

Community Active Wildlife Stewards

Participation Framework

1. Program Goals and Objectives
2. Eligibility for Program Participation
3. Criteria for Participation
4. Process for Program Participation and Recognition
5. Causes for Membership Revocation

Program Goal and Objectives

The goal of the program is to develop a community-based education and recognition program for businesses, organizations, and individuals to increase their awareness and knowledge – and ultimately that of their customers, members, and visitors – about responsible marine wildlife viewing practices; marine life behavior, natural history, biology, ecology, and conservation; the laws and guidelines protecting marine wildlife; and stewardship of the marine environment. The overall program is called *Community Active Wildlife Stewards*, but local chapters may be creative with their names.

Objectives in support of this goal are:

1. Develop *Community Active Wildlife Stewards* approved criteria that assist participants in achieving voluntary compliance with legal requirements, policies, and guidelines, as well as best practices aimed at preventing disturbance or harassment of marine wildlife.
2. Develop (and keep up to date) outreach and education materials to ensure participants' awareness of the issues surrounding marine wildlife conservation
3. Share outreach materials with wildlife tourism centers, agents, and the public to promote marine wildlife stewardship.
4. Determine the program's overall effectiveness by developing an evaluation component to measure adherence to the program criteria.
5. Establish a platform for public recognition of businesses, organizations, and individuals complying with the program criteria.

Eligibility for Program Participation

The following are encouraged to participate in *Community Active Wildlife Stewards*:

Tier 1:

A) Businesses renting marine recreation equipment to the public in regions where customers are likely to encounter marine wildlife (e.g., kayak, stand-up paddleboard, electric boats, SCUBA) *without an experienced guide*.

B) Businesses offering guided tours and classes of individually operated small craft (e.g. kayak tours, SUP tours and lessons, surfing lessons)

C) Businesses for which viewing of marine wildlife is from an operator-controlled craft, and/or is opportunistic and secondary to the primary purpose of the tour operation (e.g., Eco-tours, fishing charter boats, land-based guided tours, SCUBA diving or snorkeling operations).

Tier 2:

A) Organizations/Clubs that participate in or promote marine recreation activities/events during which members have the potential to encounter marine wildlife

B) Coastal tourism related businesses such as hotels, restaurants, and shops

C) Educational Facilities in regions where visitors are likely to encounter marine wildlife

Special recognition:

Individuals or entities that have made an extraordinary contribution consistent with the objectives of the *Community Active Wildlife Stewards*

Criteria for Participation

Note: Participation in Community Active Wildlife Stewards does not create any right to renewal and does not represent a waiver if violations of state or federal laws are discovered.

Participants must:

1. Conduct Educational Briefing

Tier 1, Type A: Before renting customer operated water craft, a staff person conducts an educational briefing about *Community Active Wildlife Stewards* themes. The briefing should include guidelines for responsible wildlife viewing¹, and why they are important for wildlife conservation. Participants can request a list of suggested talking points to guide the briefing. Participants should screen educational videos² for customers prior to rentals when possible. We recommend staff require renters to acknowledge they have received wildlife guidelines and will follow them with both a verbal acknowledgement and a signed waiver.

Tier 1, Type B: Same as above but Guides additionally reinforce, model, and promote *Community Active Wildlife Stewards* themes throughout tour. Participants should screen educational videos² for customers prior to tours when possible.

Tier 1, Type C: Conduct onboard educational briefing about *Community Active Wildlife Stewards* themes. It is recommended to reiterate the *Community Active Wildlife Stewards* guidelines¹ throughout the tour to help customers learn and observe

¹ See Guidelines in Handbook

² Videos will be available from sponsoring organizations. Alternative videos may be provided by participants but are subject to approval.

responsible behavior. Participants should screen educational videos² for customers when possible.

Tier 2, Type A: Conduct educational briefings about *Community Active Wildlife Stewards* themes for members who might participate in marine recreation activities where marine wildlife encounters are likely. Screen educational videos for customers when possible.

Tier 2, Type B: Demonstrate exceptional efforts to provide educational materials and content to the public; support and participate in measures to reduce disturbance to coastal wildlife; contribute substantially to public awareness and wildlife stewardship.

