



NORTHWESTERN HAWAIIAN ISLANDS

HELP SAVE ONE OF THE LAST WILD PLACES ON EARTH!
PRESERVE THE NORTHWESTERN HAWAIIAN ISLANDS
AS A TRUE PU'UHONUA

The Northwestern Hawaiian Islands form the most isolated archipelago in the world. Stretching over 1,200 miles northwest of the Main Hawaiian Islands, these remote and ancient islands, atolls and shoals are the last large-scale coral reef wilderness remaining on the planet and support the highest degree of unique reef species of any large coral reef ecosystem. This biologically diverse area is unique, fragile and magnificent. **There is no place like it left on our planet.**

The 84-million-acre NWHI Reserve is the largest Marine Protected Area under U.S. jurisdiction and the second largest protected area in the world; second to Australia's Great Barrier Reef.

Referred to by Native Hawaiians as the Kupuna (revered elder) **Islands**, the Northwestern Islands are Hawaiian (ceded) lands and hold great significance for the Native Hawaiian people. Hundreds of cultural sites provide information about the origins of Hawai'i's first people who inhabited these Islands for centuries. The ki'i (stone carvings) pictured on the back page are from Mokumanamana (Necker) and trace back to Marquesa Islands. Ancient Hawaiian oli and mele (chants and song) reveal much about the role these Islands play in Hawaiian culture, including a mele describing the fire goddess Pele and her family traversing the NWHI on their way to the Main Hawaiian Islands.

The Northwestern Hawaiian Islands ecosystem contains over 3.5 million acres of some of the world's oldest living coral colonies and encompasses tremendous biodiversity. More than 7,000 marine species have been recorded in the Hawaiian Islands, with half of the fish species found only in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands.

These Islands form **one of the world's last remaining intact, predator-dominated ecosystems** — another reason they must be preserved in their natural character.





The diverse and fragile coral reefs are the foundation of an expansive ecosystem that hosts an interdependent association of highly endangered monk seals, reef fish and bottomfish, sea birds, sharks, corals, anemones, jellyfishes, mollusks, shrimps, crabs, sea grasses, and algae. Over 90% of Hawai'i's green sea turtles are born in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands.

Located in colder waters, these tiny islands and atolls have an exceptionally low net productivity with limited nutrient cycling. Consequently, they are slow to recover from disturbance and are extremely vulnerable to human impacts. Spiny lobsters, a main-

stay of the Hawaiian monk seal diet, were overfished to a point of decimation. They have yet to recover, which is a major reason that monk seal populations are declining.

The NWHI are the primary breeding and foraging grounds for the critically endangered Hawaiian monk seal, Hawaiian populations of the threatened green sea turtle, almost the entire world populations of Laysan albatross, the black-footed albatross, the Laysan duck, and numerous other threatened and endangered species. These islands and atolls form the largest tropical seabird rookery under U.S. jurisdiction.

Due to the counter currents that have been mapped and documented, the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands serve as a nursery for fish stocks in the Main Hawaiian Islands. To protect the vitality of the active fisheries in the Main Islands, we need to protect the fragile ecosystems to the northwest.

Much of Hawai'i's \$800 million ocean recreation industry is dependent on visitors viewing green sea turtles in the Main islands. These turtles migrate over 500 miles to and from the NWHI.

IMPORTANT FACTS ABOUT EXISTING PROTECTIONS IN NWHI

In December 2000, the **Northwestern Hawaiian Island Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve** was established by Presidential Executive Order, which added essential environmental and cultural resource protections to the conservation measures initiated by Theodore Roosevelt in 1909.

The creation of the NWHI Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve resulted from one of the largest public consultation processes in the history of Hawai'i. During the past four years, there have been over 30 public hearings, with 100,000 letters and testimonials submitted in support of strong and lasting protection measures for the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands and Native Hawaiian cultural practices.

In 2003, National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) initiated a public process to determine if the NWHI Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve should be designated as a National Marine Sanctuary, and if so, what protections should be provided. That process is going on now, with the development of a management plan by NOAA and fishing regulations that are required to reflect the conservation-based goals and objectives of the Reserve. A Draft Environmental Impact Statement is due to be released in 2005/2006.

