

MONTEREY SHOOTOUT

PHOTOGRAPHER ENTRANT PACKET BEGINNER CATEGORY MONTEREY SHOOTOUT 2026

JOIN US FOR A WEEKEND OF UNDERWATER FUN IN MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA!

The Monterey Shootout is the largest underwater photography competition in the world, emphasizing fun and education while aiming to inspire new underwater photographers. NCUPS and Backscatter have been running this weekend-long event for over 35 years. Are you new to underwater photography or Monterey diving? Meet a supportive group of die-hard Monterey divers, learn new shooting techniques in our seminars, and maybe even discover a new favorite dive site.

Thanks to our many sponsors, our friendly shooting competition not only rewards advanced shooters with amazing prizes but also awards fantastic prizes to the newest shooters in the ranks. Add in a cocktail party not to be missed, and this is a weekend worth booking a flight and hotel room to attend. Industry professionals, including those who have led photo trips or refer to themselves as “Professional Underwater Photographers,” must compete at the advanced level.

REGISTER NOW!

COMPETITOR ENTRY (Compete in Photo, Video, or Both)

\$35

Paid competitors receive a full access pass to the weekend’s events, including the cocktail party, Sunday seminars, door prizes (eligible to non-winning competitors), and the Sunday awards ceremony. Only competitors are eligible for door prizes. The Sunday Awards Ceremony is a free event open to the public.

Sign up now at www.montereyshootout.com to reserve your space.

SCHEDULE

For a current schedule of this year’s event, please visit: www.montereyshootout.com/schedule/

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GENERAL RULES FOR ALL PARTICIPANTS:

1. All participants must sign and submit a Waiver of Liability.
2. Participants may enter both video and photo competitions. Participants willing to shoot both will be awarded for their multitasking with accumulated prize points.
3. During the competition, images must be taken within the Monterey Bay and Big Sur region. Diving from Point Lobos State Reserve is allowed, but divers must make a reservation two months in advance at www.pointlobos.org.
4. Split shots or over-under images are allowed, but all photos must be composed to include at least 50% underwater.
5. Boat diving is allowed, and we encourage you to support our local dive boats with your business.
6. We have adopted the conservation rules established by EPIC®**. Marine life should never be stressed or endangered for the sake of a photo or video. Any Entrant and/or Dive Leader suspected of exhibiting the following behavior will be disqualified:
 - a. Diver(s) visibly damaging the environment (eg: dangling or dragging gear, kicking up sand);
 - b. Animals with signs of stress (eg: puffed puffers, inking octopus);
 - c. Animals moved to an unnatural environment or risky location;
 - d. Animals being fed;
 - e. Marine life being touched (eg: coral polyps, handling sea snakes);
 - f. Diver(s) exhibiting poor buoyancy control.

** The judges will be asked to interpret this guideline and disqualify any images that are suspect to poor behavior.

7. All entries must be submitted within the posted hours on the USB flash drive received at registration using the file naming convention explained in the entry instructions. In case of a problem with the entries, a cell phone or local number must be submitted.
8. Each participant is responsible for their own safety and the proper operation of their diving and photographic equipment. NCUPS, Monterey Shootout, and Backscatter are exempt from all liability or responsibility for all personal injury, property damage, or wrongful death, however, caused, including but not limited to property liability or the negligence of the released parties, whether passive or active. Each participant must use their judgment regarding diving safety.
9. Should conditions make diving unsafe or a large number of participants decide not to dive due to conditions, NCUPS and the Monterey Shootout reserve the right to postpone and reschedule the competition to a future date within 12 months from its original date.
10. Competition judges and presenters are not eligible to compete in the Monterey Shootout for the year that they judge or present.
11. A current-year competition judge's spouse or significant other and immediate family members are not eligible to compete for the given year.

WHAT WE ASK FROM OUR COMPETITION JUDGES:

1. The judges volunteer their time as working professionals with an interest in helping promote underwater arts.
2. The judges will award a first, second, and third place in each subject for each category of participants. Honorable Mentions will be awarded at the judges' discretion.
3. The judges have the authority to combine categories if there are too few entries in a single category. They will eliminate an image if they believe it might violate the conservation rules or does not fit the category. The judges will select images and videos based on the question, "Would I display this as a print on my living room wall or want to share this video with my friends?"
4. The decision of the judges will be final in all cases.

