



COMMENTS
BY THE COUNTY OF DARE
ON THE PROPOSAL TO EXPAND THE BOUNDARIES
OF THE MONITOR NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY (MNMS)

BACKGROUND

The Dare County Board of Commissioners appreciates the historical heritage of the Monitor National Marine Sanctuary (MNMS). Dare County has the utmost respect for the service and sacrifice of all U.S. military personnel and has demonstrated strong support for the recovery and identification of all U.S. Sailors whose lives were lost on December 31, 1862 off the coast of Hatteras Island.

Uniquely positioned on the Outer Banks of North Carolina, Dare County includes Hatteras Island and is home to the Graveyard of the Atlantic Museum. Our rich maritime tradition includes generations of heroic lifesaving and rescue operations assisting ships in distress off the Dare County coast.

POSITION OF THE DARE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

The people of Dare County, through their elected officials, have enthusiastically supported many components of the MNMS mission including resource protection, education and outreach, and efforts to provide dignified care for recovered USS Monitor Sailors. However, **the Dare County Board of Commissioners strongly objects to any expansion of the sanctuary or the creation of additional Marine Sanctuaries.**

Although Dare County supports MNMS in protecting artifacts, educating the public, and preserving recovered remains, it cannot for the reasons stated in these comments, support any expansion of the MNMS. Neither does it support the creation of other Marine Sanctuaries off Dare County's shoreline. **The Board of Commissioners strongly objects to any expansion of the Sanctuary and to any effort that would limit or restrict recreational or commercial fishing activities now or in the future.**

Dare County believes that any concerns that MNMS may have about long-term site preservation can best be addressed through enhanced public education and by enforcing current regulations. Although enforcing regulations is challenging at the sanctuary due to its distance from the shore, the existing rules have proven adequate.

Any and all violators should be penalized as already provided in the current law, rather than expanding the number of regulations or extending the boundaries of the Sanctuary. This better serves the public interest rather than further infringement on responsible recreational and commercial fishing activities.

We respectfully request that officials of the MNMS work closely with elected leaders in coastal communities along with local fishermen, charter boat operators, and the scuba diving industry to promote an ongoing program of enhanced public education to assure long-term preservation of the site.

Dare County endorses MNMS efforts to raise public awareness about the sanctuary. The Dare County Board of Commissioners believes the cornerstone of these activities should center on the Graveyard of the Atlantic Museum. We believe this respected Hatteras Island museum should be given a prominent role in the display of artifacts, resource preservation, and expansion of educational programs.

As NOAA investigates Sanctuary expansion, we advocate a public process that fairly considers peer-reviewed science, citizen comments, and stakeholder input. As elected leaders who are geographically the closest to the Monitor National Marine Sanctuary, we believe the remarks made on behalf of Dare County's citizens should be given the greatest weight in decisions that are made about Sanctuary expansion.

The current Superintendent, David Alberg, has stated publically that he does not want expansion that excludes public access. Superintendent Alberg is a dedicated public servant and we take him at his word and believe his statement to be genuine and sincere. However, Dare County has witnessed first-hand, how promises made by other well-intended federal superintendents have later been set aside by those who follow after they have retired or are reassigned.

If, in spite of our objection, NOAA considers Sanctuary expansion, ironclad verbiage is needed to make sure that promises made today guarantee public access tomorrow for responsible SCUBA divers, and for recreational and commercial fishing. Expansion of the Sanctuary could result in the entire body of ocean waters off the Dare County seashore becoming a gigantic Marine Sanctuary in the future, which would result in highly restricted access that would devastate recreational and commercial fishing and seriously harm the economic stability of all of Dare County.

CONCLUSION

The Dare County Board of Commissioners supports the use of peer-reviewed science to protect resources, preserve archaeology and pursue ongoing research, monitoring, and conservation. We encourage MNMS in its education and outreach efforts and call upon NOAA to expand its utilization of the Graveyard of the Atlantic Museum.

We strongly object to any expansion of the MNMS or the creation of other Marine Sanctuaries off the Dare County coast. We call upon NOAA to use existing enforcement resources rather than expanding the regulations that now govern public access and fishing related activities.

We encourage NOAA to work closely with local and state officials, the general public, the fishing and dive communities, and other stakeholders on all aspects of the Monitor National Marine Sanctuary.

We further call upon the MNMS to involve the Dare County Board of Commissioners in any and all studies, advisory councils, and meetings concerning the Monitor National Marine Sanctuary now and in the future.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Robert L. Woodard, Sr.", with a large, sweeping flourish above the first few letters.

Robert L. "Bob" Woodard, Sr. Chairman
Dare County Board of Commissioners