



Santa Barbara Channel Whale Heritage Area

Management Plan August 2023

Introduction

The Santa Barbara Channel Whale Heritage Area (SBCWHA) is a region of significant ecological importance, known for its diverse marine wildlife and its role in supporting whale populations.

Our mission is to promote and protect the natural and cultural heritage of the region, with particular focus on cetaceans and their habitats.

Our goal is to raise awareness about the importance of whales, dolphins and porpoises, their role in enhancing ocean productivity and their climate connection in sequestering carbon. Through education, research, and sustainable practices, we strive to inspire local communities of Santa Barbara and Ventura counties and visitors alike to appreciate and celebrate the presence of whales in the Santa Barbara Channel. By fostering meaningful connections between people, the ocean and especially with whales, dolphins and porpoises, we aim to create a lasting legacy of conservation and preservation for future generations.

This Management Plan aims to establish goals, actions, timelines, responsibilities, and monitoring procedures to ensure the well-being of the community, conservation of nature, and protection of animal welfare in the SBCWHA over a three-year cycle.

1. Community Well-being Goals: On-going
 - Foster sustainable tourism practices already in place that benefit local communities economically, socially, and culturally.
 - Enhance public awareness and education programs to promote understanding, appreciation, and protection of the marine environment.
 - Engage the community in the decision-making process that is already in place, example with Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary's Advisory Board; and seek feedback to ensure their concerns and perspectives are heard and taken into account.

Actions: a) Utilize the sustainable tourism strategy from local whale watching tour companies, Island Packers and Condor Express and implement across a broader group of stakeholders including the smaller whale watching companies based in the Channel Islands Harbor in Oxnard, CA.

- Take the most recent research on cetaceans and collaborate with local stakeholders to identify sustainable tourism practices. This is already in place but we'll reach out to all whale watching companies and make sure they are well versed on the federal guidelines for watching cetaceans without harassing them.
- Establish guidelines and incentives for tourism operators to minimize their environmental impact. This will be ongoing and will happen through an on-going tour operators.
- Increase the promotion of responsible whale-watching practices and encourage visitors to support local businesses. This is also already mostly in place. But will work with any new tour operators.

b) Increase public awareness and education:

- Continue to develop educational materials, including brochures, websites, and signage to inform visitors about the marine environment and wildlife. We are proud of our website so far, but we'll continue to add logos of partners and supporters. There are a few new small 6-pack size boats doing whale watching that we need to include.
- Organize workshops, seminars, and events to engage the community in conservation efforts. *Dates of seminars and events are listed below.*
- Collaborate with local schools to incorporate more marine education into their curriculum. Dates are being set for the fall months to work with all the 3rd grader classes in the 4 elementary schools in the Carpinteria School District and present Santa Barbara Maritime Museum's 'Whales are Superheroes' program.

c) Community involvement and feedback:

- Encourage community members to partake in the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary's Advisory Board to increase communication between management authorities and local communities as it relates to whales.
- Provide opportunities for volunteers to participate in conservation projects and community initiatives. SBCWHA will work closely with Channel Islands Naturalist Corps and collaborate on future opportunities.
- Conduct regular surveys to gather feedback on SBCWHA- this will be on-going

2. Nature Conservation Goals:

- Encourage greater participation in the protection and restoration of critical habitats and ecosystems within the SBCWHA.
- Promote sustainable fishing practices already in place to ensure long-term viability of fish stocks. Jamie Diamond, owner and general manager of Santa Barbara Landing will help take the lead on this important nature conservation goal.
- Participate in the monitoring of human activities on the environment. Penny Owens from Santa Barbara Channelkeeper leads wonderful citizen science opportunities to monitor recreational activities in our MPAs as well as conduct

water qualities surveys both in the local creeks and close to the discharge of cruise ships anchored outside Santa Barbara Harbor. SBCWHA will help promote these opportunities as well as collaborate too.