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OUR “SHARE THE WEALTH” PRIZE RULES:

1. A weighted point system will be used to award prizes, encouraging competition and rewarding excellence. Points are awarded for all places, including honorable mentions. Photo and Video competition points are added together.
2. No participant may receive more than one prize.
3. Prize selection will occur immediately after showing the winning images based on the highest points.
4. Each participant eligible to select a prize, whether through the competition or the door prize, must be present to choose a prize unless they have designated a proxy in writing or by phone before the beginning of the awards ceremony. The proxy must be ready to select a prize within 5 minutes of the winner being announced. Any entitled participant who was not present during the prize selection and did not designate a proxy will have thirty days thereafter to select from any remaining prizes.
5. In the event of a tie, the winners' prize selection order will be determined through random selection.
6. All persons selecting a prize agree that NCUPS and the Monterey Shootout may use their image(s) or video(s) for promotion of the club and its competitions in future years.
7. NCUPS and the Monterey Shootout have solicited prizes from various individuals and companies. Each prize donor has represented to NCUPS and the Monterey Shootout that the prize offered will be provided to the participant who selects it. However, NCUPS and the Monterey Shootout do not guarantee that the donor will deliver the prize and will not be responsible if the donor does not do so.
8. Prize trips must be used within one (1) year and may have other restrictions.
9. Prizes are non-transferable.

RULES FOR USE OF AI:

For purposes of this competition we have categorized AI into two categories: Generative and Non-Generative. **Generative AI is not allowed in any contest category.** Please see below on how we define each type of AI.

Generative AI

This type of AI will create images, video, and audio from the cloud using models that have been trained on the work of other artists. For example it could be used to create a complete image, video, or audio track not from the images you captured during the contest window or royalty free audio. All images must be captured by the entrant during the contest window and thus **Generative AI is not allowed in any category.** Further we don't support the fact that most Generative AI companies do not compensate the original artists.

Non-Generative AI

This type of AI uses elements already captured within your image or video and do not reach out to the cloud to use content learned from other image makers. Non-Generative AI tools such as Photoshop's Content Aware Fill or the Backscatter Xterminator can be used to remove unwanted elements in your image by generating content from surrounding elements in your image.

Non-Generative AI tools are allowed in Unrestricted Categories.

AI Use Specific to Video

Generative AI used to generate images or scripts from cloud based tools is not allowed. All video clips must be shot by the entrant during the shootout window. AI tools used to retime audio to match a sequence is allowed as long as the original audio is royalty free or appropriately licensed by the entrant.

PHOTO COMPETITION - BEGINNER SKILL LEVEL

If you are a new underwater photographer, this is the category for you. In the spirit of rewarding new photographers, entries in this category are limited to photographers where **NONE** of the below-mentioned items are true:

1. Have carried a camera diving on more than 50 dives
2. Have won more than \$500 in prizes or a total of all prizes won valued at more than \$500 in any underwater photography competition
3. Have received more than \$500 in payment for any underwater photography work.
4. Have taught underwater photography classes
5. Have led underwater photography trips

Our panel of judges reserves the right to eliminate any Beginner entries that, based on the entrant's experience, they feel should have been entered in the Intermediate category.

PHOTO CATEGORIES:

Entrants can submit a maximum of 6 images to the competition.

Macro Traditional (enter up to 3 images):

Enter up to three of your best images that meet these criteria. Our "Traditional" categories allow for adjusting brightness, contrast, color, and sharpness when applied to the entire image ONLY. Cropping, cloning, masking, backscatter removal, and other digital manipulation is NOT allowed in this category. This restriction on digital manipulation will enable people not as savvy at Photoshop to compete on even ground as those with more experience. It also highlights better composition and lighting skills by not allowing cropping and cloning.

Any underwater image of a 7x5 inch or smaller picture area. The "Traditional" category is designed to reward shooting skills and not Photoshop skills. ONLY GLOBAL adjustments of brightness, contrast, color, sharpness, and conversion to black and white are allowed in the "Traditional" category. Cropping, cloning, and local adjustments such as brushes, spot removal, graduated filters, and vignetting are NOT allowed. No AI tools or compositing allowed.

Macro Unrestricted (enter up to 3 images):

Enter up to three of your best images that meet these criteria. Our "Unrestricted" categories have no rules regarding digital manipulation; anything goes.... but please note that the judges usually find that less is more.

Any underwater image of a 7x5 inch or smaller picture area. The "Unrestricted" categories have no rules regarding digital manipulation, anything goes.... but please note that the judges usually find that less is more. Only non-generative AI tools are allowed. All elements must be shot during the event. Content-Aware Fill is permitted.

