



NEWS

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Office of the Secretary
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President Sets Aside Largest Marine Conservation Area on Earth

***Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Marine National Monument Encompasses Nearly
140,000 Square Miles***

President George W. Bush today created the world's largest marine conservation area off the coast of the northern Hawaiian Islands in order to permanently protect the area's pristine coral reefs and unique marine species. The President used his authority under the Antiquities Act to designate the area a national monument.

The Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Marine National Monument encompasses nearly 140,000 square miles of U.S. waters, including 4,500 square miles of relatively undisturbed coral reef habitat that is home to more than 7,000 species. The monument will be managed by the Department of the Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, in close coordination with the State of Hawaii.

Along with the two national wildlife refuges already in the area, this national monument provides permanent protection and conservation for the extraordinary natural resources and wildlife of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, said Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne. Relatively untouched by human activities, these isolated waters and coral reefs provide vital habitat for the endangered Hawaiian monk seal, the threatened Hawaiian green sea turtle and other rare marine species.

This is a landmark achievement for conservation, protection and enhancement of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, said Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez. Approximately one quarter of the species here are found no where else in the world and a marine national monument will provide comprehensive, permanent protection to this region.

The national monument is located in waters off the Hawaiian Islands Reservation established by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1909, the Hawaiian Islands National

Wildlife Refuge and Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge, site of the key World War II sea battle and the Battle of Midway National Memorial.

Permits will be required for activities related to research, education, conservation and management, native Hawaiian practices, and non-extractive special ocean uses. The commercial and recreational harvest of precious coral, crustaceans and coral reef species will be prohibited in monument waters and commercial fishing in monument waters will be phased out over a five-year period. Oil, gas and mineral exploration and extraction will not be allowed anywhere in the monument.

Prior to today's designation, this unique region had been part of a five-year study under a National Marine Sanctuary designation process, during which federal and state entities, native Hawaiian leaders, and the public have participated in strong collaboration with significant amounts of testimony and input to develop a plan with broad-based consensus. Since 2000, more than 52,000 public comments were received, most supporting strong protection.

The President's action today means immediate protection, immediate implementation of the management measures included in the plan that was developed during the National Marine Sanctuary designation process, and immediate start of the "seamless" federal/state management process that will include ongoing consultation and involvement with the public.

Secretary Kempthorne noted that Hawaii Governor Linda Lingle recently approved the establishment of a marine refuge in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. States and federal partners, national and local conservation organizations and thousands of interested individuals have made possible the protection of this national monument. This is collaboration at its best, Kempthorne said.

Under the Antiquities Act of 1906, which is celebrating its 100th year of enactment, the President of the United States is authorized to declare by public proclamation, historic landmarks, historic and prehistoric structures, and other objects of historic or scientific interest that are situated upon the lands owned or controlled by the Government of the United States to be national monuments.

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