

New Marine National Monuments Include National Wildlife Refuges

The National Wildlife Refuge System was given responsible for managing nearly all of the three marine national monuments established in early January, adding about 54 million acres to the Refuge System. The Refuge system now spans about 150 million acres. Some portions of the monuments will be managed in part by the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration and in part by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Combined, the three monuments encompass nearly 200,000 square miles, making it the largest fully protected area in the world.

Six national wildlife refuges – remote coral reef ecosystems that contain hundreds of thriving fish species and support large numbers of nesting seabirds and migratory shorebirds – are at the heart of the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument, one of three marine national monuments announced on January 6.

The new **Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument**, which spans areas to the far south and west of Hawaii, consists of Wake, Baker, Howland and Jarvis Islands, Johnston Atoll, Kingman Reef and Palmyra Atoll. All but Wake Island are units of the Refuge System. The islands are an important part of the most widespread collection of marine- and terrestrial-life protected on the planet under a single country's jurisdiction. They sustain many endemic species including corals, fish, shellfish, marine mammals, seabirds, water birds, land birds, insects and vegetation not found elsewhere.

A diamond-shaped island to the east of American Samoa, **Rose Atoll Marine National Monument** is the southernmost point of the United States. This small atoll, which includes the Rose Atoll National Wildlife Refuge with about 20 acres of land and 1,600 acres of lagoon, remains one of the most pristine atolls in the world. Rare species of nesting petrel, shearwaters, and terns thrive on the island.

The third and largest of the protected areas surrounds the **Northern Mariana Islands National Monument** and includes the Mariana Trench, the deepest canyon on earth. The Mariana Islands monument alone protects 95,000 square miles, encompassing areas believed to harbor some of the oldest known life on the DNA tree. By itself, this monument is the third largest marine reserve in the world. Among its diverse and remarkable underwater features are the second known boiling pool of liquid sulfur and huge, active mud volcanoes.

The United States has jurisdiction over the areas because all the islands are U.S. territories. Parts of the new marine monuments were the scene of intense military activity during World War II. Wake Island was occupied by Japanese forces. Other designated islands and atolls housed naval air stations and other U.S. military facilities.

