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Refuge Association Praises Expansion of Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument

Today the Obama Administration announced it would expand Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument from 89 million to 373 million acres, creating the largest protected area on planet Earth. The President will highlight this enormous global conservation gain next week at the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) World Conservation Congress in Honolulu. Following the announcement in Hawaii, he will travel to Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge to see firsthand the species he is helping to protect by this proclamation.

Established in 2006 by President George W. Bush, Papahānaumokuākea protects wildlife and safeguards native Hawaiian cultural resources throughout the monument's millions of acres of open ocean, undersea mountain ranges, coral reefs, islands, and atolls.

This expansion extends Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument's boundary from 50 to 200 nautical miles offshore of its islands and atolls to match the boundary of the Exclusive Economic Zone, thus protecting an additional 284 million acres of Pacific Ocean habitat. Prior to this announcement, France's Natural Park of the Coral Sea held the title of world's largest protected area at just over 319 million acres.

"The expansion of Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument is a historic milestone for global conservation efforts and reaffirms the United States as the world leader in natural resources protection," said David Houghton, President of the National Wildlife Refuge Association.

The expansion offers increased protections for predator fish species like tuna and swordfish, millions of pelagic seabirds like Laysan albatross, critically endangered species like Hawaiian monk seal, and incredible coral reefs in a vast ecosystem with unparalleled biodiversity. All waters within Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument will be off-limits to commercial fishing and other resource extraction activities, such as deep-sea mining. Sustainable recreational and traditional fishing will still be allowed.

Administered jointly by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and the State of Hawaii's Department of Land and Natural Resources, Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument encompasses two national



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wildlife refuges: Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge and the Hawaiian Islands National Wildlife Refuge.

Papahānaumokuākea’s remote location, incredible biodiversity, and relatively untouched marine and terrestrial ecosystems have made it one of the premier locations to study the effects of climate change. Because the monument’s low-lying atolls and fragile coral reefs are especially sensitive to rising sea levels, ocean acidification, and other consequences of climate change, Papahānaumokuākea provides scientists with crucial information as to how climate change will affect other environments around the world.

Expanding Papahānaumokuākea has been widely supported not only by the scientific and conservation community, but also native Hawaiians as well. Today’s announcement guarantees additional protections for an area regarded as sacred in native Hawaiian culture and ensures continued abundance of the ocean resources that provide both food security and economic security to the region. The name “Papahānaumokuākea” itself honors two ancestors of native Hawaiians, “Papahānaumoku” and “Wakea” whose union, according to Hawaiian culture, resulted in the creation of the Hawaiian people and the Hawaiian archipelago.

The expansion of Papahānaumokuākea continues President Obama’s conservation legacy in the Pacific. Over the course of his Presidency, Obama has protected approximately 546 million acres in the Pacific -- more area than the states of California, Texas, Florida, Montana, New Mexico and Arizona combined.

“The establishment of this visionary marine national monument by President George W. Bush and the continuation by President Barack Obama is a fitting symbol that wildlife and habitat conservation is not a partisan act – it is an act of humility and respect for future generations on this blue planet,” Houghton said.

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