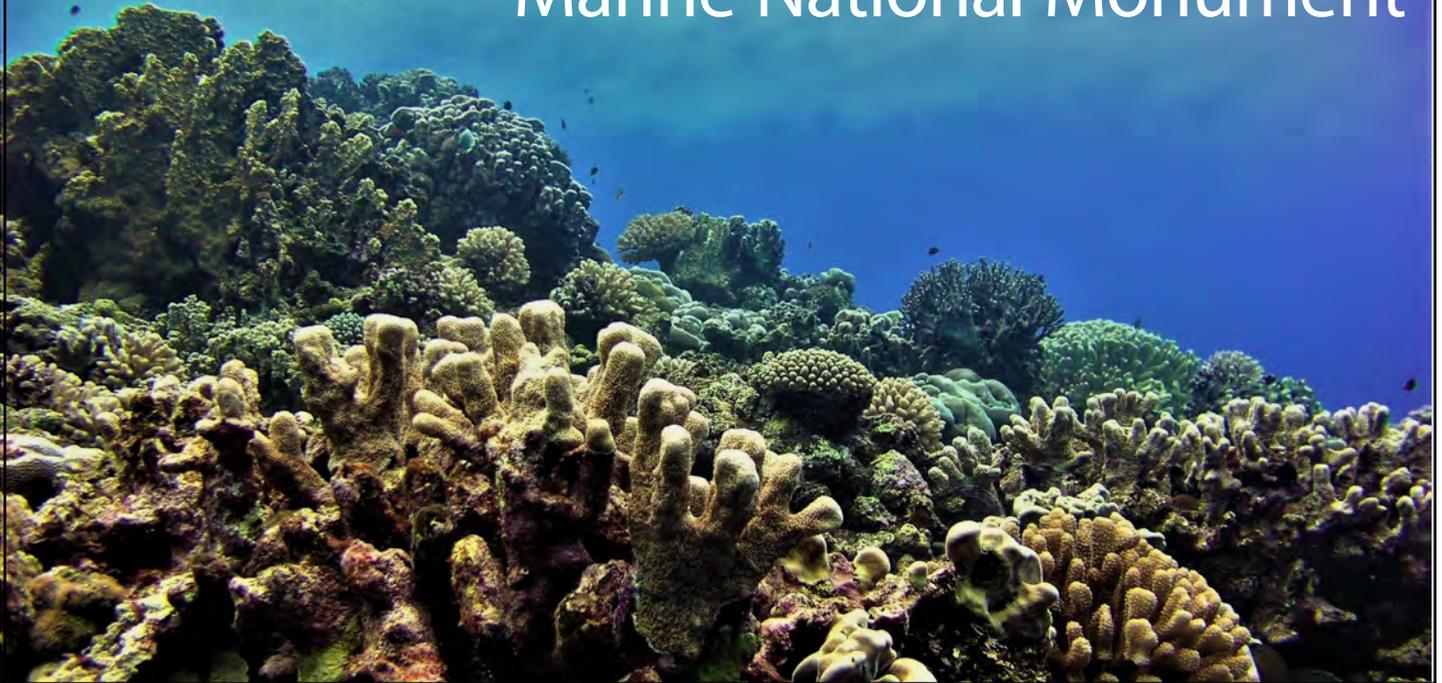




# Marianas Trench Marine National Monument



Coral garden at Maug, Jean Kenyon/USFWS

## Draft Monument Management Plan and Environmental Assessment is Available for Public Comment!

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) announce the **Draft Monument Management Plan and Environmental Assessment (MMP/EA)** for the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument (Monument) is available for public review and comment until May 25, 2021.

Since our last Planning Update for the MMP/EA, the submerged lands extending three geographical miles seaward from the islands of Farallon de Pajaros, Maug and Asuncion were officially transferred to the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). The transfer of the the three-mile coastal zone provides the Government of CNMI authority over the seabed, subsoil, minerals, water column and surface water resources.

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In September 2016, the Department of Commerce, the Department of the Interior, and CNMI signed a formal memorandum of agreement (MOA) for coordinated management and protection of these submerged lands and waters. The coral ecosystems that ring the islands contain a diversity of marine life that will continue to be protected as part of the Monument.