Tier 2, Type C: Educational facilities must include prominent educational displays that share information about *Community Active Wildlife Stewards* themes. They should screen educational videos for visitors when possible. They should promote/support the *Community Active Wildlife Stewards* group and participants on their web page and/or social media accounts and other outreach media.

Special Recognition: Individuals and/or entities will be considered for recognition on a case-by-case basis. *Community Active Wildlife Stewards* organizers may award certification/special recognition even without an application from the entity. Currently certified members may submit nominations for recognition under this category.

POTENTIAL CUSTOMER SURVEY QUESTION(S):

1. Did your staff person/guide provide an educational briefing about wildlife species you might encounter on your tour/rental?
2. Did your staff person/guide provide guidelines for responsible wildlife viewing?
4. Did your staff person/guide screen an educational video about responsible wildlife viewing practices?

2. Provide Outreach Materials

- a) Provide customers/members/visitors with outreach materials that promote the program objectives. *Community Active Wildlife Stewards* supporting organizations will supply outreach materials at no charge.
- b) Inform customers/members/visitors of the availability of additional information resources (website links, social media, supplementary printed materials) available to them.
- c) If applicable, operators offering unguided kayak/SUP/boat rentals *must* apply and maintain *Sea Otter Savvy* stickers on rental kayak fleets. Instructions for best

application of stickers will be provided. Cases where stickers cannot be applied due to kayak surface type or other factors, will be taken under consideration.

POTENTIAL CUSTOMER SURVEY QUESTION(S):

1. Were any education materials about local wildlife provided to you? If yes, give examples: _____
2. Did the staff person/guide direct you to any additional sources of information about wildlife?
3. Kayak renters: Did you notice a Sea Otter Savvy sticker on your kayak?

3. Comply with Applicable Laws and Report Strandings, Injuries, Entanglements of Sea Life, and Potential Violations Towards Protected Species. *Note: Copies of all laws and regulations will be made available to applicants and participants.*

- a) Comply with all applicable resource protection laws and regulations (e.g., Marine Mammal Protection Act, Endangered Species Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act, National Marine Sanctuary, US Fish and Wildlife Service, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, California State Parks, and local harbor districts)
- b) Report suspected harassment of marine wildlife to CalTIP: 888-334-CalTIP
- c) Whale Entanglement: Immediately, call (877) SOS-WHALE (877-767-9425), or hail the U.S. Coast Guard on VHF CH-16
- d) Report any marine mammal strandings to the Marine Mammal Center (415) 289-SEAL
- e) Report bird entanglements, injuries, and strandings: SLO county: Pacific Wildlife Care (805) 543-9453 (WILD); Monterey county: SPCA Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation (831) 646-5534; Santa Cruz county: Native Animal Rescue (831) 462-0726
- f) Report oiled wildlife: Oiled Wildlife Care Center Wildlife Reporting Hotline (877) 823-6926

POTENTIAL CUSTOMER SURVEY QUESTION(S):

1. Did your staff person/guide mention laws protecting wildlife?
-

4. Follow Guidelines, and Additional Recommendations to Prevent Wildlife Disturbance and Promote Stewardship. *Note: Copies of all guidelines and recommendations will be made available to applicants and participants.*

- a) Follow *Community Active Wildlife Stewards* guidelines³ for responsible viewing.
- b) Follow NMFS policy statement on marine mammal harassment:

“Interacting with wild marine mammals should not be attempted and viewing marine mammals must be conducted in a manner that does not harass the animals. NMFS cannot support, condone, approve or authorize activities that involve closely approaching, interacting or attempting to interact with whales, sea otters, porpoises, seals or sea lions in the wild. This includes attempting to swim with, pet, touch, or elicit a reaction from the animals.”

