



April 3, 2026

**To:** Our Valued Shipping Industry Partners

**Subject:** Important Update Regarding the 2026 Protecting Blue Whales and Blue Skies Program

We have solicited and received valuable input from our program participants and industry representatives regarding the 2026 Protecting Blue Whales and Blue Skies Program (BWBS), including on operational considerations associated with transitioning to the expanded voluntary Vessel Speed Reduction (VSR) zone area.

In the spirit of continued collaboration, BWBS is implementing recommendations from industry partners on ways to ensure a smoother transition for fleet operations. This includes issuing a two-month transitional period for the 2026 program.

**Key Adjustment: Transitional Period from April 22 - June 30, 2026**

To provide program participants with the necessary time to adjust schedules, the following grading criteria will apply for the 2026 BWBS season:

- Through June 30, 2026: Performance tracking and program award tier recognition will be evaluated based on cooperation rates within the voluntary 2025 VSR zone boundaries (see Figure 1 below) within these legacy areas.
- Effective July 1, 2026: Performance tracking and program award tier recognition will fully transition to the newly expanded voluntary 2026 VSR zone (see Figure 2 below).

**Special Recognition for Early Adopters**

BWBS will celebrate participating lines who are able to voluntarily transition to the 2026 expanded area during the two-month transitional period.

- Bonus Recognition: Any shipping line that voluntarily cooperates in the expanded 2026 zone boundaries prior to July 1 will receive special additional recognition. This "Early Adopter" status will be highlighted *in addition* to a lines' qualifying award tier ranking (Sapphire, Gold, or Blue Sky) within program press and at the end of the season.

The success of the Protecting Blue Whales and Blue Skies program has always been rooted in partnership with the shipping industry and in recognition of the many complexities of maritime trade. We deeply appreciate the relationships we've developed with mariners and operations

professionals, and their willingness to provide us candid and constructive feedback. BWBS appreciates that without your engagement and collaboration, the sustained impact of this program in protecting whales and air quality would not be possible.

BWBS hopes this adjustment offers greater flexibility in balancing operational feasibility while also ensuring the long-term success of our conservation mission.

We thank you for your ongoing commitment to this program, and for your willingness to work with us to protect our coastal waters and communities as well as endangered and threatened whales.

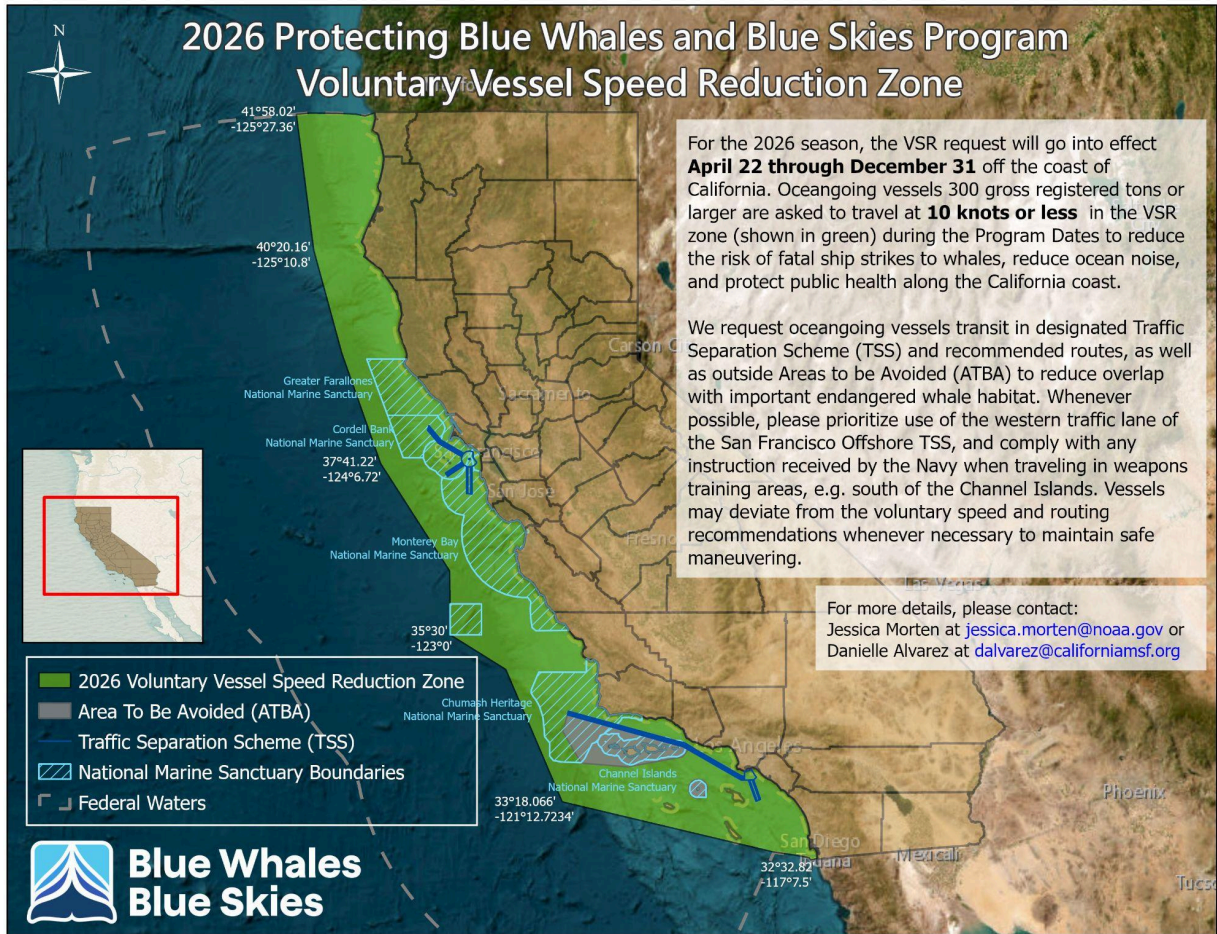
For more information, please visit our program website (<https://bluewhalesblueskies.org/>) or feel free to contact Jessica Morten (Director of Marine Resource Protection at California Marine Sanctuary Foundation) at [jessica.morten@noaa.gov](mailto:jessica.morten@noaa.gov) or 805-203-3186.

Sincerely,  
The Protecting Blue Whales and Blue Skies Program Coalition

Figure 1. 2025 Protecting Blue Whales and Blue Skies Program Zone Map



Figure 2. 2026 Protecting Blue Whales and Blue Skies Program Zone Map



Map source: Jess Morten/NOAA ONMS

This map is not to be used for navigational purposes

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