

## WHY IT'S SPECIAL

Located in the central North Pacific roughly 3,000 miles from the nearest continental land mass, Papahānaumokuākea is part of the remotest archipelago in the world. This isolation has led to the evolution of many unique plants and animals. A significant amount of species within the Monument are endemic to Hawai'i, found nowhere else on Earth. This area is also rich in ancient cultural sites and historic shipwrecks and landmarks.



Photo by Greg McFall/NOAA

## ‘ĀINA MOMONA - A Place of Abundance

Native Hawaiian worldview acknowledges Papahānaumokuākea as a sacred area that represents the source of an everlasting continuum of creation from which life springs and to which spirits return after death. Cultural practitioners of today consider Papahānaumokuākea to be one of the last remaining ‘āina momona in Hawai'i – a deep source of knowledge and spiritual inspiration, a place for people to strengthen lineal ties to their ancestors and gods, who are manifested in nature. The Hawaiian god Kanaloa, for example, is embodied in the vast expansive ocean and can take nearly every form of life within it. In recent years, Native Hawaiians, in their continuing journey to perpetuate their tradition and cultural practices, have voyaged to Papahānaumokuākea to honor their ancestors.



Photo by Ryan Tabata/NOAA

## THREATS

The most significant threats to Monument habitats and wildlife arise from human activities beyond its boundaries. Key threats include **invasive alien species**, **marine debris**, and impacts from human-accelerated **global climate change** such as coral bleaching, sea level rise, and ocean acidification.

The introduction of **alien species** – non-native organisms that humans brought to Hawai'i from other parts of the world – caused the loss of native terrestrial species and continue to threaten native wildlife.

Each year, over 50 tons of **marine debris** drift into Monument waters from elsewhere. Every kind of plastic material 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 pupping 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.

## 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.



Photo by Brad Wong/OHA

## A HISTORY OF PROTECTION

With the region considered an 'āina 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 1903 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.



Photo by Dan Clark/USFWS

## ABOUT

Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument is one of the largest fully protected conservation areas in the world. It encompasses 582,578 square miles (1,508,870 square kilometers) of the Pacific Ocean – an area nearly the size of the Gulf of Mexico!

The Monument, created expressly to protect an exceptional array of natural and cultural resources, was originally established on June 15, 2006 and expanded on August 26, 2016, both times under the authority of the Antiquities Act. It was inscribed as the nation's first natural and cultural World Heritage Site in 2010.

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.

## VISIT

**Mokupāpapa Discovery Center** in Hilo, Hawai'i to learn about the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands

**Waikiki Aquarium** in Honolulu to see some of the unique fishes and corals found in Papahānaumokuākea

**Bishop Museum** in Honolulu to view several ki'i (carved stone images) from Mokumanamana

**Maui Ocean Center** in Mā'alaea to enjoy a Papahānaumokuākea exhibit with stunning imagery highlighting the unique features of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands

**Nantucket Whaling Museum** in Massachusetts to explore artifacts from the 19<sup>th</sup> century whaleship *Two Brothers*, which wrecked on a reef in French Frigate Shoals

For information on permits for research, education, conservation and management, Native Hawaiian practice, or special ocean use within the Monument, go to

[www.papahanaumokuakea.gov](http://www.papahanaumokuakea.gov)

## SUPPORT

**National Marine Sanctuary Foundation**  
[www.marinesanctuary.org](http://www.marinesanctuary.org)

**Friends of Hawaiian Islands National Wildlife Refuge**  
[www.friendsofhawaiianislands.org](http://www.friendsofhawaiianislands.org)

**Friends of Midway Atoll**  
[www.friendsofmidway.org](http://www.friendsofmidway.org)

**Kure Atoll Conservancy**  
[kureatollconservancy.org](http://kureatollconservancy.org)

Cover Photo by Mark Sullivan/NOAA

## PAPAHĀNAUMOKUĀKEA Marine National Monument



Artwork by Solomon Enos

## THE NAME

The name Papahānaumokuākea (pronounced Pa-pa-hah-now-mo-koo-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.



