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NOAA Releases First-Ever Report on Threats to Farallones Marine Sanctuary

A new NOAA report details the health, pressures and resource trends of Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary. It indicates that, overall, the sanctuary's marine life and habitats for the outer coast and offshore areas are relatively good, despite pressures from nearly 8 million people in the greater Bay Area and the impacts they have on water quality.

However, the sanctuary's estuary and lagoon areas rate only "good/fair" to "fair/poor" due to their proximity to the San Francisco Bay Area's large urban population, and runoff and water diversions in the rural areas. These areas are threatened by non-native animal and plant species, water quality and pollutants, increased coastal growth and wildlife disturbance.

The Farallones condition report – the first of its kind for the sanctuary – was prepared by NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries in consultation with outside experts, who reviewed the final version. The report provides an important baseline for the status of sanctuary resources and management responses.

"Many management and regulatory programs aimed at protecting and restoring resources are already in place and we can significantly improve conditions in the sanctuary," said Maria Brown, sanctuary superintendent. The sanctuary updated its management plan in October 2008, emphasizing ecosystem-based approaches to improving water quality, reducing vessel discharges, and focusing research on emerging threats to ocean ecosystem health.

Rising population growth in adjacent cities and counties, vessel traffic, as well as air and water polluting activities outside the sanctuary's boundaries are also a concern. The full report is available online at: <http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/science/condition>.

Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary was designated in 1981 to protect marine resources off the Marin, San Francisco and San Mateo county coasts. It spans approximately 1,282 square miles, and encompasses a rich diversity of marine life, habitats and historical and cultural resources.

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