



October 24, 2002

U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy
1120 20th St., NW
Suite 200 North
Washington, DC 20036

Honorable Committee Members:

The wise management of submerged cultural resources is an important objective in California. In its development of a national policy with regard to these resources, it is important for the Commission to look at the broad range of values they encompass. All too often the focus is on "Treasure Salvage v. Archaeology." That issue is important in the few areas where there are treasure ships, but for those of us on the Pacific coast, the major issues are not who "owns" the shipwreck and its treasure. We have only a few "treasure ships," and none have ever made anyone rich.

The central issue in California is: how can all the interest groups be encouraged to work together in the effective management and interpretation of submerged cultural resources. The Commission can set the stage for cooperative programs by being inclusive in its approach. In order to inventory, map, assess and interpret the thousands of shipwreck and other submerged resources off the coast of California, it is vital to connect sport divers, historical and archaeological societies, the SCUBA industry, academics and government agencies. Our experience demonstrates that collaboration is the best approach in managing these heritage resources. By working together with dive clubs, for example, we have established a sense of stewardship over some of the shipwrecks in our underwater state parks. Sport divers through their clubs can be enlisted to do site monitoring, buoy retrieval and interpretation. Their direct involvement with these sites is very beneficial.

I would urge the Commission to work through the States to strengthen programs that preserve and interpret submerged cultural resources. This could be done through a series of grants administered by the State Historic Preservation Offices. Such an approach, with even modest financial support, could provide a basis for significant collaboration.

With the passage of the Abandoned Shipwreck Act in 1987, the stage is set for the states to develop effective management of their submerged heritage resources. The Commission should encourage these efforts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John W. Foster".

John W. Foster

State Underwater Archaeologist