



NEWT GINGRICH

February 6, 2006

Dear Mr. President:

I write to call your attention to a marvelous opportunity to leave a historic mark on U.S. and world conservation history by providing permanent protection to the remote chain of uninhabited islands, atolls, submerged banks and surrounding waters known as the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, which stretch from the main Hawaiian Islands to Midway Atoll. Specifically, it is within your power to designate this area as the largest fully-protected coral reef ecosystem in the world. By such action, a Northwestern Hawaiian Islands National Marine Sanctuary would be the marine equivalent of Yellowstone National Park.

The archipelago has a number of unique qualities that make it worthy of permanent conservation. The Northwestern Hawaiian Islands:

- account for 10% of the coral reefs out to 100 fathoms under U.S. jurisdiction;
- are the most remote large-scale coral reef ecosystem on the planet, and are less impacted by pollution and use than are reefs closer to human populations;
- are the least-impacted large marine ecosystem in U.S. waters, from which we can learn how coral reef ecosystems operate in a natural state;
- are a predator-dominated ecosystem, unlike all other large-scale coral reef ecosystems in which predator fish have been heavily depleted;
- support the highest degree of endemic coral reef species, meaning species that are found only in the NWHI or in the Hawaiian Archipelago (about 25% of all shallow water coral reef species in the NWHI are endemic);

- harbor the highest proportion of un-described reef species (algae, corals, sponges, other invertebrates) of any reefs on the planet;
- are home to the endangered Hawaiian monk seal, the only surviving marine mammal that is wholly dependent on coral reefs, and whose complete habitat is within U.S. waters (estimated population of 1300);
- comprise the largest seabird rookery in the United States, with about 6 million seabirds from more than 20 species breeding here, and provide critical habitat for several globally endangered or threatened seabird species, such as albatrosses;
- are the nesting grounds for more than 90% of green sea turtles in the Hawaiian Archipelago; and
- are culturally important to Native Hawaiians.

The Northwestern Hawaiian Islands have been the subject of presidential interest since Theodore Roosevelt established some of the islands as a bird sanctuary in 1909. Over the years, four other presidents--Franklin Roosevelt, Lyndon Johnson, Ronald Reagan and William Clinton--have recognized the superlative conservation values of the area and provided increased protection to its resources. In 2000, the 84-million acre area was designated as a Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve by executive order. At that time, Congress concurrently directed that a federal marine sanctuary designation be considered for the reserve area.

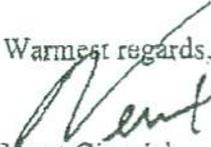
This year, Governor Linda Lingle responded to overwhelming public comments and designated all state waters in the Northwestern Island chain as a fully-protected state refuge. She has called on the federal government to follow suit, and apply comparable protection to federal waters within the proposed sanctuary. In early December, the Governor highlighted her position by visiting Midway with James Connaughton and other federal officials.

Your administration, under the leadership of the Secretary of Commerce, is now completing a sanctuary designation process. The stated purpose of the proposed sanctuary is "long-term protection of the marine ecosystems in their natural character." An enormous amount of public consultation has occurred, and a draft environmental impact statement is due to be issued by the Secretary in 2006. Expressed public sentiment favors full protection of the area.

At issue is whether or not the sanctuary will be one that is fully protected from all extractive activities, such as commercial fishing, seabed mining, coral removal, and the like. The National Marine Sanctuaries System Act permits you to establish marine sanctuaries with varying degrees of protection, including full protection. Unlike the locations of existing marine sanctuaries, the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands are highly isolated, and have no inhabitants except wildlife and a few researchers. Designation of a fully protected sanctuary is achievable because no one lives in these remote islands. A small, economically marginal and shrinking fishery for bottomfish does take place in the area. However, the Department of Commerce recently announced that these species are experiencing overfishing. Thus, conditions are ripe to buy-out the nine fishing boats for fair and just compensation, an action called for by Governor Lingle.

I cannot think of a better conservation opportunity for you than to complete the conservation work begun by Theodore Roosevelt. A decision to fully-protect the islands would be the highest and best use for the area, and would be widely acclaimed by Hawaiians and conservationists worldwide. Whether one is concerned about ecological integrity, coral reefs, seabirds, sea turtles, sharks, or reef fish, the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands offers one of the few remaining places on earth to learn more about a coral reef ecosystem in its near-natural condition. As Peter Young, Director of Hawaii's Department of Land and Natural Resources said after his recent visit to the NWHI, "If there were ever a place on earth you wanted to see remain unchanged forever, this is it... The Northwestern Hawaiian Islands deserve the strongest protections and should be the place on earth where we don't take something."

Warmest regards,



Newt Gingrich

Cc: Secretary of Commerce Carlos Gutierrez, The Honorable Daniel Inouye, The Honorable Daniel Akaka, The Honorable Neil Abercrombie, The Honorable Ed Case, The Honorable Linda Lingle