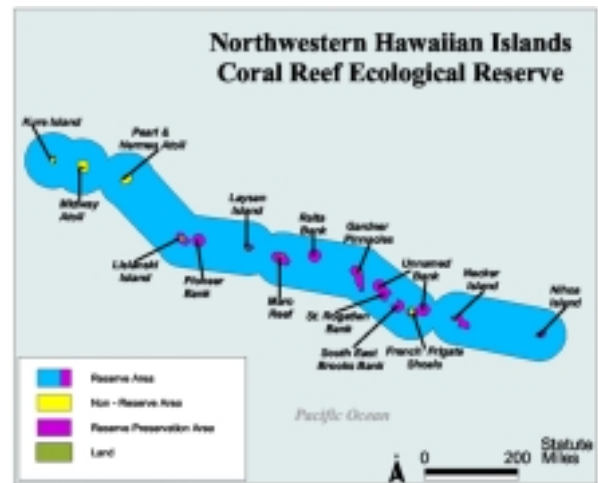


Northwestern Hawaiian Islands

Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve Executive Order



In May of 2000, the President directed the Secretaries of Commerce and Interior working cooperatively with the State of Hawaii and consulting with the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council, to develop recommendations for a new, coordinated management regime to increase protection of the coral reef ecosystem of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands and provide for sustainable use of the area. Upon consideration of the recommendations following the interagency discussions and recommendations following the public visioning sessions, the President is providing immediate protection for the NWHI coral reef ecosystem. It is intended to bring together state and federal agencies to help address the global coral reef crisis by protecting this national treasure for future generations.

This Executive Order establishes the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve which includes the marine waters and submerged lands of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, extending approximately 1200 nautical miles long and 100 nautical miles wide. The Reserve is adjacent to the State of Hawaii waters and submerged lands and the Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge and includes the Hawaiian Islands National Wildlife Refuge outside of state waters.

This is the largest area of conservation in U.S. history and the second largest marine protected area on earth, second only to the Great Barrier Reef in Australia. This 1200 nautical mile stretch of coral islands, seamounts, banks and shoals are unquestionably some of the healthiest and most extensive coral reefs in the world. Approximately 70 percent of U.S. coral reefs are in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands.

This vast area supports a dynamic environment which is home to more than 7,000 marine species, of which approximately half are unique to the Hawaiian Island chain. The incredibly diverse species of coral, fish, birds, marine mammals, and other flora and fauna includes the endangered Hawaiian monk seal, leatherback and hawksbill sea turtles and the threatened green sea turtle.

The principal purpose of the 99,500 square nautical mile Reserve is the long-term conservation and protection of the coral reef ecosystem and related marine resources and species of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands in their natural character.

Working with both the State of Hawaii and the U.S. Department of Interior, the Reserve will be managed by the U.S. Department of Commerce with a precautionary approach to resource protection through a Reserve Operations Plan which will be directed at priority issues and actions that, at a minimum, provide for:

- Identification and management, in coordination with Native Hawaiian interests, of culturally significant subsistence, cultural and religious uses and locations within the Reserve.
- Coordinated management among the Reserve, Hawaiian Islands National Wildlife Refuge, Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge, and the State, consistent with relevant authorities as well as Federal agencies and the Director of the National Science Foundation to make vessels and other resources available for conservation and research activities for the Reserve.

- The cleanup and prevention of marine debris in the Reserve and the restoration or remediation of any degraded or injured Reserve resource.
- Research, monitoring and assessment of the Reserve and its resources.
- Education and outreach about the coral reef ecosystem and related marine resources and species of the Reserve and efforts to conserve them.
- Enforcement and surveillance for the Reserve, including the use of new technologies and coordination with the U.S. Coast Guard and other relevant agencies.
- Identification of potential tourism, recreational, and commercial activities within the Reserve and actions necessary to ensure that these activities do not degrade the Reserve's coral reef ecosystem or related marine resources or species, or diminish the Reserve's wild and natural character.
- The possible use of vessel monitoring systems for any vessel entering or transiting the Reserve.
- Any regulations, in addition to the conservation measures and closure areas described in the Order, that the Secretary determines are necessary to manage the Reserve in accordance with this Order.
- Coordination of all relevant activities with the process to designate the Reserve as a national marine sanctuary.

National Marine Sanctuary

The Secretary of Commerce will begin immediately to initiate the process to designate the Reserve as a National Marine Sanctuary. There are currently 13 National Marine Sanctuaries around the U.S. which are managed by the U.S. Department of Commerce's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Council

The Secretary will, after considering input from the Secretary of the Interior and Governor of Hawaii, establish a Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve Council, composed of local interested stakeholders to provide advice and recommendations on the Reserve Management Plan and designation and management of any sanctuary.

Conservation Measures

All currently existing or recent commercial federal fishing permits and levels and current levels of recreational fishing will be capped. In addition to these conservation measures, other activities are prohibited throughout the Reserve including exploring for or producing oil, gas or minerals, anchoring any vessel on living or dead coral, drilling into, dredging or otherwise altering the seabed or constructing, placing or abandoning any structure, material or other matter on the seabed except as an incidental result of anchoring vessels, discharging in the reserve or removing or injuring any material or species within the Reserve.

Reserve Preservation Areas

As part of the Reserve's designation, the President has established fifteen "Reserve Preservation Areas." Within these areas, the Executive Order prohibits all consumptive uses, including commercial and recreational fishing. Existing bottom fishing, however, will be allowed to continue in 8 of the 15 Reserve Preservation Areas. The President has proposed to make these preservation areas permanent and is requesting public comment on this proposal. NOAA is receiving comments on behalf of the President. To comment by email contact: hawaiicomments@noaa.gov.

This is an opportunity as never before seen in our Nation's ocean history. The U.S. Department of Commerce is committed to working with the Department of Interior and the State of Hawaii as well as the U.S. Coast Guard, the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council, and all other interests in the area to coordinate and integrate all of the on-going protective measures and the ensure that protection is done right and with all available resources.

For more information: <http://hawaiiireef.noaa.gov>