

Protection of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Now and in the Future



J. Palmer/NMFS

AWARENESS

The Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI), an isolated chain of coral atolls, reefs and islands, offer a rare glimpse at one of the last intact marine ecosystem on earth. Stretching more than 1,000 miles northwest of the main Hawaiian Islands, the NWHI are home to a flourishing web of life including more than 7,000 species of algae, fishes, marine invertebrates, sea turtles and marine mammals.

Presently designated a Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve, the NWHI are the world's second largest marine protected area. More than 14 million sea birds, including two species of globally endangered albatross, and over 90% of Hawaii's green sea turtle population return to these unique islands each year to breed and nest. The highly endangered Hawaiian monk seal, estimated population of only 1300 individuals, wholly depends upon the health of this coral reef ecosystem for its survival. Additionally, the NWHI have been a culturally rich and important place to native Hawaiians for centuries.

However, even through isolation, resources in the NWHI face many threats including overfishing, climate change, marine debris, and invasive species.



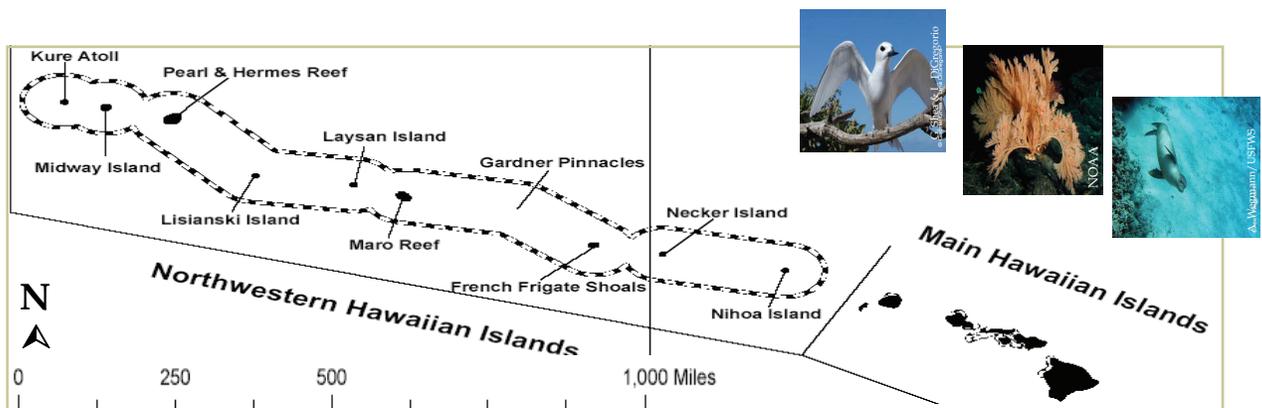
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PROTECTION

NWHI Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve, protects the waters out to 50 nautical miles from the shoreline of the islands and atolls from Nihoa to Kure. The NWHI are also protected as a National Wildlife Refuge and State Marine Reserve. Several other designations are being proposed to provide for even stronger protection, such as a National Marine Sanctuary, Federal Marine Refuge, and World Heritage Site.

"Protect, preserve, maintain, and where appropriate restore the natural biological communities, including habitats, populations, native species, and ecological processes, of the Sanctuary as a public trust for current and future generations."

~ Primary goal and objective for the proposed NWHI National Marine Sanctuary



**A place like no other...
deserves protection like no other**

1903: President Theodore Roosevelt signs Executive Orders to secure Midway as a U.S. possession, to stop foreign squatters and poachers, and to protect millions of seabirds.

1909: Creation of the Hawaiian Islands Bird Reservation, protecting resources from Nihoa to Kure.

1940: Hawaiian Islands Bird Reservation changes name to Hawaiian Islands National Wildlife Refuge, as President Franklin D. Roosevelt broadens refuge purposes to protect ALL wildlife.

1967: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, under President Johnson, designates atolls within the Hawaiian Islands National Wildlife Refuge as Research Natural Areas (including Gardner Pinnacles, French Frigate Shoals, Laysan, Lisianski, Necker, Nihoa, and Pearl and Hermes Reef).

1988: President Reagan designates Midway Atoll as a National Wildlife Refuge.

1996: Jurisdiction of Midway Atoll and surrounding reefs is transferred from U.S. Navy to Fish and Wildlife.

2000: Congress passes a law requiring that the National Marine Sanctuary Program consider the NWHI for designation as a National Marine Sanctuary.

2000-01: Creation of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve. Executive Orders, issued by President Clinton, protect the waters out 50 nautical miles from the shoreline of the islands and atolls from Nihoa to Kure, restricting the amount and types of fishing allowed in the Reserve.

2004: NOAA releases goals and objectives for proposed NWHI sanctuary. Identifies the purpose of the proposed sanctuary as the “long-term protection of the marine ecosystems in their natural character.”

2005: Sanctuary designation process continues. The Western Pacific Fishery Management Council submits draft fishing regulations for the proposed sanctuary that would potentially increase the level and types of fishing in the NWHI. The National Marine Sanctuary Program must now decide whether to accept these draft regulations or reject them as incompatible with the sanctuary goals.

A bill entitled “The Northwestern Hawaiian Islands National Marine Refuge Act of 2005” was introduced in the House of Representatives by part of the Hawaii delegation to Congress. The bill would close the NWHI to all extractive uses, including fishing, and require permits for all other uses.

In response to more than 20,000 public comments, Hawaiian Governor Linda Lingle signs regulations making the state waters, from shore out to 3 miles around each of the NWHI except Midway, a State Marine Refuge. The Refuge prohibits all extractive uses, including commercial and recreational fishing. The Governor also states her support for a fully-protected federal marine sanctuary and a buy-out of the 9 remaining fishing vessels in order to protect natural and cultural resources in the NWHI.

2006: The Administration’s draft Environmental Impact Statement for the proposed NWHI sanctuary is expected in spring 2006. Final sanctuary designation is expected in late 2006.

“One hundred years ago, visionary thinking created the State’s forest reserve system to ensure that there would always be adequate fresh water resources. Today, we are taking similar protective measures for our marine resources... As one of the last pristine wilderness locations on earth, it is only right to consider the long-term preservation of this area and strive to have one place that is free from extraction.”

~ Peter Young, head of the Department of Land and Natural Resources.