Wide-Angle Traditional (enter up to 3 images):

Enter up to three of your best images that meet these criteria. Our "Traditional" categories allow for adjusting brightness, contrast, color, and sharpness when applied to the entire image ONLY. Cropping, cloning, masking, backscatter removal, and other digital manipulation is NOT allowed in this category. This restriction on digital manipulation will enable people who are not as savvy at Photoshop to compete on more-or-less even ground as those with more experience. It also highlights better composition and lighting skills by not allowing cropping and cloning.

Underwater images larger than a 7x5 inch picture area. The "Traditional" category is designed to reward shooting skills and not Photoshop skills. ONLY GLOBAL adjustments of brightness, contrast, color, sharpness, and conversion to black and white are allowed in the "Traditional" category. Cropping, cloning, and local adjustments such as brushes, spot removal, graduated filters, and vignetting are NOT allowed. No AI tools or compositing allowed.

Wide-Angle Unrestricted (enter up to 3 images):

Enter up to three of your best images that meet these criteria. Our “Unrestricted” categories have no rules regarding digital manipulation; anything goes.... but please note that the judges usually find that less is more.

Underwater images larger than a 7x5 inch picture area. The “Unrestricted” divisions have no rules regarding digital manipulation, anything goes.... but please note that the judges usually find that less is more. Only non-generative AI tools are allowed. All elements must be shot during the event. Content-Aware Fill is permitted.

PHOTO ENTRY INSTRUCTIONS:

Participants must bring their own system for image viewing, selection, and manipulation.

Each photo category has rules that state the type of manipulation allowed.

Each participant may submit a maximum of 6 images to the competition on the USB flash drive received at registration.

You choose how to spread your selection of 3 total images per categories.

Do not watermark your images.

Identical image files are not allowed in more than one category.

Entrants should save their images on the flash drive as full resolution, 100% quality JPEGs with the following naming convention separated by underscores (_):

- a. skill level (**BGR** for Beginner)
- b. category (**MT** for Beginner Traditional , **WT** for Wide-angle Traditional, **MU** for Macro Unrestricted, **WU** for Wide-angle Unrestricted)
- c. Three-digit Entrant number (found on your USB flash drive; please keep leading zeros in your file name)
- d. Number of pictures submitted in this category [i.e., 1, 2, or 3]. Remember, a grand total of 6 entries are allowed for the competition; split your 6 entries across the available categories however you see fit.
- e. Entrant name (firstname_lastname)
- f. .jpg

Examples:

Competitor John Doe, who is entrant number 010, in the Beginner skill level, would name his second picture in Macro Traditional:

BGR_MT_010_2_John_Doe.JPG

Competitor Jane Doe, who is entrant number 105, in the Beginner skill level and is submitting her third picture in Wide-angle Unrestricted, would name her entry:

BGR_WU_105_3_Jane_Doe.JPG

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Photographers may shoot in RAW and must be prepared to deliver their RAW image if asked by the judges.

When saving to JPEG, please include the metadata.

All entries must be submitted within the posted hours of the competition, which are located in the schedule and on the USB flash drive received at registration.

A cell phone or local number must be submitted during registration in case your entries are faulty. Images submitted in the wrong category will be disqualified.

In-camera duplicates will be judged only in the first category the judges see them.

All entries must be submitted using the file naming conventions explained above and a completed entry submission form. Entries must be submitted within the posted submission hours and on the USB flash drive received at registration.

No late submissions will be accepted.

SAVE TIME AT REGISTRATION!

Please bring a completed Waiver of Liability form (found at the back of this packet) to Backscatter when you check in prior to diving!

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SCHEDULE

CHECK OUT OUR EVENT SCHEDULE. (Subject to change)

FRIDAY, JULY 24, 2026

7:00 AM	Event Registration & Competition Begins	Backscatter
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SATURDAY, JULY 25, 2026

7:30 AM – 8:30 AM	Late Registration	Backscatter
7:30 AM – 7:00 PM	Image Drop-off	Backscatter
7:00 PM	Competition Ends (Submission Deadline)	Backscatter
6:00 PM – 9:00 PM	Cocktail Party	Backscatter

SUNDAY, JULY 26, 2026

10:30 AM – 11:45 AM	Erin Quigley – GoAskErin – AI for Good & Evil	Asilomar Conference Grounds
12:00 PM – 1:30 PM	Hergen Spalink – Hope is Not a Strategy	Asilomar Conference Grounds
3:00 PM – 5:00 PM	Award Ceremony and Prize Selection	Asilomar Conference Grounds

REGISTER AT BACKSCATTER

The contest begins Friday morning, but you can choose to start diving any time during the window. All participants must submit registration and waiver forms before diving. Download competition packets & forms

COCKTAIL PARTY

Meet new friends and catch up with all the locals at the Backscatter house party. Entry to the party is included with registration.

