



**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
National Marine Sanctuary System  
Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary  
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Dear Boston Sea Rovers Annual Clinic Attendees:

Thank you for the opportunity to explain the Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary management plan review process. We understand that this process is generating a lot of interest while creating some confusion among your readers.

Stellwagen Bank is a special place that includes many exciting diving opportunities. Congress established the Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary in 1992 because it recognized the area's extraordinary national significance and the importance of protecting the sanctuary's living and non-living (e.g., maritime heritage resources, including shipwrecks) marine resources.

Under the National Marine Sanctuaries Act, the Secretary of Commerce, through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), is directed to enhance the public's awareness, understanding, and appreciation of the sanctuary's maritime heritage resources, and to facilitate uses compatible with the primary mandate of protecting these important resources. Under sanctuary regulations, greater protection is required for these resources than those in surrounding federal waters.

Congress also requires NOAA to develop and periodically review sanctuary management plans. NOAA's National Marine Sanctuary Program (NMSP) initiated the first management plan review for Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary in 2002 with public meetings and input. Over 20,000 comments were received, including comments directed at improving management of the sanctuary's maritime heritage resources.

Public comments identified three needs with respect to the maritime heritage resources within the sanctuary:

- 1) A resource inventory and assessment;
- 2) A resource management and protection plan; and
- 3) Improved efforts to educate the public about the maritime heritage resources in the sanctuary.

In response, the Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council convened a Maritime Heritage Resources Working Group to advise the NMSP on the management plan review. The Working Group included representatives of marine science, fishing, conservation, historic preservation and diving interests. This group formulated an action plan to realize the program's goal of resource protection while allowing for compatible uses.

Examples of their recommendations include the establishment of mooring buoys on appropriate sites to facilitate access to sites while avoiding anchor damage, as well as recommending targeted outreach to divers about the sanctuary's maritime heritage resources.

This plan was reviewed and approved by the Sanctuary Advisory Council before being forwarded to the NMSP. The action plan was prepared as advice to the program, and recommendations are currently being evaluated. Consequently, NOAA has not yet released the Draft Management Plan for public comment. However, it is not NOAA's intention to close the entire sanctuary, or all of its shipwreck sites to divers.