The 2016 **Deepwater Exploration of the Marianas** expedition enlightened us with mapping almost 2 million acres of seafloor from depths of 800-19,000 feet while surveying precious corals and fish habitats, deep-sea coral and sponge communities, seamounts, hydrothermal vents, and mud volcanoes.

Representatives from CNMI, NOAA, and USFWS collaborated on the Draft MMP/EA and worked with the Mariana Trench Monument Advisory Council (MTMAC) to refine the proposed goals, strategies, and activities. The resulting Draft MMP/EA describes our proposal for managing the Monument for 15 years. We expect to schedule public meetings in 2021 on Saipan, Tinian, Rota, and Guam.

## Summary of Alternatives

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires federal agencies to develop a range of reasonable alternatives, including a “no action” alternative which reflects current activities with no change, i.e. no management plan. Three alternatives were developed. Under all alternatives: the CNMI would continue to have jurisdiction over the submerged lands and waters out to 3 miles seaward of Maug, Asuncion, and Farallon de Pajaros, managing in cooperation with USFWS and NOAA; Managers would continue to support efforts to design exhibits and grow the visitor contact stations; and, the NOAA Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center would continue to conduct Reef Assessment and Monitoring cruises and cetacean and sea turtle assessments as resources allow.

Each of the three alternatives should be considered as separate, stand-alone options for management. Both Alternatives 2 and 3 propose to implement the same set of activities with the same potential environmental effects. The difference lies in the scheduling or timing of when the activities would be implemented. Under each alternative, actions will be implemented over a period of 15 years following the timelines in the action plans as funding becomes available. The alternatives are summarized below and on the insert section (pages 3-6) of this planning update:

### Alternative 1 – No Action

Under Alternative 1, current management activities would continue. Fishing regulations for the Monument are enforced by NOAA but no regional outreach or public education of the permitting process would occur. The USFWS will manage the Trench Unit/Refuge and Volcanic Unit/Arc of Fire Refuge in accordance with regulations covering the NWRS. Grant funding from NOAA Fisheries Monument Program would allow limited support for projects in priority areas, such as ocean literacy. New activities would not be added and ongoing activities are not guaranteed.

### Alternative 2 – Phased Implementation on a Set Schedule

Under Alternative 2, proposed activities would be implemented in short-, mid-, and long-term phases, subject to funding and staff availability. All activities in each action plan have a designated

implementation phase: short-term (within 3 years), mid-term (year 4-9), or long-term (10 years out or more). Outreach and education would take place as well as distance learning opportunities via the internet. A permitting system would ensure protection of Monument ecosystems, and new programs to explore cultural and maritime connections would be implemented. New protocols to prevent introduction of marine invasive species would be developed and new technologies for monitoring and enforcement researched.

### Alternative 3 – Prioritized Implementation of Action Plans – (Preferred alternative)

Under Alternative 3, activities would be prioritized annually by the Monument Management Coordination Team (MMCT) comprised of USFWS, NOAA, and CNMI Monument managers. Prioritization will be based on a set ranking system. Top priorities for the first year under Alternative 3 include: Develop a joint permitting process. Integrate Monument information and regulations into existing interagency agreements and mapping tools. Work with partners to study, explore, and conserve Monument features and resources. Develop environmental education and ocean literacy programs along with distance learning tools. Develop protocols to prevent introduction of marine invasive species and, research new technologies for monitoring and enforcement.

#### Planning Schedule

<u>Planning Step:</u>	<u>Target Date:</u>
Planning Update 5 Issued.....	February 2021
Draft MMP/EA Issued.....	February 2021
Public review/comment on Draft MMP/EA...	Feb May 2021
Virtual open-house public meetings.....	April 2021
Final MMP.....	Fall 2021

Schedule dates are tentative and subject to change as planning progresses and in compliance with local government social distancing guidelines.

