

Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary - NOAA Overflight Rules

Notice Number: NOTC2939

Sightseeing Along the California Coastline: “Know Before You Go & Avoid Flying Low”

If you feel the urge to descend below 1,000’ above sea level along the California coast, think again! There are safety and legal reasons why you shouldn’t.

Federal Aviation Regulations may in some instances allow for low altitude flight, but doing so off the coast poses significant safety risks. Losing an engine over ocean waters poses a significant risk to life and property. Also, large birds are more prevalent at lower altitudes, and can create a significant hazard to aircraft. **Bottom line: flying the coast 1000’ above sea level will give you more time to respond to the unexpected.**

In addition, flying above 1000’ will also keep you in compliance with federal **wildlife protection** laws. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has regulations that require aircraft to fly 1000’ above sea level in certain designated areas within Greater Farallones, Monterey Bay and Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuaries. These are denoted on aeronautical charts by magenta lines and dots. In these areas, flights below 1000’ above sea level (ASL) could result in NOAA civil penalties. So, why not fly higher and enjoy the view?

For more information on the designated areas that require you to fly above 1000’ ASL along the California coast, please refer to your Sectional charts and reference below:

- [Pilots! Know Before You Go-National Marine Sanctuaries](#)
- [Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary](#)
- [Greater Farallones National Marine Sanctuary](#)
- [Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary](#)

Finally, please note that consistent with the Airmen Information Manual and Advisory Circular, pilots operating noise-producing aircraft (fixed-wing, rotary-wing and hot air balloons) over noise-sensitive areas should make every effort to fly not less than 2,000 feet above ground level (or sea level), weather permitting. The intent of the 2,000-foot altitude recommendation is to reduce potential interference with all types of wildlife and complaints of noise disturbances caused by low flying aircraft over noise-sensitive areas. The ground level of FAA’s general 2,000-foot minimum altitude recommendation for noise-sensitive areas is defined to include the highest terrain within 2,000 feet AGL laterally of the route of flight, or the uppermost rim of a canyon or valley (*AC91-36, Flight Near Noise Sensitive Areas and AIM 7-5-6, Flights Over Charted U.S. Wildlife Refuges, Parks, and Forest Service Areas*).

Thank you for doing your part to protect wildlife, stay safe, and stay within the law.

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Any questions? Please title the subject line in your email “NOAA Question” to allow us to better track it.