SEMINARS

Both of the seminars will be held at the Asilomar Conference Grounds in the Grace Dodge Chapel.

Join the Lightroom and Photoshop certified expert Erin Quigley of GoAskErin for a seminar on “AI for Good and Evil: How to Edit Smarter Using Artificial Intelligence.” Does AI make you feel dumb? Erin will walk you through Lightroom’s and Photoshop’s powerful new AI functionality and how to make it work for you.

Award-winning photographer Mike Bartick, Photo Pro at Backscatter’s authorized photo center at Crystal Blue Resort in Anilao, will share his go-to techniques for capturing impactful underwater images. From natural history and blackwater to animal behavior and creative macro lighting, Mike will walk you through the process he uses to consistently get the shot, providing tips and inspiration for your next dive.

AWARD CEREMONY & RAFFLE

The award ceremony will be held at the Asilomar Conference Grounds in the Grace Dodge Chapel. Winners will select their prize based on a point system and all that entered are eligible for a raffle. You must be present to choose a prize or authorize a person to select for you.

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PHOTOGRAPHER ENTRANT PACKET
BEGINNER CATEGORY
MONTEREY SHOOTOUT 2026

SEMINARS, AWARD CEREMONY, & RAFFLE
Asilomar Conference Grounds in the Grace Dodge Chapel



MONTEREY SHOOTOUT

NAME: _____

GENERAL RELEASE FROM LIABILITY

In consideration of my participation in the Monterey Shootout presented by the Northern California Underwater Photographic Society (NCUPS) and Backscatter Underwater Video and Photo, I hereby fully release and discharge NCUPS, Backscatter Underwater Video and Photo, and The Monterey Shootout, their officers, directors, members, course instructors, dive trip leaders, boat owners and skippers, drivers, agents, attorneys, and their heirs, successors and assigns (the "released parties"), from any present and future claims, actions and damages, of any kind and nature, including negligence, property damage, personal injury, or wrongful death, arising from my participation in the Monterey Shootout. This release includes, but is not limited to, all compensatory, non-economic, consequential, incidental, and punitive damages.

PLEASE READ AND INITIAL ON EACH LINE BELOW:

_____ I am aware that skin and SCUBA diving and underwater photography take place in unconfined waters such as oceans or lakes. Such waters are subject to current, waves, surge, cold, and wind and can, therefore, be hazardous. I voluntarily participate in this activity with knowledge of the dangers involved and hereby agree to accept and assume any and all risks of property damage, personal injury, and death.

_____ I understand that skin and SCUBA diving activities involve certain risks, including, but not limited to, travel to and from the site of the activity, possible negligent or reckless conduct of other participants, serious injury or death resulting from drowning, near drowning, arterial air embolism, decompression sickness (DCS), collisions with boats, propellers, and vehicles, entanglement with kelp or fishing line, hypothermia, wave and surf-related injuries, and contact with dangerous marine life. I voluntarily assume and accept all of these risks.

_____ I understand that skin diving, SCUBA diving, and underwater photography activities in which I participate may be conducted at sites that are remote from available medical assistance. I accept the risk that medical assistance may not be readily available should I become injured.

_____ I understand and agree that if I choose to dive without a buddy or that if I leave my buddy, I assume all risks of injury or death resulting from that decision and hold the released parties harmless therefore.

_____ I agree to provide my own dive and camera equipment for this NCUPS activity and warrant and represent that such equipment is in good condition and adequately maintained according to manufacturer's recommendations, DOT regulations (for tanks), and generally accepted safe-diving practices. Underwater photography also includes substantial risk of property damage, including flooded cameras and strobes and other damage to camera and dive equipment.

_____ I represent that I am in good physical condition, have a valid and current certification from a generally recognized SCUBA diver certification agency, and follow safe diving practices at all times.

_____ I understand and agree that I have not compensated the released parties for any services. I further acknowledge that any person providing services to me in an NCUPS-sponsored event is an uncompensated volunteer. I understand and accept that the people providing such services are not doing so as professionals employed by the diving operator or owner, or the judgment of any NCUPS member concerning water conditions, the appropriateness of SCUBA diving in such conditions, or the adequacy of my equipment made by anyone including the released parties.

