Where Nature and Culture are One

Papahānaumokuākea to honor their ancestors.

For example, is embodied in the vast expansive deep sea, as well as other cultural resources. These co-trustees together manage the Monument waters from elsewhere. Every kind of marine debris washes up on beaches and floats in the waters, oftentimes ingested by wildlife. Derelict fishing nets scour fragile corals and entangle marine life.

Coral bleaching due to climate change, has caused massive coral mortality, turning once-thriving reefs into algae-covered wastelands. The low-lying nesting habitats of threatened green turtles and seabirds and popupping habitats of endangered Hawaiian monk seals are in danger of disappearing due to rising sea levels.

Only increased awareness and behavior changes from individuals and businesses will bring relief to these stressors facing not only the Monument, but also the planet we all live on.

The Monument is administered jointly by four co-trustees: the Department of Commerce through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s Office of National Marine Sanctuaries and National Marine Fisheries Service Pacific Islands Regional Office; the Department of the Interior through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Pacific Region National Wildlife Refuge System and Pacific Islands Fish and Wildlife Office; the State of Hawai‘i through the Department of Land and Natural Resources’ Division of Aquatic Resources and Division of Forestry and Wildlife; and the Office of Hawaiian Affairs.

These co-trustees together manage the Monument to protect ecosystems, ranging from terrestrial island peaks to shallow reefs to the deep sea, as well as other cultural resources within the Monument.

A BRIEF GLIMPSE THROUGH TIME

The entire area of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands was frequented by Native Hawaiian navigators and voyagers for centuries before the first Europeans arrived. These voyages were memorialized in many mo‘olelo (traditional stories) passed down through oral tradition, and recorded within Hawaiian language newspapers of the 1800-1900s. Additional archaeological evidence points to the extensive use of two of the closest islands, Nihoa and Mokumanamana, for various cultural practices from the 1300s until recent times. The 1800s brought heightened international trade and overexploitation of resources. Guano miners destroyed island ecosystems and seabirds were targeted for their feathers and eggs. Whaling vessels were lost on poorly charted and treacherous reefs. In the early 1900s, Midway Atoll became a "stepping stone across the Pacific" for the Trans-Pacific Cable, which provided the critical link in worldwide cable communications. Later, Midway Atoll served as an early trans-Pacific stop for the Pan American clipper flights and serves today as an emergency runway for trans-Pacific flights. Midway Atoll, now Battle of Midway National Memorial, was also the setting of the most decisive battle in the Pacific Theater of World War II, turning the tide of the war in favor of the Allied forces.

A HISTORY OF PROTECTION

With the region considered an ‘aina akua (sacred realm) by Native Hawaiians for centuries, it gave a level of reverence akin to formal protections. However, over the last hundred years, the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands have seen increasing protections from federal and state governments, beginning in 1909 when the U.S. Marines were sent to stop the slaughter of seabirds for feathers and eggs at Midway Atoll. Since then, the region has seen additional protections, including designation of the Hawaiian Islands National Wildlife Refuge, Kure Atoll State Wildlife Sanctuary, Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve, Northwestern Hawaiian Islands State Marine Refuge, Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge and Battle of Midway National Memorial. International protections include designation in 2008 as a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area and inscription in 2010 as the nation’s first UNESCO mixed (natural and cultural) World Heritage Site.

The name Papahānaumokuākea (pronounced Pa-pah-hah-now-mo-kooh-ah-keh-ah) commemorates the union of two Hawaiian ancestral gods. Papahānaumoku (a mother figure personified by the earth) and Wākea (a father figure personified by the expansive sky), whose union resulted in the creation of the entire Hawaiian archipelago and the Native Hawaiian people.

Taken apart, “Papa” (earth mother), “hānau” (birth), “moku” (island), and “ākea” (expansive) suggest a fertile woman giving birth to a wide stretch of islands beneath a benevolent sky. Taken as one long name, Papahānaumokuākea is a symbol of hope and regeneration for the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands as well as the main Hawaiian Islands.

A UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITE
**A Living Hawaiian Culture**

Traditional Hawaiian accounts describe Papahānaumokuākea as a sacred area from which life first emerged and to which spirits return after death.

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**Endemic Sanctuary**

The monument is home to many species found nowhere else on Earth and is a critically important nesting ground for green sea turtles and breeding ground for Hawaiian monk seals.

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**Predator-Dominated Coral Reefs**

The monument protects 3.5 million acres of coral reef where sharks and large fish like ulua (trevally, pictured here) still dominate.

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**New Discoveries**

The majority of the seafloor in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands lies at depths below 10,000 feet (3,000 meters). Using advanced technologies like remotely operated vehicles, researchers are discovering high-density biological communities and unique species at these depths.

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**Traces of our Seafaring Past**

Archival research indicates there may be as many as 67 shipwreck sites, the earliest of which dates back to 1818, within monument waters. There are also at least 15 aircraft sites, many lost during the Battle of Midway. These sites represent the legacy of our nation’s maritime heritage in this region, providing a window through which we can better understand our seafaring past.

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**Seabird Refuge**

The monument is home to over 14 million seabirds representing 23 species. This includes the world’s largest colonies of Laysan and black-footed albatross.

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**The monument is a World Heritage Site**

www.papahanaumokuakea.gov