

FACT SHEET: Nomination of Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument to the UNESCO World Heritage List

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What:

The United States announced its nomination of Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Centre for consideration for inscription on the World Heritage List.

Along with Mount Vernon, also nominated this year, Papahānaumokuākea will mark the United States' first nominations to the World Heritage Convention in over 15 years.

Papahānaumokuākea was nominated as “mixed” site, for both its natural and cultural significance to the world.

Significance of Nomination:

If inscribed under the World Heritage Convention, Papahānaumokuākea would join a globally exclusive list of properties with outstanding universal value that are unique and diverse—such as East Africa's Serengeti, the Egyptian pyramids, Latin America's Baroque cathedrals, Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park, and the Galapagos Islands.

World Heritage sites belong to all peoples of the world and are meant to embody the most universal and significant aspects of natural and cultural heritage or humanity's legacy of the past and present for future generations.

Papahānaumokuākea's nomination is based on the site's exceptional geological and ecological processes, its provision of the best remaining habitat for some of the world's most endangered species, and its status as a sacred place in the history, culture, and cosmology of Native Hawaiian people.

Papahānaumokuākea is the first site nominated with cultural connections to the sea, and adds to underrepresented World Heritage sites in the Pacific. It would be America's first marine site, and the world's first cultural seascape.

World Heritage Designation Process

Papahānaumokuākea topped the new United States Tentative List in 2008, at which time Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne selected Papahānaumokuākea as one of two sites in the U.S. to develop a full nomination to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre.

Following its nomination for inscription, Papahānaumokuākea will undergo an 18-month review by the advisory bodies to UNESCO World Heritage Centre and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) for its natural resource heritage, as well as by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) for its cultural resource heritage.

Over the past 10 months, development of Papahānaumokuākea's UNESCO nomination package was led by the State of Hawai'i and prepared collaboratively with various NOAA offices, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Office of Hawaiian Affairs. Assistance and peer reviews were also provided by members of the Native Hawaiian community, National Park Service, Bishop Museum, and academia.

Based on these reviews and recommendations, the World Heritage Committee will make a determination on Papahānaumokuākea's proposed listing in July 2010.

Rationale for Nomination:

The rationale for the nomination of Papahānaumokuākea as a mixed (natural and cultural) site is due to its unique geological, ecological, biological and Native Hawaiian cultural heritage. The following describes some of Papahānaumokuākea's outstanding values:

- The Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI) are a classic, important and unparalleled example of volcanic island and atoll formation.
- The NWHI are one of the world's last apex predator-dominated coral reef ecosystems, a feature characteristic of reefs prior to significant human exploitation.
- The NWHI are a spectacular example of evolution in isolation, where enhanced speciation and a phenomenally high degree of endemism in both marine and terrestrial species occur.
- The NWHI provide the only remaining habitat for endangered species such as the Nihoa Finch and the Laysan Duck.
- The beaches and waters constitute the foraging and pupping/nesting grounds for nearly the entire population of the critically endangered Hawaiian Monk Seal and 90% of the threatened Hawaiian population of Green Turtles.
- Over 14 million seabirds nest in the islands and forage in the waters of the Monument, making the NWHI the world's largest tropical seabird rookery.
- In the Native Hawaiian cosmology and tradition, a portion of the islands is believed to lie within the place where life originates and to which it returns.
- 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 all Polynesian societies and Native Hawaiian cultural resilience in a changing environment.
- For a culture that considers nature and civilization to be part of a genealogical whole, its seas offer a "place of abundance" to reconnect with the ancestral environment, and are also a traditional and contemporary testing ground for the revitalized art of Polynesian wayfinding.

About the World Heritage List:

UNESCO's World Heritage List protects and preserves natural and cultural heritage sites of "outstanding universal value" as determined by the standards and processes established under the World Heritage Convention, the most widely adopted international agreement for the conservation of nature and preservation of culture.

Listing denotes the international recognition of the value of a site and the commitment of the sovereign nation and the site's owners for its long-term protection and management under applicable domestic laws.

World Heritage Sites currently include 878 sites from 144 countries - 679 cultural, 174 natural, and 25 mixed natural and cultural sites.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) seeks to encourage the identification, protection and preservation of cultural and natural heritage around the world considered to be of outstanding value to humanity. More information can be found at <http://whc.unesco.org>.

About Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument:

Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument is administered jointly by three co-trustees – the Department of Commerce, Department of the Interior and the State of Hawai'i – and represents a cooperative conservation approach to protecting the entire ecosystem. Co-trustee agencies in cooperation with the Office of Hawaiian Affairs manage the Monument through the Monument Management Board. The Monument area includes the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve, Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge/Battle of Midway National Memorial, Hawaiian Islands National Wildlife Refuge, Kure Atoll Seabird Sanctuary, and Northwestern Hawaiian Islands State Marine Refuge. More information can be found at www.papahanaumokuakea.gov.