

PALMYRA ATOLL



Photo: Space Imaging

KEY SPECIES

Birds

Red-tailed tropicbirds
White-tailed tropicbirds
Red-footed boobies
Masked boobies
Brown boobies
Great frigatebirds
Sooty terns
Black noddies
Brown noddies
White terns

Reptiles

Green sea turtles
(threatened)
Hawksbill sea turtles
(endangered)

Mammals

Mellon-head whales
Hawaiian monk seals
(occasionally)

Invertebrates

176 stony coral species
over 36 genera
17 benthic cnidaria
species over 15
genera
12 species of macro-
invertebrates other
than cnidarians
Coconut crabs
(globally depleted)
Giant clams
(globally depleted)

Fish

418 fish species



PROPOSAL

- Establish a National Monument that includes Palmyra Atoll and its surrounding waters
- Expand US Fish and Wildlife Service management authority from 3 to 12 nautical miles (nm)
- Manage the island and nearshore waters to 12 nm as a fully protected National Wildlife Refuge under authority of the Secretary of the Interior
- Establish appropriate conservation measures to protect and conserve the wildlife in the waters and on the seafloor surrounding the fully protected refuge, in particular shallow and deepwater corals, large predatory fishes, and seabirds. This zone from 12 to 200 nautical miles would be managed by the Secretary of Commerce acting through NOAA

IMPORTANCE

- Atoll lies within the inter-tropical convergence zone and path of the eastward moving Equatorial Countercurrent, which bring more rainfall and the larvae of additional reef species from the more diverse West Pacific
- The only uninhabited “wet” atoll in the Pacific when rediscovered by American explorers two centuries ago
- Serves as a baseline from which to evaluate the condition of other coral reefs and sea-bird populations elsewhere that have been degraded
- Protects many depleted species, including coconut crabs, giant clams, resident whales, and sea turtles
- Strong cultural value for the early history of Polynesians, Micronesians, guano miners, and recent colonists
- During WWII, Palmyra Atoll Naval Air Station was occupied by American troops
- Location of the biological research station managed by The Nature Conservancy

SITE DESCRIPTION

Palmyra Atoll includes approximately 680 acres of emergent reef and land and nearly 515,000 acres of submerged lands. Palmyra Atoll and surrounding waters out to 12 nautical miles are currently managed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service and closed to public entry except for limited catch and release and sustenance fishing.

Palmyra Atoll is home to a diverse array of terrestrial and marine species, many of which are threatened or endangered. Palmyra Atoll is known to have the third largest colony of red-footed boobies in the world.

THREATS

- Localized upwelling around the island attracts illegal foreign commercial fishermen
- Potential trespass by a handful of US fishing vessels, which cannot be monitored
- Potential shipwrecks, groundings, and oil spills from commercial fishing vessels in refuge waters
- Potential for transiting vessels to ground due to poor charts
- Invasive insects, coconut trees, and invasive marine species destroying natural ecology
- Lost fish aggregating devices (FADs) wash up on reefs and beaches as marine debris and entangle and kill wildlife; potential groundings by trespassing vessels retrieving FADs