

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
and  
United States Coast Guard

Joint Position Statement on Enforcement of the  
Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve

The Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI) are a vast and remote chain of islands that are a part of the Hawaiian archipelago and provide habitat to numerous species found nowhere else on earth. These islands represent a nearly unspoiled ecosystem where habitats upon which marine species depend include both land and water. This area contains a number and variety of shallow and deep water coral reefs and supports more than 7,000 marine species, many of which are unique to the Hawaiian Islands chain. The area is rich in history and represents a place of cultural significance to the native Hawaiians. It is an area that must be carefully managed to ensure that the resources are not diminished for future generations. The Northwestern Hawaiian Islands are also the most remote archipelago in the world. This isolation has resulted in need for integrated resource management of this vast and exceptional marine environment.

The Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve (Reserve) was established by Executive Orders 13178 and 13196 on December 4, 2000 and January 18, 2001 respectively, pursuant to the National Marine Sanctuaries Amendments Act of 2000 (Amendments Act). The Reserve boundaries include all waters from 3-50 nautical miles offshore from Nihoa Island to Kure Atoll, except at Midway Atoll where the inner boundary of the Reserve is the seaward boundary of the Refuge. The Reserve is the largest conservation area under U.S. flag and the second largest marine protected area in the world – second only in size to the Great Barrier Reef in Australia. The purpose of the Reserve is the long-term, comprehensive conservation and protection of the coral reef ecosystem and related marine resources of the NWHI.

The Executive Orders provide a set of management principles (section 4) and conservation measures (section 7) that apply throughout the Reserve to protect Reserve resources. Moreover, the Executive Orders (section 8) establish 15 Reserve Preservation Areas (RPAs) within which all consumptive activities are prohibited, with some exceptions.

NOAA's Marine Sanctuary Program (NMSP), within NOAA's Ocean Service, administers the Reserve. Pursuant to the Amendments Act and the Executive Orders, the NMSP has initiated the process under the National Marine Sanctuaries Act (NMSA) to designate the Reserve as a National Marine Sanctuary. The NMSP is also in the process of finalizing a Reserve Operations Plan (ROP) to govern management of the Reserve pending completion of the designation process.

An integral component of Reserve operations, and the development of sanctuary alternatives during the designation process, is the design, establishment and implementation of enforcement and educational programs. The ROP includes an action plan that describes a variety of strategies that would form an enforcement infrastructure for the Reserve, and provide a foundation for a proposed sanctuary management regime. NOAA and the United States Coast Guard will continue devoting attention to the application of existing laws and regulations to maintain and protect the resources within the Reserve.

The United States Coast Guard, as one of its missions, conducts enforcement and educational activities to assist NOAA in administering laws such as the NMSA, Endangered Species Act,

Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, and the Marine Mammal Protection Act. NOAA and the USCG will work cooperatively on educational and enforcement programs to assist in the conservation and protection of Reserve marine resources. As opportunity arises, USCG and NOAA will provide educational materials and conduct outreach activities to inform the public and marine users of the Reserve, including the management principles, conservation measures, and RPAs as stated in the Executive Orders.