



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: September 25, 2014

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Refuge Association Praises Expansion of Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument

Added Protection Offers 'Best Chance' to Reverse Species Decline; Address Impacts of Climate Change

Today, the Obama Administration announced it would expand the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument by six times its original size in the south-central Pacific Ocean. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will have primary management of the newly expanded monument.

According to the White House, the protected area will be expanded to 490,000 square miles, and will include “over 130 newly protected seamounts, which are hotspots of biodiversity that harbor uncounted numbers of new and unique marine species.” The area is home to millions of seabirds that nest on the seamounts, as well as large predatory fish such as tuna and swordfish in sharp decline.

The expanded monument includes three national wildlife refuges: [Wake Atoll National Wildlife Refuge](#), [Johnston Atoll National Wildlife Refuge](#), and [Jarvis Island National Wildlife Refuge](#). It also complements the other three monuments in the Pacific managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: Rose Atoll Marine National Monument, Marianas Trench Marine National Monument, and the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument, which all encompass numerous islands and atolls.

“The National Wildlife Refuge Association is in full support of this expansion,” said President David Houghton. “This will be the largest network of marine protected area in the world, and one of the only safe havens left for highly endangered species like the leatherback sea turtle.”

Overfishing, pollution, habitat destruction, ocean acidification, climate change and invasive species all threaten the world’s oceans. As a result, an estimated 90 percent of all large predatory fish worldwide have been wiped out.

“This area provides a vital refuge for protected and vulnerable or endangered marine mammals, sea turtles, and seabirds from longline fishing and industrial development from oil drilling and mining,” Houghton said. “Fully protecting the area gives us the best chance at reversing this startling decline in species, improving resiliency to climate change and restoring the marine environment to health.”

The proclamation bans commercial fishing and other resource extraction activities, such as deep-sea mining. Sustainable recreational and traditional fishing will still be allowed.

The Department of Interior, in consultation with the Department of Commerce, has primary



management responsibility of the newly expanded monument under the Antiquities Act; and it is critical that the department be given sufficient resources to adequately manage this substantially larger protected area.

Specifically, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will need a research and transportation support vessel similar to the M/V Tiglax used in the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge, and a minimum of \$5 million more in annual appropriations to cover the increased cost of managing the existing monuments created by the Bush Administration in 2006 and 2009 as well as the expanded monument, which is now six times its original size.

“We urge President Obama to include these needs in his FY 2016 budget request to Congress,” Houghton said.

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The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge Association is to conserve America’s wildlife heritage for future generations through strategic programs that protect, enhance, and expand the National Wildlife Refuge System and the landscapes beyond its boundaries.