



Your Involvement is Needed to Protect this World Treasure as a Pu'uhonua

Currently there are two central processes that will determine the long term protection measures for the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands.

- ✦ A federal process is now underway to determine if the NWHI Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve should become a National Marine Sanctuary. This is a concern because the Sanctuary Program is not known for its ability to protect marine resources or wilderness areas. A Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) process led by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), will ask the public to consider what protections are necessary for the 84-million acre NWHI Reserve. The first step in this process—"visioning sessions" or public scoping—was held in the spring 2002 to determine key issues. As public input opportunities continue to arise, it will be up to all of us to ensure that—if a Sanctuary is established in the NWHI—the existing protection measures for this pu'uhonua are not weakened.
- ✦ The Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) is expected to be holding public hearings on revised regulations for state waters in the NWHI sometime in the next few months. The NWHI Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve boundaries surround, but do not include state waters, which represent the heart of the coral reef ecosystem and contain the majority of rich biodiversity. DLNR is proposing refuge status for these waters, which would provide essential habitat protection for the highly endangered Hawaiian monk seal and threatened and endangered sea turtles. Public support at DLNR's hearings on regulations for state waters will be of crucial importance.

The challenge before us is to ensure that all protections for the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands incorporate—as required by law—all of the measures identified in former President Clinton's Executive Order establishing the 84-million acre Northwestern Hawaiian Island Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve.

A Pu'uhonua for the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands

The Northwestern Hawaiian Islands form the most isolated archipelago in the world. Stretching over 1,200 miles to the northwest of Kaua'i, these prehistoric islands, atolls and shoals contain some of the most diverse and pristine reefs in the world. This remote and biologically diverse ecosystem is truly a world treasure.

At nearly 120,000 square nautical miles, the 84-million-acre NWHI Reserve is the largest Marine Protected Area in waters under U.S. jurisdiction and the second largest protected area in the world, second in size to Australia's Great Barrier Reef.

Referred to as the Kūpuna (elders) Islands, the NWHI are ceded lands and extremely important to the Native Hawaiian people. They hold rich cultural resources that inform us about the origins of Hawai'i's first people. They hold great significance in Native Hawaiian culture and history. Myth and culture join in ancient oli and mele telling of the fire goddess Pele and her family traversing the NWHI and stopping at Mokumanamana (Necker Island) on their way to the Main Hawaiian Islands.

A "rainforest of the sea," the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands ecosystem contains over 3 million acres of some of the world's oldest living coral colonies and encompasses tremendous biodiversity. While more than 7,000 marine species have been recorded in the Hawaiian Islands, half of them exist only in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. These pristine coral reefs are the foundation of an expansive ecosystem that hosts an interdependent association of vertebrates (monk seals, reef and bottom fish, turtles, birds, sharks),

invertebrates (corals, anemones, jellyfishes, mollusks, shrimps, crabs, lobsters, sea urchins, sea stars, sea cucumbers), sea grasses, and algae. The Northwestern Hawaiian Islands provide essential habitat for millions of seabirds, the endangered Hawaiian monk seal and threatened and endangered sea turtles.

These very isolated islands, shoals and atolls are located in colder waters and have an exceptionally low net productivity with limited nutrient cycling. Consequently, they are very slow to recover from disturbance and are extremely vulnerable to human impacts.

The remote location of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands has allowed one of the world's last remaining intact, predator-dominated ecosystems to endure—making it a truly unique and phenomenal place.

