

Support the Designation of Mallows Bay – Potomac River National Marine Sanctuary

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a National Marine Sanctuary?

Congress established the National Marine Sanctuary system in 1972 to recognize areas that have unique or significant natural and cultural features such as coral reefs, wildlife habitat, and historical artifacts. The system currently includes 13 national marine sanctuaries, two of which were established to conserve historical shipwrecks.

What are the benefits of a designation?

Sanctuary designation is a special type of recognition that makes a site significant as a national treasure. It is comparable to a “National Park” or “National Landmark”. Sanctuaries bring a variety of benefits to the communities, states, and regions in which they are located. These include economic benefits from increased recreation and tourism, education and career opportunities, financial support, and enhanced conservation efforts, to name a few.

What is a draft Environmental Impact Statement?

A draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) is a document required by the government for certain actions "significantly affecting the quality of the human environment". In response to public comment, the DEIS evaluates 4 alternatives to help protect and promote the shipwrecks and other maritime heritage resources in the area. The alternatives are no sanctuary, 18-, 52-, and 100-square-mile area boundaries.

What is the preferred alternative?

The federal agency leading the designation recommends Alternative C: Designating a 52-square-mile area in the Potomac River which includes the vessels listed on the National Register of Historic Places, as well as several other historical shipwrecks and historical areas.

What are the anticipated environmental impacts?

The DEIS finds no significant adverse impacts to the environment.

Am I able to enjoy fishing, boating, and other recreational opportunities in a National Marine Sanctuary?

Yes! The only new regulations clarify and strengthen current laws protecting historical shipwrecks and maritime resources. Recreational & commercial fishing in the area would continue and be managed, as before, by MD DNR and the Potomac River Fisheries Commission. All other recreational uses occurring on the river or on Maryland public lands, including hunting, fossil collecting, birding, wildlife viewing, boating, and paddling, would continue and be managed by MD DNR or local authorities. Archaeological research will be by permit from the Maryland Historical Trust, as before.

Who supports the designation of Mallows Bay-Potomac River as a National Marine Sanctuary?

The sanctuary has a lot of supporters, including but not limited to: Charles County

Commissioners, MD DNR, federal and state elected officials, the Chesapeake Conservancy, the Maryland Historical Trust, maritime museums, local universities and academic institutions, and many local residents.

What happens next?

When the public comment period ends on March 31st, the sanctuary designation committee will review all comments and make a determination. The process could take up to one year to complete.

For more information, visit:

<https://www.regulations.gov/searchResults?rpp=25&po=0&s=NOAA-NOS-2016-0149&fp=true&ns=true>

<http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/mallows-bay>