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Contact: Hugh Vickery, DOI (202) 208-6416
Aulani Wilhelm, NOAA (808) 397-2660 x 223

Salazar, Lubchenco Applaud Designation of Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument as a World Heritage Site

*Remote chain of atolls and surrounding waters is first U.S. site added to
World Heritage List in 15 years*

WASHINGTON — Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar and NOAA Administrator Dr. Jane Lubchenco today commended the World Heritage Committee for adding Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument (Papahānaumokuākea) in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands to the prestigious UNESCO World Heritage List at its annual meeting in Brasilia, Brazil. Measuring nearly 140,000 square miles and protecting more than 7,000 marine and terrestrial species, Papahānaumokuākea is the nation's first site designated for its outstanding value as both a natural and cultural heritage site.

World Heritage listing acknowledges the historical, cultural or natural value of a site, as well as the commitment of the sovereign nation and the site's owners to its long-term protection and management.

"I am pleased that the World Heritage Committee recognized the unique cultural and natural heritage of Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument and the commitment of the United States and the state of Hawai'i to conserve it," Salazar said. "The monument will now be part of an exclusive list that includes sites such as the Egyptian pyramids, the Taj Mahal, and the Great Barrier Reef."

"We are proud to add this exceptional marine protected area to the list of the world's greatest natural and cultural treasures," said Dr. Lubchenco, under secretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA administrator. "As the nation's first primarily marine World Heritage site, Papahānaumokuākea helps forward global recognition of the critical heritage values of the sea and global understanding of the importance of protecting our oceans."

The islands and seascape were inscribed as a spectacular example of evolution in isolation, resulting in a great number of marine and terrestrial flora and fauna unique to Papahānaumokuākea. The tiny islands and atolls provide nesting and foraging grounds for 14 million seabirds, making it the world's largest tropical seabird rookery. Sharks and other large apex predators are abundant in the waters of Papahānaumokuākea. Additionally, the region provides the only remaining habitat for several endangered species, such as the Laysan duck and Nihoa millerbird and provides critical habitat for the Hawaiian monk seal.

Geologically, the monument is an unparalleled example of volcanic island and atoll formation, stretching over 1,200 miles from end to end.

Papahānaumokuākea is the name given to this area of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands by the Monument's Native Hawaiian advisory group, honoring its deep cultural significance to the indigenous people. Two of the islands in Papahānaumokuākea feature the highest concentrations of ritual sites in Hawai'i and bear remarkable testimony to the shared historical origins of Polynesian societies. In predominant Native Hawaiian tradition, Papahānaumokuākea is believed to lie within the place where life originates and to which it returns.

Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument is administered jointly by the Department of the Interior as a component of the National Wildlife Refuge System, the Department of Commerce, and the State of Hawai'i, with assistance from the Office of Hawaiian Affairs. World Heritage designation does not change the Monument's management structure and Papahānaumokuākea will continue to be managed to ensure the conservation and preservation of the Monument's relatively pristine ecosystems and significant cultural heritage for future generations.

The United States nominated the monument as a World Heritage site in 2009. The remote chain of atolls and surrounding waters is the first U.S. site to be added to the World Heritage List in 15 years. It joins 20 U.S. sites currently on the list, including the Grand Canyon and the Statue of Liberty.

In 2009 the World Heritage List had 878 sites from 144 countries, including 679 cultural, 174 natural, and only 25 mixed natural and cultural sites.

High resolution photographs of Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument are available for media use at www.papahanaumokuakea.gov/imagery/hires.html. Video clips of Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument are available for media use by contacting dan.dennison@noaa.gov or at 808-397-2660.

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