Protecting Deep-Sea Corals by Including Davidson Seamount in the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary

Andrew P. DeVogelaere, Erica J. Burton and *Richard H. McGonigal*
Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, Monterey, CA, USA

There are 20 documented deep-sea coral taxa on the Davidson Seamount. The distribution of these corals was characterized during a cruise in 2002, and public interest in the seamount has been growing since then. Interesting science and high quality images from the cruise generated an award-winning interactive CD, extensive print and television media coverage, two web sites, an agency promotional poster, numerous public presentations, as well as peer-reviewed publications. As a result, the potential for protecting Davidson Seamount through sanctuary designation arose in the management plan review process for the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary (MBNMS). After receiving input from a focus group of stakeholders and experts, the MBNMS Advisory Council voted to pursue inclusion of the Davidson Seamount in the MBNMS. Sanctuary status would increase national opportunities for education on deep-sea corals and limit extraction of corals from the Davidson Seamount. The potential regulations to achieve this have been presented to other public agencies for consultation, and NOAA's Pacific Fishery Management Council supported protection of the seamount habitats though inclusion in the MBNMS. There continue to be discussions on which branch of NOAA would best be suited for regulating fisheries that might impact these corals. The draft MBNMS Management Plan and supporting Environmental Impact Statement is due for public comment in the fall of 2005 with a final determination scheduled for spring 2006. Consultation by scientists has been critical throughout this process, and will be described with an update on the sanctuary designation status for Davidson Seamount.

Contact Information: Andrew P. DeVogelaere, Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, 299 Foam Street, Monterey, CA 93940, USA, Phone: 1-831-647-4213, Fax: 1-831-647-4250, Email: andrew.devogelaere@noaa.gov