<b>Marianas Trench MNM - Summary of Proposed Activities and Management Alternatives Comparison</b>				
Project Title		Alt 1	Alt 2	Alt 3
MRCM Strategy 1: Coordinate and promote Monument-related non-commercial fishing and scientific research.				
Activity 1.1	Provide access for activities related to sustainable non-commercial fishing and exploration and research that preserves the marine resources of the Monument.	✓	Short-term	(1)
Activity 1.2	Work with partners and the scientific and local communities to monitor and assess the impacts from authorized Monument activities.		Short-term	(1)
Activity 1.3	Review the data and records from authorized fishing activities in the Monument and assess compliance with marine resource conservation needs.		Short-term	(1)
MRCM Strategy 2: Assess the status of endangered species, fisheries, habitats, and geologic features of the Monument.				
Activity 2.1	Work with partners to conduct population studies for marine mammals and T&E species, and CNMI species of concern.	✓	Short-term	(2)
Activity 2.2	Work with partners to continue the assessments of coral reef communities and other benthic habitats in the Monument.	✓	Short-term	(1)
Activity 2.3	Identify management options to maintain ecological integrity for species and systems considered vulnerable to climate change.		Mid-term	(2)
MRCM Strategy 3: Identify threats to endangered species, fisheries, habitats, and geologic features found in the Monument.				
Activity 3.1	Identify key species or functional groups on which to focus management efforts.		Short-term	(1)
Activity 3.2	Work with partners to develop long-term monitoring projects to determine how natural and anthropogenic events outside of the Monument impact the resources over time.		Long-term	(3)
MRCM Strategy 4: Identify measures to reduce or minimize threats to the Monument resources.				
Activity 4.1	Implement and refine BMPs to protect endangered and threatened marine species, habitats, and geologic features.		Short-term	(1)
Activity 4.2	Investigate the feasibility and necessity of deploying remote surveillance technologies to aid in resource protection.		Mid-term	(2)
Activity 4.3	Facilitate efforts to reduce and minimize fishery bycatch and incidental mortality.		Long-term	(3)
MRCM Strategy 5: Work with the MTMAC to include traditional knowledge in the management of the Monument.				
Activity 5.1	Solicit advice from SHPO and cultural groups on traditional knowledge pertaining to management of marine resources.		Short-term	(3)
CMAP Strategy 1: Establish a Monument Management Coordination Team to facilitate coordinated management of the Monument.				
Activity 1.1	Prepare and sign a Memorandum of Understanding for management roles and responsibilities shared between USFWS, NOAA, and CNMI.		Short-term	(1)
Activity 1.2	Annually, prepare a brief "State of the Monument" report on the status of the Monument and implementation of the MMP.		Short-term	(2)
Activity 1.3	Assess and determine format and frequency of MTMAC meetings with the MMCT.		Short-term	(3)
CMAP Strategy 2: Develop a joint Monument permit and a single permit application for all Monument activities requiring permits.				
Activity 2.1	In consultation with NOAA and CNMI, USFWS will modify the existing approved SUP to serve as the JMP.		Short-term	(1)
CMAP Strategy 3: Develop a single public portal (website) to eliminate duplication of effort within one year of MMP publication.				
Activity 3.1	Work with USFWS Visitor Services to modify existing website to include NOAA & CNMI logos.		Short-term	(1)
SNF Strategy 1: Improve information about fisheries stocks status within the Monument.				
Activity 1.1	Acquire baseline data about fishery populations.	✓	Mid-term	(2)
SNF Strategy 2: Assess fisheries landings from the Islands Unit to ensure sustainable harvests and maintain effective regulations.				
Activity 2.1	Track the landings and species from submitted logbooks to better inform management decision-making.		Mid-term	(4)
SNF Strategy 3: Identify threats to fisheries resources and develop management actions in the Islands Unit to ensure sustainable, healthy fish stocks are maintained.				
Activity 3.1	Analyze fisheries data to guide management actions for sustainable fishery stocks.		Mid-term	(4)
SNF Strategy 4: Provide the residents of CNMI and Guam easy access to permit applications, record forms, log books, etc.				
Activity 4.1	Incorporate the sustainable non-commercial fishing permit application into the new JMP permit application.		Short-term	(1)
Activity 4.2	Establish locations in the CNMI and Guam where fishers can find JMP applications and Monument-related fishing information.		Mid-term	(3)