THE NWHI EXECUTIVE ORDER STATES:

1. *The principal purpose underlying protections for the NWHI is to ensure comprehensive, strong and long-term conservation and protection of the coral reef ecosystem in its wild and natural state.*
2. *Activities should be allowed only when they support the primary goal of protection and preservation of the NWHI in their natural state and prevent further degradation of the ecosystem.*
3. *Activities must be based on a precautionary approach, with resource protection favored when there is a lack of information regarding proposed activities.*
4. *All new protection measures (including a proposed Sanctuary) must build on or add to, not weaken or eliminate, the existing protections. This includes the protection measures and prohibitions of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Refuge and the NWHI Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve.*

Enforcement, monitoring and compliance with regulations are the most important elements in protecting these remote reefs. This includes Vessel Monitoring Systems, dock-side inspections and strong sanctions for violations.

EXISTING PROTECTIONS IN THE NWHI CORAL REEF ECOSYSTEM RESERVE

- There is a ban on the introduction of new fisheries in NWHI Reserve waters. This includes any coral harvesting, aquarium fish collecting, expanded trolling or bottomfishing. The lobster fishery was permanently closed in 2000 after severe population crashes under National Marine Fishery Service and Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council (Wespac). It cannot be reopened.
- There is full protection of Native Hawaiian access and of religious and cultural rights.
- No coral harvest, seabed mining or drilling
- No anchoring on reefs
- The 9 active NWHI bottomfish vessels and the small number of recreational charters are grandfathered at levels of catch and effort that was reported at time of the Executive Order.

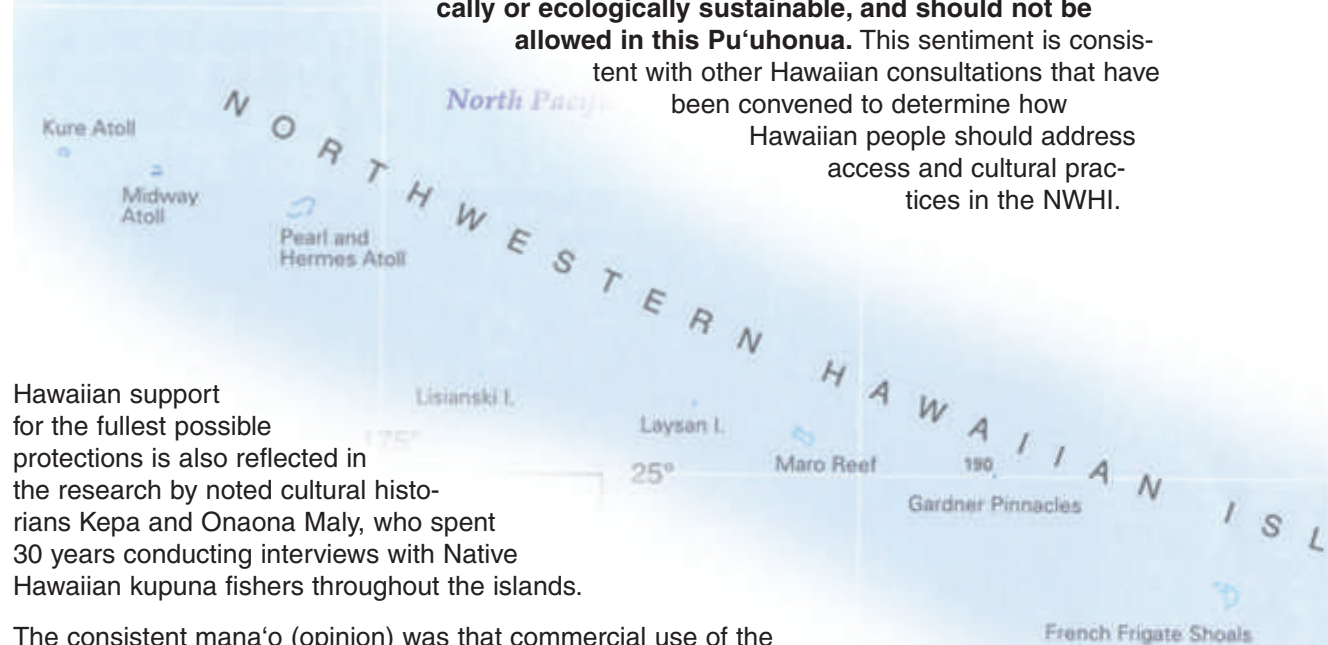


Recent data highlight concerns about the effect of 9 high-impact NWHI commercial vessels on the health of the NWHI bottomfish stocks. In addition, given the indications that the NWHI are a nursery for the valuable commercial and recreational fishery in the Main Hawaiian Islands (MHI), there is concern about the impact of the NWHI vessels on the health of the MHI bottomfish fishery, where 98% of Hawai'i's bottomfishers fish.