Actions: a) Habitat protection and restoration: On-going

- Participate in the regular surveys and research to continue to identify critical habitats and key species within the SBCWHA
- Participate in appropriate management strategies to safeguard these habitats.
- Collaborate with local organizations and governmental bodies to restore and rehabilitate degraded habitats.

b) Sustainable fishing practices:

- Work with local fishermen/women to continue developing and promoting sustainable fishing methods.
- Provide educational opportunities for the different sport fishing landings on how best they can continue to prevent overfishing and protect vulnerable species.
- Support research and initiatives to enhance the understanding of local fish populations and their interactions with whales and the ecosystem.

c) Impact assessment and management:

- Gather the most recent scientific research and monitoring programs to regularly assess the impact of human activities on the environment.
- Support measures put in place to mitigate adverse impacts and minimize conflicts between different marine uses.
- Collaborate with relevant authorities and stakeholders to help increase the importance of enforcing regulations.

3. Animal Welfare Goals:

- Ensure the safety and well-being of marine wildlife in the SBCWHA
- Minimize disturbance and negative interactions between wildlife and human activities.
- Support research and monitoring programs to enhance our understanding of marine species and their needs.

Actions: a) Develop and modify guidelines for wildlife interactions: On-going

- Encourage whale-watching companies, especially any new companies to adhere to clear set guidelines and regulations for not only whale watching but for other wildlife encounters to minimize disturbance and stress on animals.
- Educate tourism operators and visitors on appropriate behavior around marine wildlife.

b) Enhance research and monitoring programs:

- Support scientific research to improve our understanding of marine species, their behavior, and their needs.
- Collaborate with research institutions to monitor the health and abundance of whale populations.
- Educate and encourage using the tools/apps (Happy Whale and Whale Alert) to engage a broader range of citizen scientists.

c) Emergency response and rescue:

- Support the education for the public on reporting procedures and importance of leaving injured or stranded animals undisturbed until professional help arrive.
 1. Channel Islands Marine and Wildlife Institute
 2. Channel Islands Cetacean Research Unit
 3. Santa Barbara Wildlife Care Network

Responsibilities and Timelines:

- Continue steering committee meetings on a quarterly basis. Strive to continue to have representatives from governmental agencies, NGOs, research institutions and community members.
- Assign specific responsibilities and tasks to each stakeholder, considering their expertise and resources.
- Regularly review progress and update the plan annually to adapt to changing needs and circumstances.
- Use social media platforms to engage a greater audience in the mission and goals of SBWHA.

Conclusion: This Management Plan for the Santa Barbara Channel Whale Heritage Area aims to holistically address community involvement in ocean education, nature conservation, and animal welfare over a three-year cycle. By engaging the community, promoting sustainable tourism, protecting critical habitat, and ensuring responsible interactions with wildlife, we can safe guard the natural and cultural heritage of the SBCWHA for future generations.

Dates:

Public Presentations:

September 9th- Present to the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council about the application process to move from candidate status to a WHA status.

October 19th- Presentation for Patagonia Inc at their Ventura Store:

Whale Look at That! A Talk about Whales, Ocean Tales, and Inspirational Stories from the Santa Barbara Channel, Channel Islands National Park and Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary

November 11th- '78 Years of Diving' Gala event honoring Jean-Michel Cousteau at The Ritz-Carlton, Bacara. We'll be sharing the destination film for SBWHA at the event.

November 13th: Presentation for the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History's Science Pub "Whales of the Santa Barbara Channel and their Climate Connection"

March 2024 Celebration of the Whales Festival in Channel Islands Harbor: tabling and presenting about SBCWHA

Steering Committee Meetings:

- Quarterly over the next three years

Whale Heritage Areas are established by the World Cetacean Alliance (WCA), are opportunities to increase the protection and conservation of cetaceans (whales, dolphins and porpoises) and their habitats while contributing to sustainable livelihoods, the arts, science and education.

Whale Heritage Area status will be granted to those places around the world where cetaceans are celebrated through art, education, research and cultural events; where sustainable practices and livelihoods are continually improved to ensure the health of cetacean habitats and the long-term economic health of human communities; and where respectful coexistence with cetaceans is supported through law, policy, and cooperation.