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U.S. Designates Three More Large MPAs in the Pacific

On 6 January 2009 in his final month in office, President George W. Bush designated three vast new MPAs in U.S. waters in the Pacific Ocean. Encompassing a total area of roughly 505,000 km², the three MPAs are:

- Marianas Trench Marine National Monument - in the Western Pacific, containing the deepest known points in the global ocean;
- Rose Atoll Marine National Monument - in the Central Pacific, containing one of the world's most pristine atolls; and
- Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument - in the Central Pacific, consisting of Wake Atoll, Baker, Howland, and Jarvis Islands, Johnston Atoll, Kingman Reef, and Palmyra Atoll.

President Bush banned drilling and mining at each of the sites, and placed increased restrictions on recreational fishing. Commercial fishing will be off-limits at Rose Atoll and the Pacific Remote Islands but will still be allowed in waters above the Marianas Trench.

Together the protected areas include hundreds of fish species and dozens of seabird and coral species. Some of these islands are also important to Polynesian and Micronesian culture, as well as to military and aviation history. The new designations add to President Bush's legacy of ocean protection. He designated the 362,000-km² Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Marine National Monument in 2006 (*MPA News* 8:1), now known as Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument.

For the official proclamation of each site, including a physical description of the area and what its regulations will be, go to www.fws.gov/pacific/news/2009/Monuments. A map indicating the location and boundaries of the new MPAs is [available here](#).

The designations mark the culmination of years of behind-the-scenes advocacy and negotiations between NGOs and the Bush Administration. The Marine Conservation Biology Institute (MCBI) and Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) lobbied for Rose Atoll and the Pacific Remote Islands sites. Pew Environment Group lobbied for protection of the Marianas Trench. Little commercial fishing activity is known to have occurred historically at any of these sites, except for some tuna and billfish fishing near some of the Remote Islands.

"These are places time forgot," said Diane Regas, Associate Vice President for oceans at EDF. "They still look as they did hundreds and even thousands of years ago."

"President Bush has now protected more of the ocean than anyone else in the history of the world," said Elliott Norse, President of MCBI. "We greatly appreciate this bold, visionary action."

Management of sites

All three MPAs will be managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) under its Division of National Wildlife Refuges, in consultation with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Don Palawski is Project Leader of the FWS's Pacific Remote Islands National Wildlife Refuge Complex, which oversees the new MPAs. He says the main challenges will pertain to the immense area involved - namely, addressing the logistics of managing scientific research and enforcement activities across such a large expanse.

"Both NOAA and the FWS Division of National Wildlife Refuges have a long history of conducting scientific expeditions to these unique marine environments," says Palawski. "By working together and with other partners, we can be more effective and efficient in conducting scientific investigations in these remote areas. In addition, emerging and innovative technologies will likely facilitate our ability to conduct remote surveillance and continuously collect oceanographic and biological data from these unique and biologically diverse ocean and island environments."

Conservationists originally hoped for the MPAs to be even larger than they turned out to be. MCBI and EDF pushed for outer

boundaries stretching to the edge of the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone, 200 nm from shore. Ultimately, the boundaries were set 50 nm from shore, similar to the outer boundary of the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument.

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