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_____ I agree to defend and hold harmless the released parties from any claim against them which may arise in whole or in part from my acts while participating in this NCUPS activity.

_____ I agree that this GENERAL RELEASE OF LIABILITY release shall be binding not only on me but also on my heirs, executors, conservators, personal representatives, successors, agents, and assigns.

**I HAVE READ THIS GENERAL RELEASE OF LIABILITY AND FULLY UNDERSTAND
THAT BY SIGNING THIS FORM, I AM GIVING UP LEGAL RIGHTS AND/OR
REMEDIES WHICH MAY BE AVAILABLE TO ME.**

Name: _____ Date: _____

(Please sign on this line)

(Print the C-card number and certifying agency above)

MINOR RELEASE

I, _____ (print name) the undersigned, am the parent and/or legal guardian of _____ (minor) aged _____. I acknowledge that I have read the preceding GENERAL RELEASE OF LIABILITY for and on behalf of the minor and hereby bind me, the minor, and our successors to its terms. I represent that I have the legal capacity and authority to sign on the minor's behalf and agree to indemnify, defend, and hold the released parties harmless from any claims made or liability assessed against any of them as a result of any insufficiency of my legal capacity to act for the minor in signing this release.

Name: _____ Date: _____

(Please sign on this line)

(Print the C-card number and certifying agency above)

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CONTEST SUBMISSION AGREEMENT

THE MONTEREY SHOOTOUT 2026

Name: _____

Entrant Number: _____

Cell Phone: _____
(or phone # during the competition)

Total Number of files submitting:	Photo (6 max)	Video (2 max)

COMPETITION SKILL LEVELS

Please check the box representing the skill level you are entering and note the number of files you submit in each category. You may submit a total of 6 photos; you can distribute up to 3 photos per category. Enter 0, 1, 2, or 3 in each category, but no more than 6 total images. Video entrants may enter only 1 video per category for a maximum of 2 video entries.

☐ BGR BEGINNER PHOTO COMPETITION	MT Macro Traditional	MU Macro Unrestricted	WT Wide-angle Traditional	WU Wide-angle Unrestricted

If you are a new underwater photographer, this is the category for you. In the spirit of rewarding new photographers, entries in this category are limited to photographers who have taken a camera diving less than 50 dives and have won less than \$500 in prizes in any major underwater photography competition or have received less than \$500 in payment for any underwater photography work. Our panel of judges reserves the right to eliminate any Beginner entries that they feel should have been entered in the Intermediate category based on the entrant's experience. You may submit a total of 6 photos; you can distribute up to 3 photos per category. Enter 0, 1, 2, or 3 in each category, but no more than 6 total images.

☐ INT INTERMEDIATE PHOTO COMPETITION	MT Macro Traditional	MU Macro Unrestricted	WT Wide-angle Traditional	WU Wide-angle Unrestricted

The spirit of the intermediate digital photo category is to reward anyone who has shot underwater more than 50 dives and has already received a few kudos or prizes in the past. If you've won a total of 3 prizes or less (first, second, or third place) in a major competition and/or are not regularly selling your underwater photography, this is the category for you. Our panel of judges reserves the right to eliminate any Intermediate entries they feel should have been entered in the Advanced category based on the entrant's experience. You may submit a total of 6 photos; you can distribute up to 3 photos per category. Enter 0, 1, 2, or 3 in each category, but no more than 6 total images.

☐ ADV ADVANCED PHOTO COMPETITION	MT Macro Traditional	MU Macro Unrestricted	WT Wide-angle Traditional	WU Wide-angle Unrestricted

If you have received a total of 4 or more prizes (first, second, or third place wins) in a major competition, the advanced category is for you. Our prize point system will reward winners in this category with the highest points and, thus, the best prizes. You may submit a total of 6 photos; you can distribute up to 3 photos per category. Enter 0, 1, 2, or 3 in each category, but no more than 6 total images.

☐ VID VIDEO COMPETITION	SM Social Media Vertical Video	VM Video Story & Montage

There is only 1 skill level in the video competition. Be sure to turn in a video, whether you are shooting with a point-and-shoot camera, mirrorless, DSLR with video capability, or a pro-level video system. (There is a Limit of 1 video per category.)

By signing and submitting this form with your USB entries, you agree that you have read and understood the skill-level definitions listed above. NCUPS and the Monterey Shootout judges reserve the right to disqualify any entrant who has submitted their work into the wrong skill level or category.

Sign First and Last Name

Date