- c) Follow NMFS responsible marine wildlife viewing guidelines for your area
- d) Avoid vessel operations that separate mothers from offspring or increase threat of boat strike to marine mammals.
- e) Stop your approach and slowly depart the area if sea otters or pinnipeds (seals and sea lions) display signs of disturbance, such as alert observation of vessel, rolling or rocking in place, slow swimming, fast swimming or diving.
- f) Stop your approach and slowly depart the area if seabirds display signs of disturbance, such as alert observation of vessel, wing-fluttering, or head-bobbing.
- g) Keep 100 yards distance from cetaceans, and do not alter their behavior.
- h) Paddle, sail or motor *around* groups of seabirds, sea otters, pinnipeds, or cetaceans, not through them.
- i) Do not feed or attract wildlife by throwing bait or fish scraps overboard.
- j) Never discard fishing line overboard, cover bait, and use barbless hooks or artificial lures to avoid hooking/entangling wildlife
- k) Avoid making loud or sudden noises near resting wildlife.
- l) Avoid bringing guided tours ashore in areas proximate to roosting seabirds or hauled-out sea otters or pinnipeds.
- m) Approach and depart marine wildlife at a slow “no wake” speed.
- n) If approaching a sea otter raft in a boat or with a guided kayak tour, wait your turn if other craft are already observing nearby. Do not crowd or encircle groups or individuals of any wildlife type.
- o) If applicable, use care when landing on, or exploring intertidal areas to avoid damaging habitat or disturbing/harming species. Touch only with extreme care and always replace animals back where you found them. Do not roll rocks.
- p) Be stewards for the marine environment by participating in and promoting environmentally conscious initiatives (e.g., marine debris and beach clean-ups, recycling, vessel wastewater pump-out) when possible.

³ Guidelines can be found in Handbook

POTENTIAL CUSTOMER SURVEY QUESTION(S):

1. To the best of your knowledge, did you observe any disturbance to the behavior of wildlife encountered on your tour? If unguided, do you feel you caused any disturbance to wildlife yourself?

- a. Swimming or flying away from boat, kayaks, SUPs etc
 - b. Pursuit of wildlife for viewing photography purposes
-

5. Participate in Training (mandatory for Tier 1 participants; Tier 2 training requirement may vary)

- a) Participate in *Community Active Wildlife Stewards* sponsored training provided by the program partners to attain a program standard of knowledge on wildlife viewing etiquette, behavior, research, and natural history. A general meeting and workshop for group participants will be held annually at locations convenient for each regional chapter. Special programs and events will be scheduled throughout the year.
- b) Ensure that all employees are trained according to program standards, including new employees hired after the initial training date. The program partners will provide necessary materials to participants to assist in training employees, including in-person staff enrichment. To help provide further training, participants are encouraged to suggest their employees attend training workshops, although not required, as well as conduct the refresher course annually.

6. Engage in Responsible Advertising

(Note: "Advertising" includes any print advertisements that mention the business' or organization's name or those linked to the business, search engine listings, and any posted photos. This also includes, but is not limited to, pitch sheets, print, web, visual, radio, and social media.)

- a) Engage in advertising that promotes responsible wildlife viewing.
- b) Promote *Community Active Wildlife Stewards* by displaying the *Community Active Wildlife Stewards* logo(s) and mission statement about responsible wildlife viewing on business promotions and advertisements, where feasible.
- c) Follow recommendations for marine wildlife watching advertisements:
 - Photos and videos which show people viewing marine wildlife must depict responsible viewing practices and not display actual or implied signs of disturbance including (but not limited to) people approaching any wildlife too closely, people causing wildlife to flee at their approach.

- Photos and videos featuring marine wildlife should not depict an actual or implied act of disturbance including (but not limited to) attention directed at the viewer/photographer in an alert posture, swimming or diving to avoid viewer/photographer, birds flushing from roosting or nesting areas.
- Do not depict marine wildlife (especially sea otters) climbing aboard watercraft. Advertisements should avoid suggesting that these activities will/can occur during the tour.
- Do not depict people feeding or attempting to feed marine wildlife. Advertisements should avoid suggesting that these activities will/can occur during the tour.
- Do not depict people touching, pursuing, chasing, attempting to swim with, or closely interacting with wild marine mammals.
- Do not use wording or phrases that may raise the public's expectation to closely interact with sea otters or seabirds in the wild. Some examples of words that may suggest close interactions include but are not limited to, "encounter", "get up close and personal"