Observers found that the NWHI bottomfishers have frequent interactions with monk seals and reported that 25% of the NWHI bottomfish catch is discarded as "waste."

NATIVE HAWAIIAN PARTICIPATION

The Native Hawaiian community has been deeply involved in securing protections for the NWHI from the beginning of this process. Through a number of different venues, Native Hawaiians have consistently called for the strongest possible protections in the Kupuna Islands. **A Kupuna Advisory Group** convened by the Sanctuary program, stated that protection of the NWHI is a part of Hawaiian cultural identity and kuleana (responsibility). They called for access for cultural and religious practices to continue, and concluded that **commercial extraction in the NWHI is not culturally appropriate, economically or ecologically sustainable, and should not be allowed in this Pu'uhonua.** This sentiment is consistent with other Hawaiian consultations that have been convened to determine how Hawaiian people should address access and cultural practices in the NWHI.



Hawaiian support for the fullest possible protections is also reflected in the research by noted cultural historians Kupa and Onaona Maly, who spent 30 years conducting interviews with Native Hawaiian kupuna fishers throughout the islands.

The consistent mana'o (opinion) was that commercial use of the waters and resources of Na Moku 'Aha (NWHI), should not be allowed. The Northwestern Hawaiian Islands are a fragile, but relatively intact component of the Hawaiian Islands ecosystem, which is substantially degraded in the MHI.

Independent scientists hired by NOAA to review the existing scientific and economic data, concurred with the Native Hawaiian community that no commercial extraction is appropriate in the waters of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. They cited poor economic performance, the ecological prominence and importance of this unique world treasure, the fragile nature of the ecosystem, and the lack of sustainability of the low-value high-impact nine vessel commercial fishery. The consultants recommend a **conservation approach** consistent with Reserve protections and the USFW Refuge

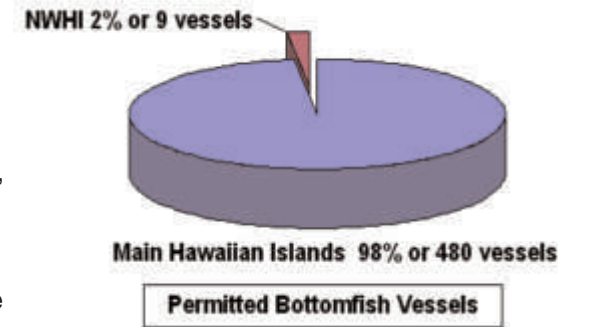


WEIGHING ECONOMIC BENEFITS

Many Native Hawaiian fishers believe--and science is beginning to support -- that the NWHI serve as a nursery for the essential fisheries in the Main Hawaiian Islands (MHI), where over 300 commercial fishermen work and where thousands of people fish recreationally. In addition, many families rely on healthy fish stocks in the MHI for subsistence. Bottomfish stocks in the main islands are being heavily impacted. Sustainability of fish stocks and the health of our economy in the Main Islands depends on protecting the health of NWHI ecosystems.

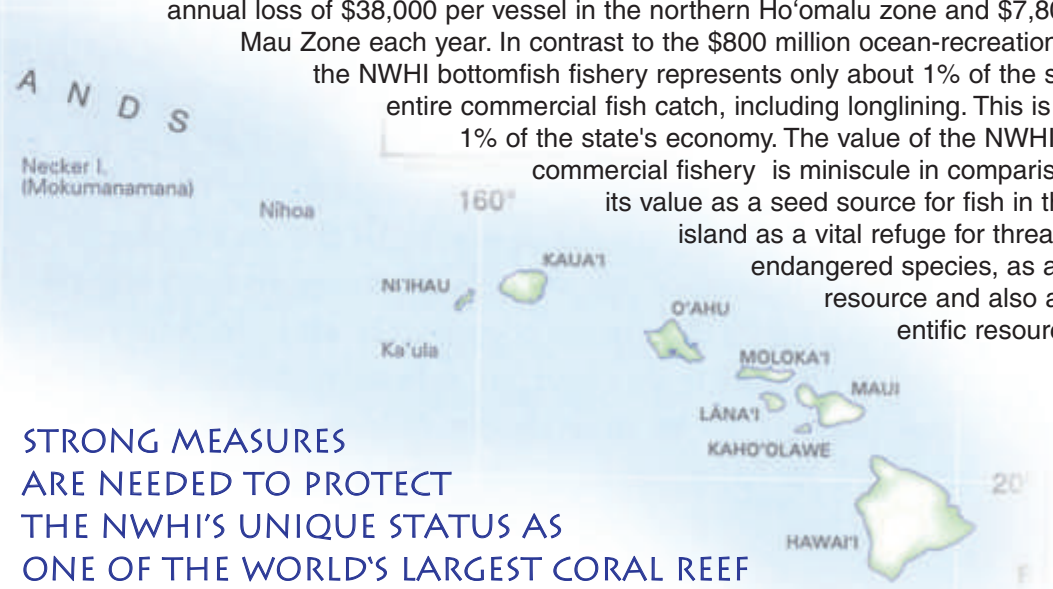
The NWHI bottomfish fishery generates significant levels by-catch-with about half the catch routinely discarded at sea or lost to predators.

