

TRUMP ORDER COULD REDUCE MONTEREY BAY SANCTUARY



VERN FISHER — MONTEREY HERALD FILE

Under new details of a Trump Administration plan released Monday, although most of the Monterey Bay Sanctuary would remain intact, but the Davidson Seamount, could be cut out of the sanctuary and its protections.

Davidson Seamount could be removed

By Paul Rogers

San Jose Mercury News

Eleven national marine sanctuaries and monuments — from Monterey Bay to New England to the South Pacific — could lose protections under new details of a Trump Administration plan released Monday that seeks to expand offshore oil and gas drilling.

The areas total 425 million acres of coral reefs, sandy beaches, and habitat for whales, dolphins, turtles, birds and fish — equal in size to roughly one-fifth of the Lower 48 states.

As the specifics of the proposal were made public on Monday, environmentalists blasted the plan and urged the public to fight it.

"These are America's most

sensitive ocean areas," said Richard Charter of Bodega Bay, a senior fellow with the Ocean Foundation, an environmental group. "Trump is going for the jugular of the marine environment here. It's incoherent."

On April 28, President Trump signed an executive order requiring U.S. Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross to review any actions taken since 2007 that expanded existing national marine sanctuaries or monuments

or established new ones, and to report back to the White House in October.

"Today we are unleashing American energy and clearing the way for thousands and thousands of high-paying American energy jobs," Trump said then at a White House ceremony.

Although commercial fishing interests and some oil companies have pushed to open some of the areas, California's main

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oil industry trade group said Monday it would not be submitting comments on the plan.

"I am confident that our industry can produce energy safely no matter the environment, so it is understandable that the possibilities are being reviewed," said Catherine Reheis-Boyd, president of the Western States Petroleum Association. "However, I am not aware of any of our members chomping at the bit to pursue the opportunity in California."

On Monday, the official notice with details was published in the Federal Register and a 30-day public comment period began.

The federal notice, which detailed for the first time which ocean areas would be affected, seeks to reverse protections put in place by both President George W. Bush and President Barack Obama. The order would not affect parts of sanctuaries and monuments established before 2007.

Environmentalists had been bracing for Monday's details, and asked opponents to file comments at saveourmarinesanctuaries.org.

The federal notice on Monday showed areas that could be reduced in size are:

- Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary: In 2008, Bush expanded the sanctuary, which stretches from the Marin Headlands to Hearst Castle, by 496,000 acres to include Davidson Seamount, a dormant underwater vol-

cano 80 miles southwest of Monterey that scientists with high-tech underwater subs found is thick with 10-foot tall coral forests, fields of colorful sponges, crabs and anemones that close like Venus flytraps. The entire Monterey Bay sanctuary, first set aside by Congress and President George Bush Sr., in 1992, would not be affected, but the seamount area could be removed.

- Greater Farallones and Cordell Bank national marine sanctuaries: In 2015, Obama more than doubled the size of two Northern California marine sanctuaries, extending them by 50 miles from the Marin County coast up the rugged Sonoma and Mendocino coasts. That expansion could be revoked, clearing the way for oil drilling there.

- Channel Islands: Bush made minor boundary adjustments to expand this sanctuary off Southern California by 9,600 acres near where oil companies have drilled for generations.

- American Samoa: Obama expanded the national marine sanctuary here by 8.7 million acres in 2012.

- Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument: In 2016, Obama vastly expanded this area off the northwest Hawaiian Islands, first set aside for protection by Bush, creating the largest ocean preserve in the United States to protect 10 mostly uninhabited islands from Midway Atoll to reefs west of Kauai that are thick with sea turtles, tropical fish, monk seals and albatrosses.

- Thunder Bay National

Marine Sanctuary: In 2014, Obama roughly doubled the size of this sanctuary on Lake Huron in Michigan that is the site of 116 historic shipwrecks popular with divers and researchers.

Other sanctuaries and ocean monuments established in the last 10 years that could be revoked entirely are:

- Marianas Trench Marine National Monument: Set aside by Bush in January, 2009, this monument bans oil and gas drilling and other industrial activity across 60 million acres near Guam and the Mariana Islands, both U.S. possessions, to protect the Marianas Trench, the world's deepest ocean area, at more than 6 miles deep.

- Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument: 3.1 million acres set aside by Obama in 2016 off the New England Coast where coral reefs, sea mounts, sperm whales and other features are located. Five commercial fishing groups have filed suit to overturn the designation.

- Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument: Established by Bush in 2009 and expanded by Obama in 2014, this 55 million-acre area includes Wake Island, Johnston Atoll, Palmyra Atoll and other South Pacific islands known for their whales, monk seals and coral reefs.

- Rose Atoll Marine National Monument: 8 million acres east of American Samoa and established by Bush, the area is rich with giant clams and reef sharks.

National marine sanctuaries are similar to under-

water national parks. Although fishing is allowed in many of them, offshore oil and gas drilling is banned in all of them, as is underwater mining and other activities that could harm wildlife or the environment. In the 45 years since President Richard Nixon started the program, no president has ever reduced or eliminated a national marine sanctuary.