Threats to the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands

Attempts to weaken or annul existing Reserve protections

- * Intensive campaigns by Wespac to weaken protections, open new fisheries and reestablish the lobster fishery.
- * Refusal of the Department of Commerce to issue regulations required by the U.S. Coast Guard for enforcement purposes

Marine debris

Opening up new commercial activities

- * Commercial fishing
- * Tropical aquarium fish trade
- * Mining of corals, sands and deep-sea minerals
- * Reestablishment of the closed NWHI lobster fishery
- * Expansion of the bottomfish fishery
- * Establishment of coral reef harvesting
- * Bio-prospecting

Increased human impact resulting from the "rediscovery" of the NWHI

- * **Eco-tourism**, "educational" tourism and related activities in new and fragile areas
- * **Cruise ships**. These floating cities carry several thousand people, produce hundreds of thousands of gallons of toxic effluent, and threaten to introduce alien species.
- * **Pollution** and contamination from increased air, vessel and human access

Research activities

- * Large increase in NWHI "research" activities since the NWHI Reserve was designated with over 1,800 research dives in the summer 2002

- * Lack of monitoring and oversight of research
- * Increase in potential for research that damages the NWHI ecosystem and its inhabitants
- * Research that is not related to the protection of the NWHI Reserve
- * Research that disturbs monk seal colonies and leads to their mortality

Military use

- * Military storage, use and disposal of hazardous materials
- * Military research
- * Military exercises, war games and bombing
- * Deteriorating WW II structures

Dumping

- * Deep sea dumping
- * Dumping of CO₂
- * Dumping of vessel effluent

Other threats

- * Shipwrecks and vessel groundings
- * Anchor damage to coral reefs
- * Marine testing of sonic devices
- * Construction and dredging
- * Sophisticated new technologies allowing access to pristine parts of the ecosystem such as re-breathing devices and robotic submersibles
- * Poaching
- * Lack of adequate enforcement

Action Needed to Protect the NWHI

1. None of the existing protections for the NWHI Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve must be weakened in any way. Public input into federal and state processes is necessary to maintain hard-won protections.
2. Protections in state waters must reflect the same level of protection as the current federal law, with additional Kapu (closed) zones in lagoons, at fragile Kure Atoll, French Frigate Shoals and Pearl and Hermes Reef. These waters provide essential habitat for the critically endangered Hawaiian monk seal, endangered and threatened sea turtles and other protected species.
3. Enforcement is crucial. The single most important element in protecting the remote NWHI and ensuring compliance with regulations is the implementation of an effective monitoring and enforcement system. Without adequate enforcement, protection efforts are doomed. Currently the Coast Guard is refusing to enforce activities in the Reserve citing a lack of "implementation" regulations including a list of penalties.

Action Needed, con't.

The Department of Commerce, which oversees the Reserve, has stated that it will not allow the development of appropriate regulations to implement protection of the Reserve.

In order to enforce the protections, we need:

- Regulations with significant penalties for violations
- Automatic 24-hour Vessel Monitoring Systems
- Independent dock-side inspection of all vessels returning from the NWHI
- Satellite imaging as an optional enforcement tool

4. Military activity within the NWHI Reserve boundaries should be limited to the clean-up and clearing of military structures, dump sites, toxins and other military debris to restore these areas to their natural state.