Process for Program Participation and Recognition

Initial Evaluation for participants

- 1) Applicant indicates to *Community Active Wildlife Stewards* membership coordinator(s) the desire to become certified as a *Community Active Wildlife Steward*. (current contact info: gena@seaottersavvy.org, cara.obrien@parks.ca.gov, or web form at <https://www.seaottersavvy.org/get-sea-otter-savvy-certified>)
- 2) *Community Active Wildlife Stewards* membership coordinator(s) provides applicant with a checklist of *Community Active Wildlife Stewards* components and criteria, as well as materials to help the participant prepare for an evaluation before participation and recognition are confirmed.
- 3) Applicant attends an initial *Community Active Wildlife Stewards* training workshop (workshops are scheduled annually by region) and receives participant handbook. The applicant ensures that all employees, including new hires, are trained to program standards before the evaluation by either: (a) attending the initial training workshop; or (b) training their employees in-house with provided materials such as participant handbook. *Note: Certification may be awarded on a contingency basis prior to workshop attendance, with applicant agreeing to attend the next scheduled workshop.*
- 4) Applicant reviews checklist of *Community Active Wildlife Stewards* components and criteria and ensures their practices comply.
- 5) When prepared, applicant contacts *Community Active Wildlife Stewards* membership coordinator(s) to request an evaluation to ensure their business is following the program criteria.

Application review

All applicants:

- 1) *Community Active Wildlife Stewards* membership coordinator requests copies of brochures and other advertising materials, reviews the applicant's web page, and conducts a web search to ensure all advertising information follows program criteria.
- 2) *Community Active Wildlife Stewards* membership coordinator meets with the applicant representative(s) at the business, organization, or educational facility site on a mutually convenient date to review evaluation checklist.

Tier 1 applicants:

- 1) A *Community Active Wildlife Stewards* representative conducts the annual evaluation. Evaluation techniques may include, but are not limited to:
 1. Customer evaluation
 2. Secret Shopper evaluation
 3. Prearranged ride-along by the *Community Active Wildlife Stewards* coordinator, trained representative, or third party, with feedback provided to the business following the close of the trip.
- 2) All CAWS participants actively conducting rentals or tours, are evaluated at least once per year.
- 3) The CAWS representative books and attends a regularly scheduled charter. The representative evaluates the charter for adherence to the CAWS criteria using a standard reporting form. At the conclusion of the charter, the representative may identify him/herself to the business as a CAWS representative and may review the evaluation results.
- 4) Representatives conducting CAWS evaluations are trained and screened to ensure objectivity and accurate assessment.

6. Following successful completion of the evaluation, the applicant becomes officially recognized as a *Community Active Wildlife Stewards* participant by signing an agreement to voluntarily follow the *Community Active Wildlife Stewards* criteria for the calendar year in which the applicant was initially evaluated. The participant also receives *Community Active Wildlife Stewards* materials, including handbook, suggested talking points for introducing *Community Active Wildlife Stewards* themes to customers/members, guidelines, decals to apply to rental craft, and promotional decals, signs, posters, and/or flags identifying participant as a "Certified Wildlife Steward"

Additional participation benefits:

- Logo/recognition symbol (to be used in advertising)
- Reviews on Trip Advisor, Google, and Yelp
- Promotion on websites and social media
- Inclusion in wildlife-related media projects and press releases

7. If the applicant does not meet all program criteria following the evaluation, the *Community Active Wildlife Stewards* membership coordinator provides a letter or email describing the manner in which the applicant is not following the program criteria and how best to alter their practices to conform.

After reviewing the evaluation and making any suggested changes, the applicant contacts the *Community Active Wildlife Stewards* membership coordinator to arrange for a re-evaluation.

Causes for Membership Revocation

1. Repeated, documented failure to follow one or more program guidelines
2. Individual or repeated records of violations to Criteria 3

Reports of the above will be gathered and reviewed by a committee of *Community Active Wildlife Stewards* members as to whether they constitute cause for revocation of membership. Members under consideration for revocation may be issued a warning, given an opportunity to rebut the reports, and/or to move forward in compliance with program guidelines.