



# Marine Refuges

## National Wildlife Refuge System

The 550-unit National Wildlife Refuge System, administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, a bureau within the Department of the Interior, is the only system of Federal lands and waters devoted specifically to habitat and wildlife conservation. The System includes 180 National Wildlife Refuges that protect ocean, coastal, or Great Lakes habitats. The Refuge System's historic role in the marine environment dates to the first refuge at Pelican Island, Florida, designated in 1903 by President Teddy Roosevelt. These marine refuges protect a variety of ecosystems including coastal wetlands, rocky coastlines, mangrove forests, seagrass meadows, barrier islands, estuarine tributaries, and

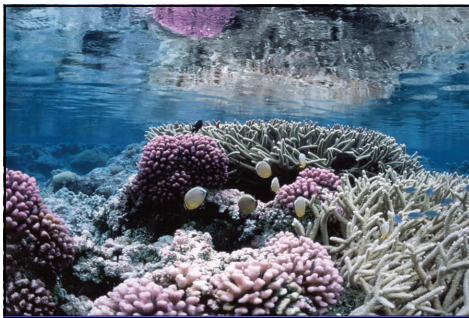
some of the most pristine coral reef communities found in the world. They represent the world's most geographically diverse and ecologically comprehensive system of fully-protected marine areas under unified conservation management. The Refuge System also includes two 1,000-mile long archipelagos, the Hawaiian Islands and Midway National Wildlife Refuges, encompassing most of the northwestern Hawaiian Islands, and Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuges, which includes the spectacular volcanic islands of the Aleutian chain. From above the Arctic Circle to below the Equator, along the Atlantic, Pacific, and Gulf coasts, throughout the Caribbean and Pacific Ocean, the National Wildlife Refuge System's "marine refuges" protect many of the ecosystems that are the most at risk due to global climate change.

The Refuge System is governed by the National Wildlife Refuge Administration Act of 1966 as amended by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997. These Acts require that the Secretary of the Interior maintain the biological integrity, diversity and environmental health of the System. They also recognize that wildlife-dependent recreational uses involving hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation, when determined to be compatible, are legitimate and appropriate public uses of the Refuge System.



Some of the threatened and endangered species protected by marine National Wildlife Refuges. Clockwise from top left: Florida manatee; American crocodile; Stellar sea lions; Short-tailed albatross; Hawaiian monk seal; and Green sea turtles. Photo credits: USFWS.

National Wildlife Refuge System Marine Refuges, location, and year designated. From top to bottom: Pelican Island NWR, Florida (1903); Alaska Maritime NWR, Alaska (1909-1980); Midway Atoll NWR, Northwest Hawaiian Islands (1988); Cross Island NWR, Maine (1980). Photo credits: USFWS..



National Wildlife Refuge System Marine Refuges, location, and year designated. From top to bottom: Palmyra Atoll NWR, Remote Pacific (2001); Oregon Islands NWR, Oregon (1935); Chincoteague NWR, Virginia (1943); J. N. "Ding" Darling NWR, Florida (1945); Rose Atoll NWR, Remote Pacific (1973). Photo credits: USFWS.

## Marine National Monuments

The Fish and Wildlife Service has management responsibilities in four Marine National Monuments (MNM) in the Pacific.

- The **Pacific Remote Islands MNM**, a group of seven wildlife refuges located throughout the North Pacific Ocean that protect pristine coral reefs and vital seabird rookeries.
- **Rose Atoll MNM** in American Samoa is the southernmost point under U.S. jurisdiction and includes one of the smallest and most unique atolls in the world; protected as a National Wildlife Refuge since 1973.
- The **Marianas Trench MNM** in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands includes three units: the Trench Unit, the submerged features of the Marianas Trench; the Volcanic Unit, 21 unique undersea volcanoes and thermal vents; and the Islands Unit, the waters and submerged features around the three northernmost islands in chain.
- **Papahānaumokuākea MNM**, which overlays the Hawaiian Islands and Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuges in the Northwest Hawaiian Islands, is co-managed by the Service, the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration, and the State of

## Marine Program

The National Wildlife Refuge System Marine Program helps develop and advance the national marine policy for the Service and supports the field staffs of the 180 marine refuges. To advance the conservation goals of the Refuge System, the Marine Program coordinates with other U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service programs to confront the unique needs and challenges of the marine refuges.

The Marine Program acts as a national liaison for many Federal partnerships including marine debris initiatives, the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force, the Seamless Networks, federal advisory groups, and the Marine Protected Area Center, which administers the National System of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). With 99 marine refuges participating, the Refuge System is the largest contributor to the National System of MPAs.

## NWRS MISSION STATEMENT

“The mission of the NWRS is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.”

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