Project Title		Alt 1	Alt 2	Alt 3
SAE Strategy 1: Incorporate Monument information and regulations to existing interagency agreements and integrate Monument-specific protections into existing boundary and mapping tools.				
Activity 1.1	Integrate the Monument into existing interagency agreements and evaluate the necessity for additional interagency agreements.	✓	Short-term	(1)
Activity 1.2	Ensure that Monument boundaries are updated on official NOAA nautical charts and U.S. Coast Pilot® 7.	✓	Short-term	(1)
SAE Strategy 2: Analyze vessel traffic data to assess the need for additional surveillance within the Monument.				
Activity 2.1	Conduct a ship travel assessment to inform compliance and enforcement needs in Monument waters.		Short-term	(4)
Activity 2.2	Assess effectiveness of Google Earth VMS data sharing.		Mid-term	(4)
SAE Strategy 3: Consider suitable programs, tools, and technologies to augment effective law enforcement.				
Activity 3.1	Investigate the feasibility and necessity of deploying remote surveillance technologies to aid in resource protection.		Long-term	(3)
MIS Strategy 1: Develop a marine invasive species prevention best management practices protocol for all Monument visitors to use.				
Activity 1.1	Review existing marine invasive species prevention measures and BMPs to establish standard protocols.		Short-term	(2)
Activity 1.2	Develop a reference guide for Monument visitors that explains BMP developed in MIS Activity 1.1.		Short-term	(2)
MIS Strategy 2: Assess the vessel numbers transiting Monument waters, the purpose of their passage, travel patterns and primary pathways, and isolate potential vectors for species introductions.				
Activity 2.1	Identify vector pathways, and assess spatial and temporal water vessel and aircraft traffic patterns.	✓	Short-term	(1)
MIS Strategy 3: Assess the need for and the feasibility of a marine invasive species inspection process.				
Activity 3.1	Review trip data and determine whether the Monument would benefit from vessel inspections for Guam & CNMI boaters.	✓	Short-term	(1)
MIS Strategy 4: Confirm the presence or absence of invasive species in the Monument.				
Activity 4.1	Analyze the MARAMP towed-diver survey data to verify the presence or absence of invasive species and establish a baseline for marine invasive species in the Monument		Mid-term	(3)
Activity 4.2	Develop database that identifies marine species in the Monument, prioritizing known invaders in the tropical and subtropical Pacific marine environment.		Mid-term	(3)
MIS Strategy 5: Develop a marine invasive species observation plan and support existing observation activities.				
Activity 5.1	Create a marine invasive species observation program for researchers to assist with detecting potential introductions.		Mid-term	(3)
MD Strategy 1: Decrease potential incidences of grounded and abandoned vessels in the Monument.				
Activity 1.1	Update navigation aids with Monument boundary and feature information.		Short-term	(1)
Activity 1.2	Assess the need and value of establishing International Maritime Organization Protection Measures for the Islands Unit.		Mid-term	(2)
MD Strategy 2: Decrease incidences of fishing gear and solid waste disposal in the Mariana Archipelago that could drift into Monument waters.				
Activity 2.1	Modify and circulate waste management education materials.		Long-term	(3)
Activity 2.2	Conduct outreach workshops in the CNMI and Guam about fishing gear loss solutions.	✓	Mid-term	(3)
Activity 2.3	Develop protocols to prevent marine debris from U.S. fishing fleets that fish in the CNMI and Guam EEZs and partner with them for removal incentives.		Long-term	(4)
MD Strategy 3: Develop a process to inventory and remove marine debris in the Islands Unit.				
Activity 3.1	Establish a marine debris data gathering procedure for the Islands Unit..		Long-term	(1)
Activity 3.2	Consider using remote monitoring technology to address marine debris.		Long-term	(2)
Activity 3.3	Work with partners to establish a centralized, inter-agency marine debris inventory and response fund.		Long-term	(3)

