

## E&E NEWS Greenwire

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# Calif. Dems urge Biden to approve marine sanctuary

Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), seated in a wheelchair, arrives Thursday for a Senate Judiciary Committee meeting on Capitol Hill. Francis Chung/POLITICO



The proposed sanctuary would protect tribal history and the marine environment, but would not include waters that overlap with the likely location of the first offshore wind array in the Pacific Ocean.

By **HEATHER RICHARDS**

**GREENWIRE** | More than a dozen California Democrats are urging the Biden administration to swiftly designate a proposed marine sanctuary off the coast of central California to protect Chumash tribal history and a diverse marine environment. The proposed sanctuary would not include waters that overlap with the likely location of the first offshore wind array in the Pacific Ocean.

Sens. Dianne Feinstein and Alex Padilla and Rep. Salud Carbajal, among others, expressed “strong support” for the proposed Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary in a [letter earlier this month](#) to Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo.

The Golden State lawmakers requested a final designation from NOAA by the end of the year in their May 5 letter, adding that the more than 7,000-acre swath of the Pacific Ocean off the coast of Santa Barbara was “essential to the heritage of ocean-going First People of the Pacific Coast.”

They said the sanctuary would protect a “biologically diverse and ecologically productive region, including feeding grounds for numerous species of whales and dolphins, sea otter populations, kelp forests, and other endangered marine life, including abalone.”

First proposed as a comanaged sanctuary by the Chumash tribe in 2015, the area is home to now-submerged tribal lands, as well as dense kelp forests, endangered species like the blue whale, and hundreds of shipwrecks. NOAA began a consideration of the sanctuary in 2021, minus waters that overlap with an offshore wind energy area.

Violet Sage Walker, the Northern Chumash Tribal Council chair, praised the California lawmakers for keeping the sanctuary proposal alive across several presidential administrations — specifically for securing an extension for the proposal in 2020 that allowed the Biden administration to pick it up in 2021 without starting from scratch.

“Establishing a tribal-led ocean conservation sanctuary with tribal collaborative management will demonstrate that the United States is a leader in advancing environmental justice and equity,” she said in a statement.

As proposed by the tribe, the sanctuary boundaries extend from the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary to the north to the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary to the south.

In taking up the sanctuary proposal in 2021, the Biden administration made clear that NOAA would not include waters that overlap with the Morro Bay offshore wind energy area. That area is the likely location of the first offshore wind array in the Pacific.

Interior held an offshore wind auction in Morro Bay and a wind area off the coast of Northern California this winter, selling development rights to five offshore wind companies.

Offshore wind is a clean energy priority for California, which aims to lift 25 gigawatts of offshore wind by 2045. It's also a priority for the Biden administration, which has committed to 110 GW of offshore wind nationally by midcentury.

But the Chumash, as well as the Yurok Tribe in Northern California, have flagged concerns about offshore wind's potential impact to their history. In comments to NOAA on the proposed sanctuary, the Chumash stressed that turbines should not be placed in marine sanctuaries but conceded that there's a potential need for offshore wind transmission to cross through protected waters to bring power to shore.