

## Ocean Guardian Dive Club: Sanctuary Sam's Sea Lions



Photo Credit: Douglas Klug

### The Next Generation of Divers

According to DEMA Fast Facts (2014), the average diver traveling to a dive resort is 41 years old and 42% of divers traveling to resorts have children under 17. This creates a unique opportunity to reach the next generation of divers, while simultaneously creating a life-long connection with national marine sanctuaries and the special places they protect.

The Ocean Guardian Dive Club will benefit dive shops by increasing their reach to younger generations of divers as well as providing them with a method of distinguishing themselves as leaders in the field for eco-tourism. Children who are taught to be responsible divers at a young age will take those values with them as they grow into adult divers – leading to a connection with the ocean that fosters a desire to protect it. These youth will carry an appreciation and understanding of the value of national marine sanctuaries that stays with them throughout their lives. They will also identify themselves as divers. This will lead to a lifetime of participation in this recreational activity.

### What is the Ocean Guardian Dive Club?

The Ocean Guardian Dive Club will be a nationally recognized youth dive program designed to strengthen youth involvement in diving and ocean conservation. It will introduce elementary and middle school students to the National Marine Sanctuary System using scuba diving to create a valuable hands-on learning experience. The program will follow dive industry standards as well as contain specific sanctuary and ocean conservation learning points, and students will emerge with certificates from recognized dive industry training organizations.

### Why the Ocean Guardian Dive Club?

In their 2014 annual report, DEMA lists one of their main goals as helping to “promote sustained growth in recreational diving” (13). Dive shops that are running the Ocean Guardian Dive Club will be given an avenue for connecting with the next generation of divers while distinguishing themselves as leaders in youth based eco-tourism activities. Participating in the Ocean Guardian Dive Club will help shops to gain increased visibility within their community.

Participating dive shops will receive:

- Access to an online training program for their staff
- Direct support from the Ocean Guardian Dive Club program manager
- Program materials
- Ocean Guardian Dive Club banner

Diving will become a vehicle for students to develop a close personal connection with the ocean, which will lead to a better appreciation for national marine sanctuaries. The program will educate students about important marine conservation issues such as marine debris, coral reef etiquette and ocean acidification. It will **create ocean stewards who promote action for conservation in their communities and make choices that are actively tied to protecting the ocean.**

### How would it work?

The Ocean Guardian Dive Club will be designed for students from 8 to 12 years of age with the potential to expand to wider audiences after being piloted. Initial investments will be used to create a curriculum that can be run independently by dive shops around the country. The



Photo Credit: Julie Bursek, Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary

Young students learn to dive in Santa Barbara, CA.



curriculum will include two components: 1) knowledge development and 2) in-water diving activities. Both components will focus on teaching and developing strong diving skills while simultaneously teaching about national marine sanctuaries and marine conservation issues.

Dive shops who receive the Ocean Guardian Dive Club certification will host at least one conservation activity per year (beach clean-up, water quality testing, etc.) and invite youth in the community to participate. They will be required to conduct an evaluation of each program as they run it as well as participate in a yearly overall evaluation process.

### What are the anticipated outcomes?

The goal of this project is to create a strong connection between recreation and education in young divers, while teaching about the importance of national marine sanctuaries, the challenges they face, and what can be done to protect them. The target audiences for the first year of the program will be the students and their families and the dive shops.

#### Student Outcomes:

- Students will demonstrate responsible diving techniques.
- Students will demonstrate an interest in further development of

diving skills through continuing education.

- Students will demonstrate increased knowledge of national marine sanctuaries.
- Students will demonstrate steps they can take to reduce impact on national marine sanctuaries and the marine environment.
- Students will demonstrate increased knowledge of ocean conservation issues.

#### Dive Shop Outcomes:

- Dive shops will see an increase in enrollment for youth dive programs.
- Dive shops will be recognized as leaders in eco-tourism.
- Dive shop employees will demonstrate increased knowledge of national marine sanctuaries.
- Dive shop employees will demonstrate increased knowledge of ocean conservation issues and how they are impacting sanctuaries.

### What is the timeline?

The initial investments will focus on creating the dive curriculum and piloting the program with specific dive shops. Once the program has been tested and evaluated it can easily be expanded to more dive shops.

The projected timeline will be as follows:

#### Year 1:

- Write curriculum and dive program.
- Promote within the dive community.
- Train shops to deliver Ocean Guardian Dive Club program.
- Begin pilot program with selected dive shops (California, Florida, and Washington, DC).

#### Year 2:

- Run pilot program at selected dive shops.
- Complete end of year Ocean Guardian Dive Club evaluation based on learning outcome evaluations and dive shop evaluations.
- Create and release outcomes report.
- Make needed changes to program based on end of year evaluation, as well as formative and summative evaluations.

#### Year 3:

- Expand to key dive shop locations in target areas.
- Conduct yearly evaluations of Ocean Guardian Dive Club program and make changes as necessary.

#### Year 4:

- Evaluate potential for program expansion to include wider age groups and varying dive certification levels.