



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Palmyra Atoll and Kingman Reef National Wildlife Refuges

*Planning Update Number 1, March 2011*



*Red-footed booby - Laura Beauregard/USFWS*

## Help Us Plan for the Future!

Over the next year, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) will be seeking input from the public, interested agencies, and organizations regarding their interests, concerns, and viewpoints about important refuge management issues.

This information will be helpful as we develop a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) for Palmyra Atoll and Kingman Reef National Wildlife Refuges,

which will be incorporated into an overarching Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument Management Plan.

This is the first in a series of planning updates to keep you informed and invite your participation. As we begin this planning process, we are provided the opportunity to look at our habitat management and public programs from fresh perspectives.



*Barringtonia asiatica*  
*Alex Weggman/USFWS*

*Your participation is critical to the success of this effort – we want to hear from you!*

*See page 6 for information about submitting your comments.*

## National Wildlife What?

Refuges are places where wildlife comes first. The National Wildlife Refuge System comprises the world's largest collection of lands and waters set aside specifically for wildlife and provides important habitat for native plants, fish, and animals. The Refuge System is administered by the Department of the Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service for the following mission:

*“To administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.”*

## Refuge Overview

Part of the Line Islands chain, Palmyra Atoll and Kingman Reef are remnants of volcanoes from some 65-120 million years ago. Many nationally and internationally threatened, endangered, and depleted species thrive at Palmyra and Kingman, including sea turtles, pearl oysters, giant clams, reef sharks, coconut crabs, fishes, and dolphins. Large schools of rare melon-headed whales reside off both atolls, and a species of beaked whale was recently rediscovered.

### *Palmyra Atoll National Wildlife Refuge*

A circular string of 25 islets, Palmyra Atoll has one of the most diverse and spectacular coral reef systems in the world. Over 130 species of stony corals populate the reefs. About 1,000 miles south-southwest of Honolulu, the atoll is the only nesting habitat for migratory seabirds and shorebirds within 450,000 square miles of ocean. It consists of about 680 acres of above-water tropical forest lands and 515,232 acres of submerged lands and open water, including approximately 16,094



*Butterfly fish - Alex Weggmar/USFWS*

acres of coral reef habitat. It is the only undeveloped and unpopulated wet atoll left in the tropical Pacific under U.S. jurisdiction.

Palmyra's terrestrial habitats support one of the largest remaining stands of *Pisonia* forest in the Pacific and several other native varieties of ferns and shrubs. The atoll is also home to the world's largest land-based invertebrate, the coconut crab. The lush vegetation supports over a million birds of 29 species. Palmyra supports 10 nesting seabird species, including the second largest red-footed booby colony in the world, the largest black noddy colony in the Central Pacific, and large numbers of bristle-thighed curlews.

Palmyra's history is long and colorful. Its first recorded sighting was in 1798, by Captain Edmond Fanning, and it was officially discovered in 1802 by Captain Sawle of the American ship *Palmyra*. In 1859, Dr. G.P. Judd of the brig *Josephine* took possession of the atoll for the United States and the American



*Coconut crab - Laura Beauregard/USFWS*

Guano Company. Three years later, King Kamehameha IV claimed possession for the Kingdom of Hawai'i, but in 1889, Great Britain claimed the atoll. In 1898, President McKinley annexed the Territory of Hawai'i, specifically mentioning Palmyra, to the United States, but Palmyra was excluded from the Hawai'i State boundaries in 1959. Palmyra hosted a 6,000-man Naval Air Station in World War II, complete with dock and airfield.

The Refuge was established in January 2001 by the Secretary of the Interior and includes submerged lands and associated waters out to 12 nautical miles from the atoll. The Nature Conservancy of Hawai'i manages a small research camp on Cooper Island for the Palmyra Atoll Research Consortium. Through this consortium of ten institutions from the United States and New Zealand, scientists conduct research pertaining to biodiversity, conservation, natural history, ecosystem restoration, marine ecosystem dynamics, biogeochemistry, climate dynamics, and global warming.

### *Kingman Reef National Wildlife Refuge*

Only 3 feet in elevation, Kingman Reef lies 932 miles southwest of Hawai'i. Crystal clear oceanic waters and vibrant coral reefs support a spectacular diversity of corals and other marine invertebrates, algae, fishes, marine mammals, sea turtles, and migratory seabirds. Kingman is known to be the most undisturbed coral reef within the U.S., complete with a greater proportion of apex predators than at any other studied coral reef ecosystem in the world.

Although no permanent land is found here, two small 2- and 1-acre emergent coral rubble spits occur on the northeastern and southeastern sides of the reef. In addition to the 3 acres of emergent reef, Kingman Reef National Wildlife Refuge includes 483,754 acres of submerged reefs and associated waters, out to its 12 nautical mile boundary.

Coral reef ecologists reported 168 species of fishes including sharks, rays, eels, groupers, jacks,

goatfishes, butterflyfishes, parrotfishes, and tuna. Also recorded were 102 species of corals, including an undescribed species of finger coral and spectacular assemblages of mushroom coral, fire coral, table coral, and plate coral. Several species of giant clams can be found in relatively large numbers in waters of Kingman Reef.

The first recorded western contact at Kingman Reef was by an American seaman, Captain Fanning, in 1798. The reef was named after Captain Kingman, who visited in 1853. The United States annexed the reef in 1922 and in 1934 delegated jurisdiction to the Navy. Its sheltered lagoon served as a way station for Pan American Flying Clippers on Hawai'i to American Samoa flights during the 1930s.

On September 1, 2000, the Department of the Interior accepted restoration of its administrative jurisdiction over Kingman Reef from the Department of the Navy; Secretary's Order 3223 signed January 18, 2001, established Kingman Reef National Wildlife Refuge.



*Reef pool and clam garden  
Jim Maragos/USFWS*



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## How Do I Contact the Service or Provide Comments?

To contact the Service or request information:

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**Email:** [FW1PlanningComments@fws.gov](mailto:FW1PlanningComments@fws.gov).  
Please include "Palmyra-Kingman CCP" in the subject line.

**Visit our web sites:** [www.fws.gov/palmyraatoll](http://www.fws.gov/palmyraatoll)  
[www.fws.gov/kingmanreef](http://www.fws.gov/kingmanreef)