There are only 9 commercial boats fishing in the NWHI. This declining fishery, which peaked in the late 1980's generates about \$700,000 in sales annually, with a total value of perhaps \$1.3 million, including restaurant sales. The NWHI commercial fishery benefits only a handful of people. NWHI fish sell for less than the fresh MHI fish, as they can be up to 3 weeks old. Imported bottomfish are even cheaper and currently comprise the majority of all bottomfish served in Hawai'i.



The NWHI bottomfish fishers report that they lose money on their operations, an average annual loss of \$38,000 per vessel in the northern Ho'omalua zone and \$7,800 in the Mau Zone each year. In contrast to the \$800 million ocean-recreation industry, the NWHI bottomfish fishery represents only about 1% of the state's entire commercial fish catch, including longlining. This is less than 1% of the state's economy. The value of the NWHI as a commercial fishery is miniscule in comparison with its value as a seed source for fish in the main island as a vital refuge for threatened and endangered species, as a cultural resource and also as a scientific resource.

STRONG MEASURES ARE NEEDED TO PROTECT THE NWHI'S UNIQUE STATUS AS ONE OF THE WORLD'S LARGEST CORAL REEF ECOSYSTEMS STILL IN A RELATIVELY INTACT CONDITION.

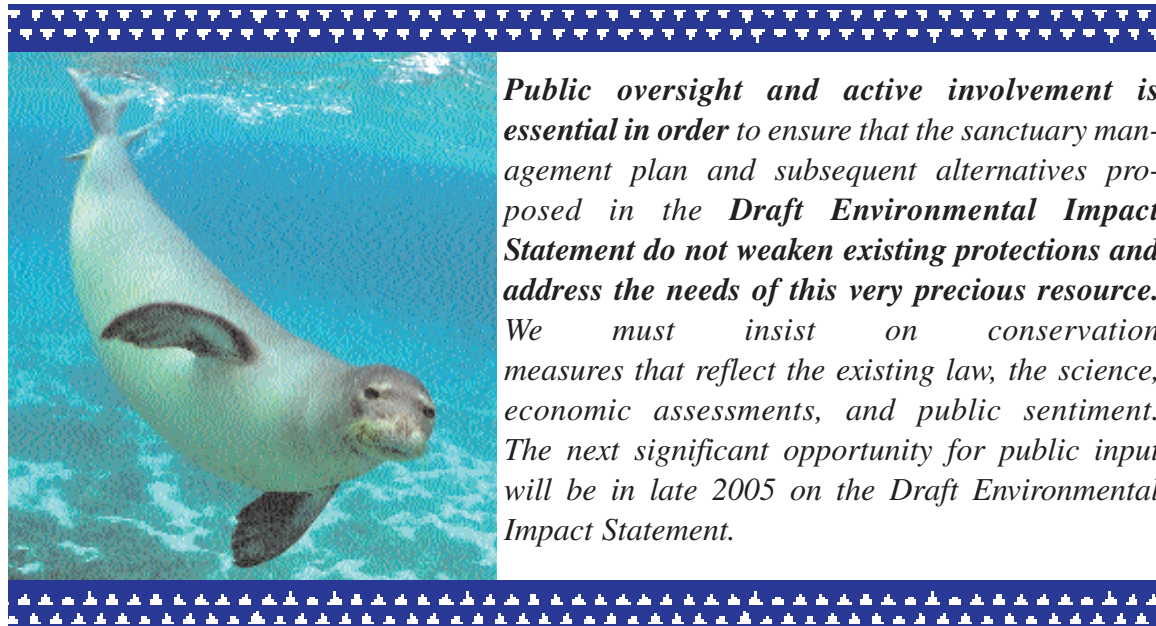


STATE AND FEDERAL PROCESSES UNDERWAY

Currently there are two public processes that will determine the long-term protection measures for the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. In 2001, a federal process was initiated by NOAA to determine if and how the existing 84-million acre NWHI Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve should become one of 13 national marine sanctuaries. The federal process does not address state waters, which extend for three miles from land and overlap in some places with the existing U.S. Fish and Wildlife Refuge boundaries. The state Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) has proposed regulations to establish a refuge with the apparent goal of protecting biologically rich shallow state waters that are surrounded by the NWHI Reserve's federal waters.