Important Facts About NWHI Protections

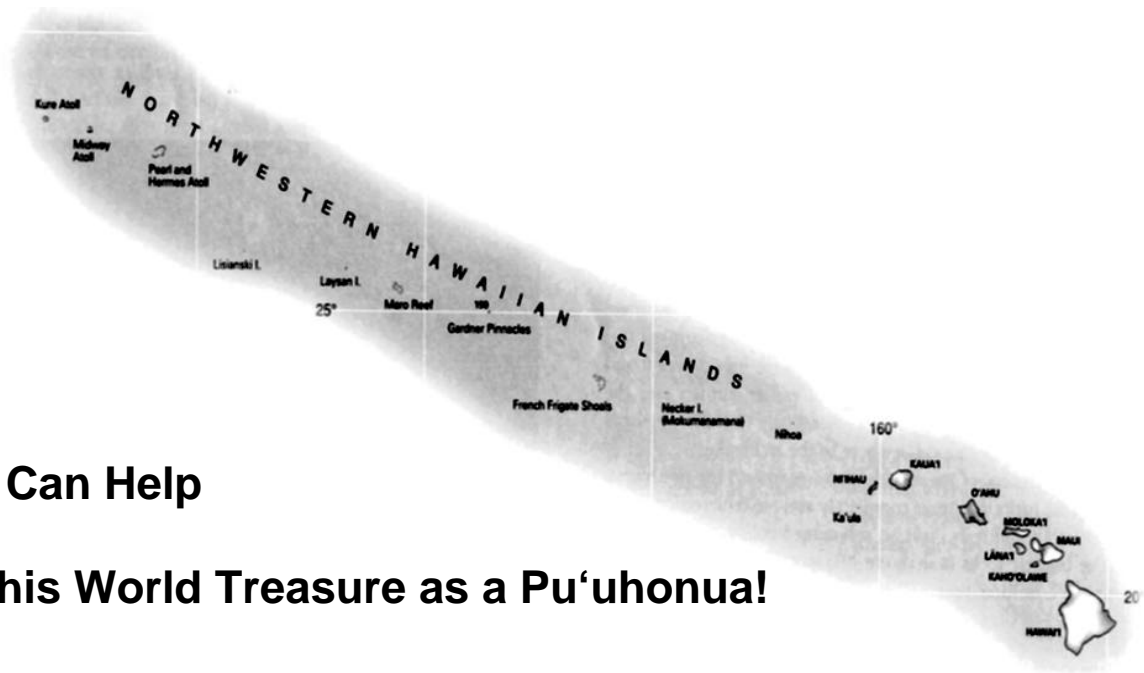
Strong protections for the coral reef ecosystem and cultural rights were established by Presidential Executive Order in December 2000, as a result of one of the largest public consultation processes in the history of Hawai'i. The public presented testimony on seven separate occasions with regard to identifying needed protections for the NWHI. We must ensure that the state and federal processes will reflect the intent of the Executive Order, which has tremendous broad public support. However, there are formidable efforts to weaken and even eliminate the following important protections:

1. The principal purpose underlying protections for the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands must be to ensure the comprehensive, strong and long-term conservation and protection of the Northwestern Hawaiian Island ecosystem in its wild and natural state.
2. The NWHI Reserve shall be managed utilizing a precautionary approach with resource protection favored when there is a lack of information regarding any given activity.

Activities in the NWHI, including research, educational, scientific, commercial and recreational activities, must be based on a precautionary approach and allowed only if the proposed activities support the primary goal of protection and preservation of the NWHI in their natural state and the prevention of further degradation of coral reef ecosystems.

3. Current law stipulates that all new protection measures must supplement or complement (build on or add to) the existing protections outlined in the Executive Order, which created the NWHI Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve. Specific protections in the Executive Orders include:

- Grandfathering existing commercial fisheries, including 4-8 active bottomfish fishers and a small number of recreational fishers at current levels of catch
- No new fisheries shall be established in the NWHI, including, coral harvesting, aquarium fish, or coral reef fisheries. No re-opening of inactive fisheries, such as the closed NWHI lobster fishery
- No mining or drilling. No removal of live or dead coral. No anchoring on reefs.
- Research in the NWHI must support the goals of prevention and conservation of the resource
- All activities must specifically support the mandate of the long-term conservation and preservation of the NWHI ecosystems in their natural state



How You Can Help

Protect This World Treasure as a Pu'uhonua!

Stay informed. Get Involved. Help support this work.

To stay informed and fax free comments to decision-makers, sign up for email Action Network Alerts at **KAHEA** www.kahea.org or at Environmental Defense www.environmentaldefense.org/hawaii.

You will receive periodic email alerts and updates about public comment opportunities and about the ways you can help protect cultural rights and Hawai'i's fragile environment. Please feel free to call us if you have any questions. KAHEA works closely with other groups and individuals who are deeply committed to protecting the NWHI unique cultural and ecological resources as a Pu'uhonua for future generations.



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Environmental Defense is a leading environmental organization combining science, law and economics to achieve lasting solutions to environmental problems, with over 2,000 members throughout the Islands, and 300,000 members throughout the United States.

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Mahalo Nui Loa for Your Support!