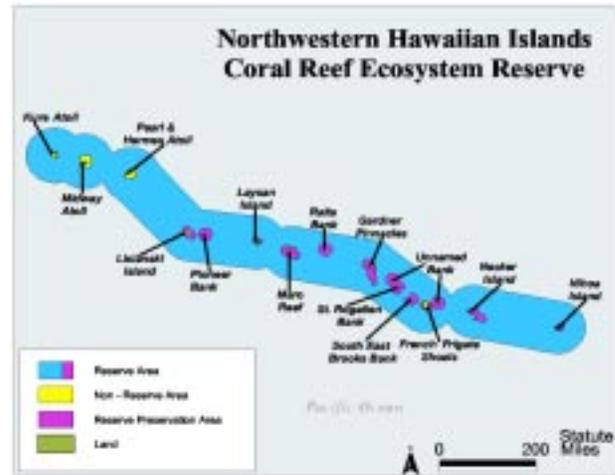


Northwestern Hawaiian Islands

Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve Executive Order



On December 4, 2000, Executive Order 13178 was issued, creating the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve (Reserve), pursuant to the National Marine Sanctuaries Amendments Act of 2000 (Act). The Reserve encompasses an area of 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 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 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.

As part of the establishment of the Reserve, Executive Order 13178 contains conservation measures that restrict some activities throughout the Reserve, and establishes Reserve Preservation Areas around certain islands, atolls and banks. With certain exceptions, all consumptive uses are restricted within the Reserve Preservation Areas. The Executive Order also directed the Secretary of Commerce (Secretary) to manage the Reserve and initiate a process to designate the Reserve as a National Marine Sanctuary.

A 30 day public comment period was initiated to receive comments on Executive Order 13178. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), on behalf of the Secretary received public comments and held seven public hearings, six throughout the main Hawaiian Islands, and one in Washington, D.C. Extensive public input was received and considered in the final decision making.

On January 18, 2001, the process and establishment of the Reserve was finalized by issuance of Executive Order 13196. This Executive Order modified Executive Order 13178 by revising certain conservation measures and Reserve Preservation Areas. With this action, the establishment of the Reserve, including the conservation measures and permanent Reserve Preservation Areas, was complete.

Working with both the State of Hawaii and the U.S. Department of the Interior, the Reserve will be managed by NOAA 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

Pursuant to the Act and the Executive Order, NOAA has initiated 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 NOAA's National Marine Sanctuary Program.

Reserve Council

After considering input from the Secretary of the Interior and Governor of Hawaii, NOAA established the NWHI 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 commercial federal fishing permits and levels and current levels of recreational fishing are capped throughout the Reserve. In addition to these conservation measures, certain 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 (with a few exceptions) in the Reserve or removing or injuring any material or species within the Reserve.

Reserve Preservation Areas

As part of the Reserve's designation, fifteen "Reserve Preservation Areas" were established where all consumptive uses are prohibited. Existing commercial bottomfishing and trolling by recreational fishers and commercial bottomfishers are allowed to continue in 10 of the 15 Reserve Preservation Areas.

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 the Interior and the State of Hawaii as well as the U.S. Coast Guard, the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, and all other interests in the area to coordinate and integrate all of the on-going protective measures and to ensure long-term coordinated protection of these significant marine resources.

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