

June 6th, 2008

*President George W. Bush
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington DC 20500*

Dear Mr. President:

Your protection of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands in 2006 was a masterful stroke of presidential leadership. As scientists familiar with the problems facing the world's oceans, we were extremely grateful to see you endorse a crucial but little-recognized conservation principle: that the ocean has significant places worth protecting, just as we protect our most important terrestrial ecosystems in national parks, refuges and wilderness areas.

By designating the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument, you have stimulated an international trend. In 2007, for example, the Republic of Kiribati established the Phoenix Islands Reserve, which is now the largest no-take marine protected area in the world. We are hopeful that you and your successors will continue this trend by protecting other superlative marine ecosystems under United States sovereignty as National Monuments.

In this regard, we wish to call your attention to some other conservation opportunities that are ripe for presidential action. Eight little-known US territories and possessions in the central Pacific Ocean deserve National Monument status to better protect their abundant resident and migratory fish and wildlife. These are the islands, ancient reefs and atolls of Baker, Howland, Jarvis, Johnston, Kingman, Palmyra, Rose and Wake.

Our central Pacific Islands are among the world's last relatively intact coral reef ecosystems. They are remarkable for their diverse fish and invertebrate communities, healthy coral reefs, and seabird colonies that are nesting and breeding habitats for millions of birds. The islands serve as important stopover points for migrating fishes, seabirds, and other marine life, and provide sanctuary for threatened species, such as green and hawksbill sea turtles. Several of the islands also have played an important role in exploration, aviation and military history.


Although the eight islands are protected to some degree due to their remoteness, lack of human inhabitants, and their wildlife refuge or military base status, they would benefit greatly from larger surrounding ocean buffer zones to protect them, better surveillance and more active management. Fishing, especially by foreign vessels, is a significant and growing threat that must be deterred. Thousands of modern fishing vessels armed with geopositioning systems now search the last corners of the world for pockets of large fishes and shellfishes, especially around remote coral reefs, such as these. Fish populations around our central Pacific Islands could easily be wiped out by foreign poachers in a short period of time; indeed, there are troubling signs that

poaching already has occurred. In addition, roaming fishing vessels have grounded on the reefs causing major damage at Kingman Reef, Rose Atoll and Palmyra Atoll.

Given the rarity of pristine coral reef islands in the Pacific in general, we believe the highest and best use of our central Pacific Islands is as fully protected biological reserves set within larger buffer zones of surrounding waters and seafloor. Not only do the islands merit National Monument status in their own right because of their rich biological diversity, they also provide essential protection against the impacts of global warming and ecological benchmarks against which to measure the health of coral reefs and seabird populations throughout the Pacific. Studies of these US islands will help coral ecosystem scientists and managers in other nations evaluate environmental conditions in their own countries and set proper restoration and protection goals.

We respectfully recommend that you use your powers under the Antiquities Act to expand the protective mantle covering our eight central Pacific Islands. We firmly believe conservation is the best use of these ecosystems.

Sincerely,



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