

Government Shutdown Operational and Programmatic Impacts Summary
Office of National Marine Sanctuaries
October 22, 2013

Constituent Impacts:

As a result of closed visitors centers, cancelled meetings, and inability of staff to participate in outreach events around the country, the National Marine Sanctuary System lost the opportunity to interact with, engage and support more than 43,000 people about its resource protection and management activities. Constituents included a broad range of individuals from the general public, local businesses, researchers, educators and international marine protected area managers from 90 countries.

The Office of National Marine Sanctuaries has extensive web sites that provide information to the general public about resource protection and management activities. The websites average 950,000 visits per month. Web site shutdown for the furlough resulted in a visitor loss of approximately 500,000 visits. The ONMS social media accounts (including Twitter and Facebook) had 16 million impressions (an "impression" refers to the number of people estimated to have paid attention to an article featured in a certain media) from January through September 2013. Suspension of social media posts during the furlough resulted in a loss of one million impressions that would communicate the importance of national marine sanctuaries to the public.

Education and Outreach Impacts:

More than 1,800 teachers and students located in sanctuary communities across the country were not served through formal educational programming, including in-class visits, class field trips to sanctuary sites and professional development. This includes, in some instances, impacts to curriculum development and delivery that will persist beyond the duration of the shutdown throughout the school year.

Regulatory Impacts:

The furlough interrupted NOAA's work analyzing and responding to nearly 18,000 public comments on the agency's proposed process to re-establish the sanctuary nomination process, as well as the public comment process for the proposed expansion of the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary, and internal NOAA review of the draft environmental impact statement and draft management plans for the proposed expansion of Cordell Bank and Gulf of the Farallones national marine sanctuaries as well as a 1,500 signature petition regarding inclusion of a nearshore area in the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary. These processes provide local coastal and Great Lakes communities the opportunity to nominate areas of the marine environment for NOAA to consider as national marine sanctuaries, and provide input to resource protection and management priorities for existing sites.

The government shutdown resulted in the cancellation of three sanctuary advisory council (council) meetings and at least two working group meetings; the reduction of a multi-day council meeting to a single day; and the postponement of three public information sessions. The sanctuary advisory councils bring members of a diverse community together to provide advice to sanctuary leadership, and cancellations and postponements of meetings delay ongoing sanctuary operations and management decisions. The shutdown resulted in lost opportunities for key stakeholders, government agencies, and the public at large to provide critical, time-sensitive advice and recommendations on ongoing and future issues and concerns, as schedules are condensed and agenda topics pushed to the next quarterly or biannual meeting. Additional domestic and international meetings with marine resource managers were cancelled, obviating the opportunity to identify common priorities and partnership opportunities for the coming year.

Science and Research Impacts:

October is a prime month for field research operations within the National Marine Sanctuary System. The shutdown caused the cancellation or delay of 17 scheduled cruises (multi-day and single day) aboard NOAA and partner research vessels and aircraft. The impacts from the loss of these field days extends beyond the shutdown, as some missions cannot be rescheduled until next year due to weather and limited sea days, resulting in critical data gaps for resource protection and management, loss of credibility with state, industry and academic partners, and even potential loss of research equipment that cannot be retrieved in a timely way. More cruises may yet be cancelled, resulting in losses of over \$240,000 for ship time and related contracts.

The analysis of data from these surveys and general field work is critical for pending resource management decisions, such as integrating monitoring data with of Automatic Identification System (AIS) data to provide critical information to commercial mariners. For example, prior to the shutdown, USCG Vessel Traffic Service issued a broadcast local notice to mariners asking commercial traffic entering and exiting San Francisco Bay to slow down to 10 knots due to a large aggregation of endangered blue whales feeding of San Francisco. Without new information on the densities of whales in the area, the notice to mariners was left up for more than three weeks, slowing the transport of commercial traffic into and out of the ports of Oakland, San Francisco and Richmond. In the Northeast region, Whale Alert iPhone app notifications to mariners on the status of critically endangered right whales and management measures. The free Whale Alert app (15,000 downloads in past year) serves as a clearinghouse of up-to-date information on right whale status and management and is available to mariners 24/7. The necessary daily manual updates did not occur during the shutdown, therefore mariners transiting to or from the port of Boston, did not have access to these critical data to help them take appropriate actions to avoid ship strikes.

Citizen Science and Volunteer Impacts:

Volunteers contribute more than 100,000 hours of annual service to the National Marine Sanctuary System in areas of research, monitoring, enforcement, education and outreach, and management. For example, the system operates a range of citizen science monitoring programs using trained volunteers to collect data for determination of unusual mortality events, identification of oil spills, documentation of changes in beach morphology, aggregation of marine debris, documentation of climate change, monitoring water quality and pollutants, and tracking trends in wildlife populations and human use of beaches to help monitoring the status of resources in the sites. The two-week data gap resulting from the shutdown is a critical loss for all of these multi-year datasets. Stakeholders that use this data range from county, state, and federal government agencies to non-profit scientific institutions. Additionally, lost volunteer training sessions may severely limit sampling capabilities in the coming year.

More than 300 sanctuary system volunteers were unable to participate in scheduled events during the shutdown. For example, the Santa Barbara Harbor and Seafood Festival, which involves important stakeholders from the fishing and boating community, as well as Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary participation in several school science night programs was cancelled. The concessionaire vessels to the national park, which carry Channel Islands Naturalist Corps volunteers, lost approximately \$3,000 per day during the shutdown. The Channel Islands Naturalist Corps volunteer hours are worth an estimated \$840,000 in annual economic value to the sanctuary system; approximately \$37,000 worth of volunteer hours were lost due to the furlough.