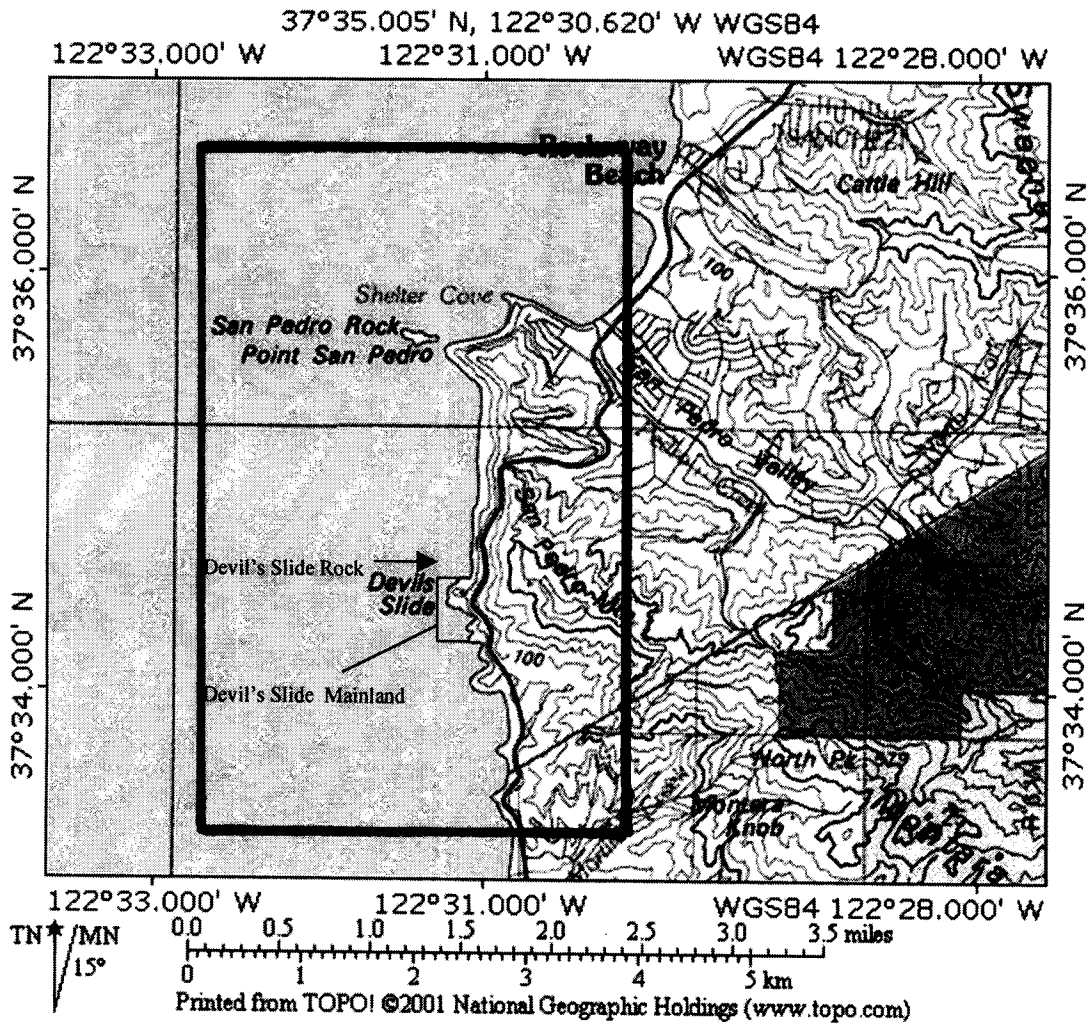
To adequately protect these seabird colonies, we suggest a flight-restricted zone that would include the colonies, the area between the colonies, and a buffer zone to at least one-mile on all sides (see attached map). This would better assure that aircraft in the area will remain clear of the colonies.

Thank you for this opportunity to participate in the sanctuary management plan process. If you have any questions, please contact Gerry McChesney at 510-792-0717 ext. 222 or Hugh Knechtel at 510-792-0717 ext. 227.

Sincerely,



Margaret Kolar, Refuge Manager
San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge Complex



Proposed Overflight Restricted Zone for the Devil's Slide Rock/San Pedro Rock area.

Number of Common Murre Breeding Pairs at Devil's Slide Rock (1979 to 2002).

