

News Release



Hawaiian and Pacific Islands National Wildlife Refuge Complex
300 Ala Moana Blvd. Rm 5-231, Honolulu, HI 96813
www.fws.gov/pacificislandsrefuges 808-792-9540

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PINWR 11-13

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Seeking Public Comments on Potential Wilderness in Hawai‘i and the Pacific

Public comments are being sought for planning a wilderness review and legislative environmental impact statement (LEIS) for the Hawaiian and Pacific Islands National Wildlife Refuge Complex. A Notice of Intent to prepare the wilderness review and LEIS was published in the *Federal Register* on December 16, 2011.

The Wilderness Act of 1964 established the National Wilderness Preservation System and a process for Federal land-managing agencies to recommend wilderness areas to Congress. Wilderness, as defined by the Wilderness Act, is untrammeled (free from man's control), undeveloped, and natural, and offers outstanding opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation, and FWS is required to assess Refuge lands for these criteria at least every 15 years.

The Hawaiian and Pacific Islands National Wildlife Refuge Complex is composed of 22 National Wildlife Refuges, encompassing over 54 million acres of land and marine areas dedicated to the conservation of the unique wildlife in Hawai‘i and the Pacific. Refuges that contain units that meet the minimum criteria for wilderness include:

- Mariana Arc of Fire
- Howland Island
- Baker Island
- Jarvis Island
- Rose Atoll
- Kingman Reef
- Palmyra Atoll
- Midway Atoll
- Hawaiian Islands
- O‘ahu Forest;
- Hakalau Forest.

The Draft LEIS will include analysis of marine waters and submerged coral reefs within the Hawaiian and Pacific Islands NWRC that have qualified as wilderness study areas. These areas will represent some of first large-scale marine environments evaluated for incorporation in the NWPS.

The wilderness review and LEIS process will allow the Complex to further analyze these areas for their practicability to be managed as wilderness, including an analysis of which specific portions, if any, of the Refuges should be recommended to Congress for wilderness designation.

The scoping period will allow the public, Federal, State, Territorial, and local government agencies, and other interested parties an opportunity to bring forward issues, concerns, ideas, and suggestions important the evaluation of potential wilderness designations in the Complex. The following preliminary issues have been identified:

- Which refuge lands and waters should be included in wilderness proposals identified in the WR/LEIS alternatives?
- How would current or planned refuge uses, including natural resource management activities, public visitation, and scientific research, be affected in areas identified in potential wilderness recommendations?
- How would our management of refuge resources, including historic and cultural artifacts, biological resources, and physical attributes such as water quality and soils, be affected in areas identified in potential wilderness recommendations?
- How should global climate change and its potential impacts be considered in the WR/LEIS?

Additional issues may be identified throughout the development of the LEIS.

The scoping period for this project is 45 days. Scoping comments should be submitted no later than January 30, 2012 via:

- Email: FW1PlanningComments@fws.gov
- Fax: Attn: Matthew Ching, 808-792-9585
- U.S. Mail: Matthew Ching, Hawaiian and Pacific Islands National Wildlife Refuge Complex, 300 Ala Moana Blvd. Rm 5-231, Honolulu, HI 96813

The Service estimates that the Draft LEIS will be available in April 2012. A Notice of Availability will be published in the *Federal Register* upon publication of the Draft LEIS. Information about the wilderness study and LEIS planning are available at <http://www.fws.gov/pacificislandsrefuges/wilderness.html>.

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