



United States Department of the Interior



U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge
P.O. Box 50167
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In Reply Refer To:

November 15, 2012

Dear Interested Parties:

As a follow up to a letter sent to you in June we wanted to provide you with the following changes affecting operations at Midway Atoll. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's goal at Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge is to make changes now that will ensure Midway has sufficient and stable capacity to manage our conservation, historical, and airport missions for both people and wildlife into the future.

Since June when we advised you and other interested publics of expected changes to operations at Midway, we have been carefully assessing alternatives to inform the complicated budget and program decisions we must now implement. We have received input from many of you and appreciate your thoughts as we have begun, and continue, to work through this process.

Some of the cost-saving alternatives we noted earlier are currently being implemented. We have reduced by half the staff stationed at the Refuge by relocating a permanent law enforcement position and a visitor services position, and eliminating the equivalent of three full-time biological-technicians and one seasonal visitor services position. These staff reductions will produce cost savings, but will also significantly impact Refuge operational capabilities and other activities previously allowed through permits issued by the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument (Monument).

The few remaining staff stationed at the Refuge will need to focus on our wildlife conservation mission including essential long-term biological program priorities (with an emphasis on endangered species and invasive plant work); on continuing to work with contractors doing lead-based paint abatement for the safety of people and wildlife; and on maintaining infrastructure. In addition, we are continuing to work with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to ensure the uninterrupted, continuous operation of Henderson Field airport for an around-the-clock emergency safety net for twin-engine commercial aircraft transiting the vast Pacific airspace. The airport will remain open for emergency landings and fuel sales to transient aircraft.

Only activities that directly support airport operations and conservation and management of the Refuge and the Monument will be allowed October 1, 2012 through September 30, 2013. These specific Monument-sponsored conservation and management activities are defined under the Monument permit categories of Research Permit and the Co-trustee Conservation and Management Permit. The Co-trustee Permit allows activities to be conducted by the Co-trustees, their designated agency representatives, habitat restoration contractors, and currently permitted researchers. No other Special Ocean Use, Education, or Native

Hawaiian, Recreation or new Research permits will be issued for Midway unless it can be demonstrated that the activity meets the findings of the Proclamation and does not involve direct access to Midway Atoll.

The activities we can no longer support at the Refuge include those previously allowed under the following permit types: Special Ocean Use (e.g., eco-tourism, historical tourism, documentary filming, photography, videography, literary publication, etc.), Education, Native Hawaiian Practices, and Recreation. In addition, the Refuge is no longer able to provide ship-to-shore boat transportation to support emergency rescues at sea.

In addition to the restrictions on visitation, we must reduce other Refuge operations. We are working hard to identify energy saving measures that will not affect the integrity of the facilities needed for our operations and the investment we have made in structural upgrades. Negotiations continue with operation and support contractors and our FAA partners to determine how best to address diminishing budget allocations.

We appreciate that your organization has had a long-term relationship with the Refuge and its staff. The remarkable natural and cultural resources associated with Midway Atoll have inspired us all and spark the concern about the necessary suspension of services at the Refuge. Regrettably, the decisions we have had to make will impact your ability to access the Atoll and reduces the Monument's capacity to educate others and to conduct wildlife conservation work. For these reasons, the decisions we have made to reduce Refuge operations were not made lightly or without concern for all who are affected.

We appreciate your patience during these difficult times. Your support and contribution to the Refuge and Monument over the years has been of critical importance to globally significant wildlife conservation efforts and we will continue to look for ways to work together to share the wonders of Midway Atoll with visitors. In the meantime, please direct immediate questions or concerns to the Fish and Wildlife Service Monument Superintendent, Doug Staller via email at Doug_Staller@fws.gov or by phone at 808.792.9540.

Sincerely,


FOR

Barry Stieglitz

Refuge Supervisor

Hawaiian and Pacific Islands National Wildlife Complex