

Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary Draft Management Plan Released for Public Review and Comment

After nearly a decade of focused effort in its preparation, the Draft Management Plan (DMP) for the Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary (SBNMS) was released for public review and comment on May 6, 2008. The Plan provides the basis for considering how to improve the conditions of sanctuary resources through a non-regulatory policy framework addressing the issues facing the SBNMS over the next five years. This is the first time there has been a cogent, fully developed modern management plan characterizing the sanctuary's diverse natural and cultural resources, current risks to them, and action plans for addressing these risks. Coincident with the DMP's release, SBNMS began a 90-day public comment period during which the public can voice its opinion of the DMP before it is finalized. The public comment period ends on August 4, 2008.

As a concerned citizen, whether you are a wreck diver, history buff, student, teacher, or historic preservation professional/agency representative, you are a steward of our nation's rich legacy of maritime heritage. This legacy is represented in the non-renewable submerged cultural resources of local, regional, national, and even international significance that are located within the SBNMS and are just now beginning to be identified and inventoried by sanctuary archaeologists. These resources are held in public trust for all of us and for future generations to use to the extent that this use is compatible with the sanctuary's primary objective of resource protection. We hope you will make the most of this opportunity to review and comment on this important document and let your voice be heard regarding your support for or concerns with the way the DMP addresses the management and protection of maritime heritage resources in the SBNMS.

What and Where is the Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary?

Created in 1992, the SBNMS is one of 13 National Marine Sanctuaries designated by the U.S. Congress as an area of the marine environment with special national significance. Managed by the Department of Commerce's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Marine Sanctuaries are set aside in perpetuity for long-term protection and conservation and are essentially the marine equivalent of a national park. The SBNMS encompasses an 842-square mile area of open-ocean located entirely in federal waters between Cape Ann and Cape Cod at the mouth of Massachusetts Bay, approximately 25 miles east of Boston. The SBNMS is centered upon the glacially formed Stellwagen Bank, the most prominent geological feature in the sanctuary. Eighty-five percent of the sanctuary's area lies in water depths greater than 130 feet, with its shallowest portions lying at a depth of 65 feet.

What Kinds of Maritime Heritage Resources Does the Sanctuary Contain?

The full extent of the SBNMS's maritime heritage resources is presently unknown, since it was only after 2000 that the SBNMS hired archaeological consultants to begin the process of surveying, inventorying, monitoring and assessing for National Register of Historic Places eligibility the sanctuary's maritime heritage resources. Currently available data indicate the sanctuary is likely to contain inundated formerly terrestrial archaeological deposits dating from the PaleoIndian period (about 12,500 to 10,000 years ago), as well as the shipwrecks of hundreds

of Euro-American vessels spanning the region's entire 400-plus year post-contact history. The possibility of PaleoIndian archaeological deposits being present in the shallower portions of the Sanctuary is supported by the recovery of mastodon skeletal remains in these areas by local fishermen. These remains were deposited after the end of the last glaciation, when sea level was some 350 feet lower than today and Stellwagen Bank was an exposed vegetated landscape occupied by a variety of wildlife. Stellwagen Bank is believed to have been accessible to the region's earliest human inhabitants who may have used the bank for hunting and fishing between about 12,000 and 11,000 years ago. The ship-borne arrival of Europeans in the region in the early seventeenth century and the sanctuary's position astride historic fishing grounds and shipping routes between some of America's oldest ports greatly increased the quantity of maritime traffic in the sanctuary. This increased traffic led to the accumulation of several hundred reported vessel losses within and in the vicinity of the SBNMS. Sanctuary archaeologists who have just begun surveying the SBNMS have located 18 historic shipwrecks, four of which are identified by name, and four of which are now listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Significantly, 11 of the 18 historic wrecks show evidence of being impacted by fishing activities (i.e., are entangled in a variety of different types of fishing gear).

What is the Purpose of the Draft Management Plan?

The Draft Management Plan sets out a series of actions for the next five years. Specifically, the Plan establishes priorities for addressing for the first time in a comprehensive way the sanctuary's maritime heritage resources through the development of a formal Maritime Heritage Resource Management Program and by assessing which sanctuary uses are compatible with the long-term goal of resource protection to guide future management actions.

In addition to these priority actions, there are a number of other potential actions addressed in the Plan. They are the result of earlier public comments, the efforts of the Maritime Heritage Resources working group, and the SBNMS Sanctuary Advisory Council. The Maritime Heritage working group was chaired by members of the sanctuary staff and Advisory Council and filled with a variety of experts in maritime heritage resource management, the fishing industry, and the recreational diving community that met regularly to develop the Plan. Both the full Plan itself and the shorter guide provide details of the Plan's proposed actions designed to enhance protection of the SBNMS maritime heritage resources.

How Do I Obtain a Copy of the Draft Management Plan to Review?

The SBNMS Management Plan and related documents are easily available for download on-line at the sanctuary's website: <http://stellwagen.noaa.gov>. At over 350-pages, the Plan is a large, detailed technical document. Fortunately, the Plan may be downloaded not only in its entirety, but also in individual sections. Furthermore, a special edition of the sanctuary's newsletter, *Banknotes* (containing a 32-page synthesis of the Plan and its proposed actions) is also available from the SBNMS website.

How Can I Comment?