Project Title		Alt 1	Alt 2	Alt 3
ERDA Strategy 1: Provide USCG with a Monument Contingency Plan to enable a streamlined response and damage assessment in the event of emergencies in the Monument.				
Activity 1.1	Prepare a Monument Contingency Plan to supplement the MIACP.		Short-term	(2)
Activity 1.2	Prepare an Environmental Sensitivity Index (ESI) for the Monument's Islands Unit.		Mid-term	(2)
Activity 1.3	Prepare a NRDA representative contact list.		Short-term	(2)
ERDA Strategy 2: Ensure preparation, response, and training needs are met for ERDA protocol in the Monument.				
Activity 2.1	Monument managers will collaborate with the PRiMO coalition to identify training and funding needs associated with the ERDA protocol.		Mid-term	(3)
E&R Strategy 1: Work with partners to assess the current state of knowledge about the resources in the Monument, and to prioritize research to fill in the gaps.				
Activity 1.1	Complete a review of the current scientific literature of research that has occurred in the Monument, and make it available to the public on an appropriate internet site(s).	✓	Short-term	(3)
Activity 1.2	Review current data to determine the abundance and distribution of the marine resources in the monument, and the location of geological features found in the Monument.		Long-term	(3)
Activity 1.3	Collect available spatial data sources to determine the distribution of the various habitats, geological features, and biological resources.		Long-term	(3)
Activity 1.4	Conduct a vulnerability assessment to understand potential climate change scenarios.	✓	Short-term	(1)
E&R Strategy 2: Work with partners to study, explore, and conserve the features and resources of the Monument.				
Activity 2.1	Work with partners to conduct scientific studies on the characteristics of the Monument's unique processes and resources.	✓	Short-term	(1)
Activity 2.2	Work with partners to characterize the ocean basins and resources in the Monument.	✓	Short-term	(1)
Activity 2.3	Characterize geological, physical, chemical, and biological ocean processes, communities, and environments.	✓	Short-term	(2)
Activity 2.4	Develop a geo-referenced system of documentation that tracks locations and types of exploration and research activities in the Monument.		Mid-term	(3)
Activity 2.5	Identify and establish long-term study sites at appropriate locations within the Monument.		Long-term	(3)
Activity 2.6	Locate areas within the Monument that demonstrate potential for climate change resilience.		Long-term	(4)
E&R Strategy 3: Identify opportunities to implement novel approaches to management of the Monument and to find ways to further collaboration with the scientific community and the general public.				
Activity 3.1	Convene a team of Technical Advisors who can aid monument managers in evaluation of research proposals and management activities.		Mid-term	(3)
Activity 3.2	Convene a working group to identify key climate change research questions.		Mid-term	(3)
Activity 3.3	Consider establishing sites where only low-impact research would be conducted, in order to maintain ecosystem integrity.		Long-term	(2)
Activity 3.4	Identify opportunities to use advanced underwater technologies such as: ROVs; autonomous underwater vehicles; and ocean gliders to increase the pace, scope, and efficiency of exploration and research.		Mid-term	(2)
CMH Strategy 1: Collaborate with Chamorro and Carolinian communities, the CNMI Historic Preservation Office, the Guam Historic Resources Division, and other interested groups to identify cultural & maritime heritage resources related to the Monument.				
Activity 1.1	Establish partnerships with indigenous communities to conduct culturally appropriate maritime heritage research and activities		Short-term	(1)
Activity 1.2	Connect with agencies managing the Maritime Heritage Grants program to determine eligibility for funding and seek out NGOs and universities for potential research projects.		Mid-term	(2)
Activity 1.3	Identify, characterize, and inventory Cultural & Maritime Heritage resources located in the Monument using a GIS-based inventory program.		Mid-term	(3)
Activity 1.4	Develop a Cultural & Maritime Heritage preservation and protection program for historic resources in the Monument.		Mid-term	(3)
CMH Strategy 2: Facilitate development of interpretive programs for the Monument's Cultural & Maritime Heritage.				
Activity 2.1	Prepare Educational materials to augment Cultural & Maritime Heritage programs.		Mid-term	(3)
Activity 2.2	Coordinate Cultural & Maritime Heritage outreach programs with educators and community organizations.		Mid-term	(3)



### Who are the Monument management officials?

USFWS	<b>Tammy Summers</b> Marianas Trench MNM Superintendent
NOAA	<b>Malia Chow</b> Branch Chief EFH-Pacific Marine National Monuments
CNMI	<b>Anthony Benavente</b> Secretary, Department of Lands and Natural Resources

### How do I obtain a copy of the draft management plan and environmental assessment?

You can download the Draft MMP/EA from our websites:

[www.fws.gov/refuge/Mariana\\_Trench\\_Marine\\_National\\_Monument/](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/Mariana_Trench_Marine_National_Monument/)  
or  
[www.fisheries.noaa.gov/pacific-islands/habitat-conservation/marianas-trench-marine-national-monument/](http://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/pacific-islands/habitat-conservation/marianas-trench-marine-national-monument/)

For more information, please contact Tammy Summers by e-mail at: [tammy\\_summers@fws.gov](mailto:tammy_summers@fws.gov) (please include "Draft MMP/EA" in the subject line)

