



News Release

Pacific Islands External Affairs Office

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Hawai'i DLNR Receives U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Grant to Restore Kure Atoll Wildlife Habitats

The State of Hawai'i's Department of Land and Natural Resources will receive a \$400,000 grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's National Coastal Wetlands Conservation grant program to restore approximately 300 acres of wildlife habitat at Kure Atoll State Wildlife Sanctuary. The award is one of 29 grants announced today by the Service for conservation projects encompassing nearly 10,000 acres of coastal wetlands in 11 states and Puerto Rico.

The grant will allow Division of Forestry and Wildlife staff to restore 1 acre of emergent wetland habitat for the reintroduction of the endangered Laysan duck, restore 13 acres of seabird nesting habitat by removing invasive plant species, and remove marine debris from 36 acres of marine intertidal shore habitat and 250 acres of subtidal coral reef habitat. The federal funding will be matched by more than \$150,000 from partners.

Located at the northwest tip of the Hawaiian archipelago within the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument, Kure Atoll provides nesting habitat for 17 seabird species, including four species identified as "highly imperiled" or of "high concern" in the U.S. Seabird Conservation Plan for the Pacific Region and listed as priority species by the North American Bird Conservation Initiative. These four species are the black-footed albatross, Laysan albatross, Christmas shearwater, and Tristram's storm-petrel.

The atoll also hosts the endangered Hawaiian monk seal, threatened green turtle, Hawaiian spinner dolphins, Galapagos and tiger sharks, spotted eagle rays, and large predatory jacks. Despite its northern location and relatively cool waters, Kure has almost 80,000 acres of coral reef habitat supporting 155 species of reef fishes.

Much of the work to restore nesting habitat will focus on the removal of the invasive herb golden crownbeard (*Verbesina encelioides*). The plant overtakes native vegetation, reduces seabird nesting habitat, and leads to heat stress and entanglement of seabirds.

Approximately 4,000 pounds of marine debris will be removed from Kure Atoll over the next 2 years with funding from this grant. The endangered Hawaiian monk seal suffers one of the highest entanglement rates of any seal or sea lion species, with 261 monk seals found entangled in debris between 1982 and 2003 across the state. Marine debris also affects sea turtles, seabird species, and other marine mammals. Removing debris such as fishing nets and lines, rings, buckets, and plastic crates from shorelines and coral reefs will help reduce this threat. In addition, marine debris adversely affects coral reef ecosystems by breaking or smothering reefs.

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The National Coastal Wetlands Conservation grant program is funded under provisions of the 1990 Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection, and Restoration Act, drawing from Sport Fish Restoration Act revenue – money generated from an excise tax on fishing equipment and motorboat and small engine fuels. A total of \$20.5 million is being awarded in 2008 to acquire, restore or enhance coastal wetlands to provide long-term conservation benefits to fish, wildlife, and habitat. Other states receiving funds include California, Oregon, Washington, Texas, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Maine, Maryland, and Massachusetts, along with the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. These federal grants will be matched by nearly \$46 million in partner contributions from state and local governments, private landowners, and conservation groups.

Including the 2008 grants, the Service has awarded more than \$200 million to coastal states and territories since the program began in 1992. When the 2008 projects are complete, 244,000 acres of habitat will have been protected, restored, or enhanced.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 97-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 548 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices, and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

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