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Lawmakers to review marine sanctuaries

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President Obama's Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument in the Pacific Ocean near Hawaii is under Interior Department review. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

A Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation subcommittee will review the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's marine sanctuaries program tomorrow.

The Subcommittee on Oceans, Atmosphere, Fisheries and Coast Guard, led by Chairman Dan Sullivan (R-Alaska), will "explore the new nomination process for sanctuaries and how sanctuaries can contribute to the economy," said a **hearing advisory**.

The panel has invited witnesses from Texas, California and Alaska to discuss the underwater parks intended to protect the nation's natural and cultural marine resources.

Scott Hickman, owner of Circle H Outfitters in Galveston, Texas, is likely to be the strongest supporter of such protected areas.

A member of the Flower Garden Banks' Sanctuary Advisory Council, he was named the Sanctuaries Volunteer of the Year in 2016 by the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation, a nonprofit that supports NOAA's program.

Jeremiah O'Brien, former president of the Morro Bay Commercial Fishermen's Organization, will likely discuss the controversy surrounding the potential Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary off California's central coast.

In 2015, NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries completed its significance review of the proposal put forth by the Northern Chumash Tribal Council.

"This nomination meets the national significance criteria and management considerations," NOAA told the tribal council in a letter. "The nomination will be added to the inventory of areas NOAA may consider in the future for national marine sanctuary designation."

But earlier this year, the San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors — which oversees Morro Bay — voted 3-2 to oppose the formation of the marine sanctuary, according to the New Times weekly newspaper.

Ernest Weiss, natural resources director for Alaska's Aleutians East Borough, may recount the process NOAA undertook when reviewing a bid to create an Aleutian marine sanctuary.

NOAA determined that the nomination, led by the nonprofit **Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility**, was "not sufficient" ([Greenwire](#), Jan. 26, 2015).

The hearing comes as the Trump administration is reviewing several marine monuments designated in the past couple of decades by presidents under the authority granted to them by the century-old Antiquities Act.

While often managed with the assistance of NOAA, marine monuments are technically under the jurisdiction of the Interior Department, which, unlike NOAA, existed at the time the Antiquities Act was enacted ([Greenwire](#), Oct. 2, 2014).

Schedule: The hearing is Tuesday, June 27, at 9:30 a.m. in 253 Russell.

Witnesses: Scott Hickman, owner of Circle H Outfitters; Jeremiah O'Brien, former president of the Morro Bay Commercial Fishermen's Organization; and Ernest Weiss, natural resources director of Alaska's Aleutians East Borough.

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