

Move to give sanctuary status to Monterey Bay worries cities

McCLATCHY NEWS SERVICE

WASHINGTON — Monterey Bay would become a national marine sanctuary by Sept. 30, 1989, under a bill approved this week by a congressional subcommittee.

Currently granted to seven areas, sanctuary status is supposed to provide additional protection for unique environments. For these areas, such as the 1,200-square mile Channel Islands sanctuary off Southern California, management plans restrict certain uses.

Officials of the cities of Gilroy and Morgan Hill fear that making Monterey Bay a sanctuary would automatically put it off-limits to additional treated sewage. One option those cities are considering to solve their sewage disposal problem is to dump it into Monterey Bay via the Pajaro River.

The sanctuary program's

administrators reply that sanctuary status per se doesn't determine whether sewage dumping or other uses are banned.

"That would be part of what we would look at during the management plan," said Joseph Uravitch, chief of the marine-sanctuary program within the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration.

None of the seven existing marine sanctuaries have any municipal sewage dumped into them, Uravitch said. What might be allowed in Monterey Bay would depend on that sanctuary's exact boundaries — still to be determined — and findings made during local study, he said.

Several congressional staff members, who asked not to be named, speculated that sanctuary status could impede efforts to dump more sewage into the bay.

In any case, the bill must still win full congressional approval and be signed into law. It could change in the meantime.

The sanctuary bill faced opposition when it was first considered last week by the oceanography subcommittee of the House Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee. Along with Monterey Bay, the bill would designate two other sanctuaries, off the Washington coast and near Point Reyes. Sites near Florida and Puget Sound also would be studied for possible sanctuary status.

The subcommittee's ranking Republican, Rep. Norm Shumway of Stockton, argued strenuously against putting Monterey Bay on a fast track to sanctuary status.

"I have very grave concerns," Shumway said. "This kind of preferential treatment ... turns it into some kind of political pork-barrel amendment."