Comments on the DMP can be submitted in writing electronically (by e-mail), in writing by fax, or in person at any one of eight upcoming public meetings scheduled in June. Please visit <http://stellwagen.noaa.gov> for commenting specifics. The sanctuary will be holding these meetings to explain the Plan and to receive comments on it. The full schedule of public meetings is available on the web site and is reproduced below. We heartily encourage you to attend one of these evening meetings, both to learn about the Plan and to see what others are saying about it. Even if you want to wait until later to comment on the Plan, it is worth attending one of the meetings to increase your familiarity with the Plan and to ask any questions you may have about it.

What Should I Say About the Plan? What Do Others Who Have an Interest in Using and Protecting Maritime Heritage Resources Think?

Because the Draft Management Plan has only just been released, we are still familiarizing ourselves with the details of what is being proposed and how the sanctuary interprets the document.

In formulating your comments and thoughts, it may be helpful to organize them in the context of these concepts:

- **Support** for the concept of the need for a management plan for the Sanctuary;
- **Support** for ecologically-based management actions for the Sanctuary, but not at the expense of funding the Maritime Heritage Program;
- **Support** for the development of a funded SBNMS Maritime Heritage Resources Program and the identification and focused pursuit of additional sources of funding beyond the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries;
- **Support** for the need to protect and manage maritime heritage resources while allowing uses compatible with resource protection;
- **Support** for the inventory, assessment, and characterization of SBNMS maritime heritage resources;
- **Support** for the development and implementation of a Maritime Heritage Resources Outreach and Education Program;
- **Concern** regarding the medium priority given to identifying and forming relationships and partnerships with entities with specialized knowledge and abilities that support the documentation and interpretation of SBNMS maritime heritage resources, site monitoring, and compliance associated with historical permitting and regulations, and the absence of any identification of the types of entities this may or may not include;

- **Concern** regarding the medium priority given to the development and implementation of a mooring buoy system on historical resources and its effect on the recreational diving community, a relatively small, but important SBNMS stakeholder/user group and partner in resource management and protection, and;
- **Concern** that the Maritime Heritage Resources Action Plan does not differentiate between human uses that have different degrees of potential impact to a site, such as impacts from commercial fishing versus scuba diving; that it does not identify which types of impacts the objectives are aiming to address, and that consequently it does not propose specific strategies in cases where human impacts are different and may require unique management approaches;
- **Concern** about the lack of management objectives aimed at specifically at recreational sport diving access, and the lack of clarity around whether a permitting structure for recreational public access on shipwrecks would be utilized and if so, under what conditions/terms access would be allowed;
- **Concern** regarding whether or not the implementation of a management system that categorizes maritime heritage resources into two categories of sites (i.e., an “historic site” or a “heritage preserve”) through an as-yet-defined “rigorous site assessment protocol” distinguishing durable historically significant resources from fragile ones is the best approach to managing different types of human activities (i.e., public access) at and around these sites.

Where Can I Ask Questions About the Plan?

Questions about the plan concerning diving and the Maritime Heritage Resources Action Plan may be sent to by e-mail to Heather Knowles (Diving) at hk@northernatlanticdive.com and/or David Robinson (Maritime Heritage) at david.robinson@uconn.edu. We will respond to all questions as soon as possible, or refer you to sanctuary staff if we cannot provide a sufficient answer. In addition, sanctuary staff will be available at the public comment meetings to informally answer questions, although they will not be able to respond to public comments as such at these meetings.

When and Where Will Public Meetings Be Held?

A complete schedule of the upcoming public meetings is included on the next page. Diving Sanctuary Advisory Council members will be at the public meetings being held on June 9 in Wenham, MA and June 12 in Hyannis, MA – and perhaps others. The next Sanctuary Advisory Council will be held June 12 from 12-5 pm in Hyannis, MA. This meeting is open to the public.

SBNMS DRAFT MANAGEMENT PLAN PUBLIC MEETING SCHEDULE

THURSDAY, 5 JUNE -- 6:30-9:30 p.m.

University of Southern Maine Law School
Talbot Lecture Hall
88 Bedford Street, Portland, ME
Tel: 207.780.4141

MONDAY, 9 JUNE -- 6:30-9:30 p.m.

Gordon College
Lane Student Center, President's Dining Room
255 Grapevine Road, Wenham, MA
Tel: 978.927.2300

TUESDAY, 10 JUNE -- 6:30-9:30 p.m.

Boston University, School of Management
4th Floor, Rooms 426 and 428
595 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA
Tel: 617.353.9720

WEDNESDAY, 11 JUNE -- 6:30-9:30 p.m.

Hilton Garden Inn Plymouth
Plymouth Rooms 1 and 2
Four Home Depot Drive, Plymouth, MA
Tel: 508.830.0200

THURSDAY, 12 JUNE -- 6:30-9:30 p.m.

The Cape Codder Resort
JFK Ballroom
1225 Iyanough Road,
Route 132 & Bearses Way, Hyannis, MA
Tel: 508.771.3000

MONDAY, 16 JUNE -- 6:30-9:30 p.m.

Sheraton Portsmouth Harborside Hotel
Harbor's Edge Room
250 Market Street, Portsmouth, NH
Tel: 603.431.2300

TUESDAY, 17 JUNE -- 6:30-9:30 p.m.

University of Massachusetts - Dartmouth
Woodland Common
285 Old Westport Road, North Dartmouth, MA
Tel: 508.999.8000

THURSDAY, 19 JUNE -- 6:30-9:30 p.m.

Mystic Aquarium, CT
Main Exhibit Hall
55 Coogan Boulevard, Mystic, CT
Tel: 860.572.5955