Or by U.S. Mail:  
Superintendent  
Marianas Trench Marine National Monument  
P.O. Box 8134 MOU-3  
Dededo, GU 96912

### How do I provide comments?

To submit comments on the draft MMP/EA go to:

**regulations.gov**

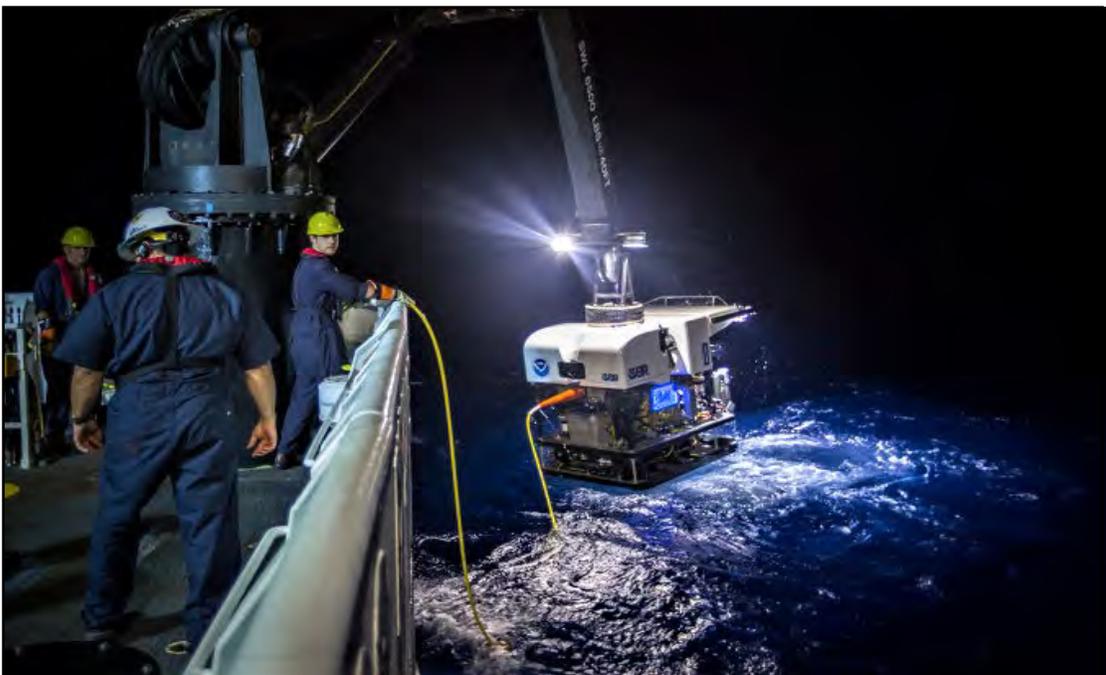
Select **NOAA-NMFS-2021-0003**

click **Comment Now!**, complete the required fields, and enter or attach your comments.

### Tips for Submitting Effective Comments

A comment can express simple support or dissent for a proposed action. However, a constructive, information-rich comment that clearly communicates and supports its claims is more likely to have an impact on decision making. These tips are meant to help the public submit comments that have an impact and help the agencies improve the management plan.

- Refer to the Draft MMP/EA section or page number your comment addresses
- Base your comment on scientific evidence and/or how you will be impacted
- Address trade-offs and opposing views
- The comment process is not a vote – one well supported comment is often more influential than a thousand form letters



Recovering remotely operated vehicle *Deep Discoverer*. NOAA OER 2016 Deepwater Exploration of the Marianas.

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Additional information about the Monument is available on our websites:  
[www.fws.gov/refuge/mariana\\_trench\\_marine\\_national\\_monument](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/mariana_trench_marine_national_monument)  
[www.fpir.noaa.gov/MNM/mnm\\_index.html](http://www.fpir.noaa.gov/MNM/mnm_index.html)

If you would like to be added to or removed from the MMP/EA mailing list, or if you prefer to receive future updates via electronic mail or hard copy, please contact Laura Beauregard at [laura\\_beauregard@fws.gov](mailto:laura_beauregard@fws.gov).



A sixgill shark cruises the reef. NOAA OER 2016 Deepwater Exploration of the Marianas.