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Ocean Conservationists Celebrate President Bush's Decision to Create Three New Marine National Monuments in the Central Pacific Ocean

(Washington – January 6, 2009) President George W. Bush will make marine conservation history today when he announces strong new protections for a vast area of the central Pacific Ocean that includes nine distinct tropical coral islands and their surrounding waters, ranging from Wake Island in the west to Palmyra Atoll in the east. The three new protected areas will be called Marianas Marine National Monument, Pacific Remote Island National Monument, and Rose Atoll National Monument. In total, approximately 195,000 square miles will be protected, an area larger than California. Having established the first U.S. marine national monument in 2006 in the northwestern Hawaiian Islands, which comprises 139,797 square miles, President Bush has now protected more of the ocean than any other President.

Marine Conservation Biology Institute (MCBI) and Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) have worked cooperatively with the Bush Administration for over two years to nominate, justify and develop scientist and public support for two of the three areas and eight of the nine sites protected: Wake, Howland, Baker, Palmyra, Kingman, Johnston, Jarvis and Rose Atoll. The Pew Charitable Trusts worked to secure protection for large, important ocean areas off the Northern Mariana Islands.

"Today's announcement marks an enormous step in conserving the biodiversity of our planet. These new marine monuments rank right up there with our nation's greatest national parks," said David Yarnold, executive director of Environmental Defense Fund. Yarnold added that the executive decision was based on findings by over 200 leading scientists from EDF and other organizations that the islands and their surrounding ocean waters must be protected because they are some of the few remaining, relatively pristine islands left on Earth. "We are gratified that the

President has given careful consideration to the scientific evidence and our recommendations to protect these areas."

Elliott A. Norse, President of Marine Conservation Biology Institute, echoes these feelings: "To the President and First Lady, to my colleagues in the scientific community, to the fishes of the Pacific and to all Americans who care about our oceans, I offer congratulations. President Bush has now protected more ocean sites than anyone else in the history of the world," said Dr. Norse. "We greatly appreciate this bold, visionary action."

"President Bush has laid the foundation for a national system of ocean reserves just as Theodore Roosevelt laid the foundation for our national park system," said MCBI vice president for government affairs, William Chandler. "The islands will be havens for all kinds of marine life, and a bulwark against the degradation and decline of the tropical Pacific," Chandler predicted.

"President Bush is giving the world a Texas-sized gift," said Diane Regas, associated vice-president for oceans at Environmental Defense Fund. "These are places time forgot. They still look as they did hundreds and even thousands of years ago."

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Marine Conservation Biology Institute is a nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing the science of marine conservation biology and securing protection for ocean ecosystems.

Environmental Defense Fund is a leading national nonprofit organization, which represents more than 500,000 members. Since 1967, Environmental Defense Fund has linked science, economics, law and innovative private-sector partnerships to create breakthrough solutions to the most serious environmental problems. For more information, visit www.edf.org