The level of protection for the federal waters of the NWHI is being determined in the sanctuary designation process and will depend on public oversight and participation. In January 2005 — four years after the Reserve was established—NOAA finally released the NWHI Reserve Operations Plan which is meant to serve as the foundation for the management plan for the proposed sanctuary.

The Reserve Advisory Council drafted strong “goals and objectives” for the proposed sanctuary, which provides the legal framework for all proposed activities. Alarming, NOAA’s recent revisions materially weaken protection parameters. In a series of recent “public hearings,” Wespac cited NOAA’s “goals and objectives” as justification for opening lobster, coral mining, reef fishing and expanded bottomfish operations in the NWHI. Marine sanctuaries are generally not known for effectively protecting the resource. Because of the unique and fragile nature of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, this sanctuary — if it is to be established — **must be a “sanctuary like no other.”**



*Public oversight and active involvement is essential in order to ensure that the sanctuary management plan and subsequent alternatives proposed in the **Draft Environmental Impact Statement** do not weaken existing protections and address the needs of this very precious resource. We must insist on conservation measures that reflect the existing law, the science, economic assessments, and public sentiment. The next significant opportunity for public input will be in late 2005 on the **Draft Environmental Impact Statement**.*

STATE WATERS IN THE NWHI



In July and August, 2004 the Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) held public hearings throughout the Islands on draft regulations for state waters in the NWHI. The NWHI Reserve boundaries surround, but do not include state waters, which represent the heart of the coral reef ecosystem. State waters contain the majority of the area's vast biodiversity. The public weighed in with resounding support for strongest possible protection of these particularly important waters. During two weeks of hearings at 5 locations, only four people testified in support of commercial fishing in the NWHI.

People understand the importance of protecting this world treasure. DLNR received over 24,000 public comments encouraging the state to adopt strongly protective Refuge status and to close the significant loopholes that directly undermined the stated intent of the state's protective language.

The DLNR draft regulations contained major technical flaws that would allow continuation of the high impact bottomfishing at Nihoa and Mokumanamana—areas that are vital habitat for monk seals and turtles and of profound cultural importance. Nihoa and Mokumanamana are the closest islands and have been the targets of poaching and abuse. There are significant concerns about unauthorized landings and disturbances of sacred cultural and burial sites. The state is still deliberating how to move forward on this critical issue.

Strong regulations will protect the habitat of the highly endangered Hawaiian monk seal, threatened and endangered sea turtles and millions of seabirds. Public support for strong language in the State's Refuge plan is vital.



STAY INFORMED! GET INVOLVED! TAKE ACTION!

Sign up with the **Action Alert Network**.

Stay informed about vital issues in Hawai'i and send comments directly to decision-makers.

Sign up at: www.kahea.org and www.environmentaldefense.org/hawaii

Protect the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands as a True Pu'uhonua.

Let them be!



The NWHI hui emerged from a broad network of kupuna, cultural practitioners, fishers, scientists, divers, and ordinary people associated with the 'Īlio'ulaokalani Coalition, Environmental Defense, KAHEA: The Hawaiian-Environmental Alliance and Sierra Club/Hawai'i – specifically to focus on the ecological and cultural protection of our kupuna islands, the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands.

For close to five years, after helping to generate the strongest protections the area has seen in close to a century, the hui has worked to keep the NWHI in the public spotlight and encouraged widespread participation in decisions about NWHI protections.

Thanks to ongoing public support, there has been fantastic turnout at more than 30 hearings and scoping sessions in 4 years and over 100,000 written comments supporting the strongest possible protections the NWHI and full recognition of Native Hawaiian NWHI cultural, religious, and subsistence rights.

We continue to provide federal and state decision-makers, the general public, the news media, and scientists with detailed analyses of science, economics, public input records, proposed policies and management plans.

Informed and active public involvement is the only way we will succeed in securing lasting strong protections for our Kupuna Islands.

PLEASE JOIN US IN THIS HISTORIC OPPORTUNITY TO SAVE ONE OF THE LAST WILD PLACES ON EARTH. MAHALO NUI LOA!



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