

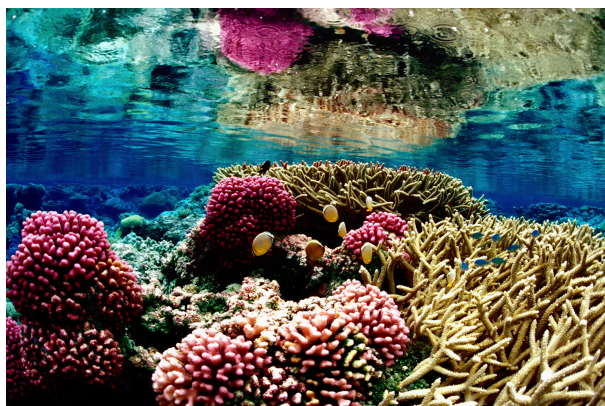


## Proposed National Marine Sanctuary in the Pacific Remote Islands

Fall 2023

### About the Designation

On March 24, 2023, [President Biden](#) directed the Secretary of Commerce to consider initiating the [designation process](#) for a proposed national marine sanctuary in the Pacific Remote Islands. On April 17, 2023, [NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries](#) issued a Notice of Intent to Conduct Scoping and to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for the Proposed Designation of a National Marine Sanctuary for the Pacific Remote Islands, launching the designation process. The proposed sanctuary designation would allow NOAA to augment the existing protections for the [Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument](#) with additional regulatory and non-regulatory tools, and to conserve additional areas outside the monument's existing boundary. The proposed sanctuary would not include terrestrial areas or diminish the protections of the existing monument designations.



Branching corals grow on a vibrant shallow reef at Palmyra Atoll National Wildlife Refuge. Photo: Jim Maragos/USFWS

### Public Scoping

A public scoping process was initiated on April 17, 2023, when NOAA issued a [Notice of Intent](#) (NOI) in the Federal Register to prepare a draft management plan, draft environmental impact statement, and proposed rule for the proposed

national marine sanctuary in the Pacific Remote Islands. The notice included information about the public scoping meetings and how to provide comments. Additional public outreach was conducted via press releases, community announcements, email, social media, and the NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries' website.

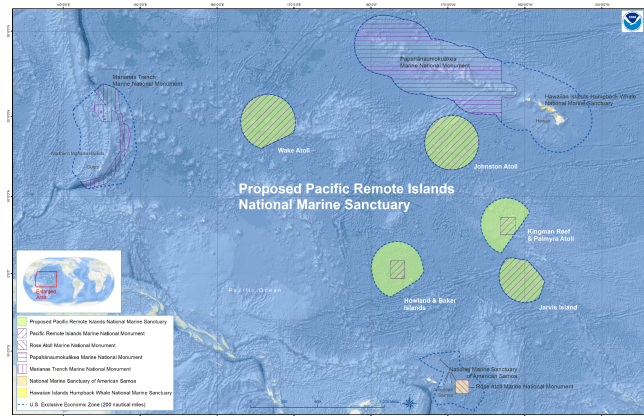
During the scoping process, NOAA is seeking a wide range of public input on topics such as the protection of natural, cultural, and historic resources; potential socioeconomic, cultural, and biological impacts of concern; potential management measures and regulations; and proposed sanctuary boundaries.

Public scoping meetings were held in May 2023 to gather input on the proposed sanctuary designation. Meetings consisted of an informational presentation followed by a public comment period. A total of 360 people attended the seven in-person meetings, and 179 people participated virtually. During these meetings, 151 oral and written comments were received.

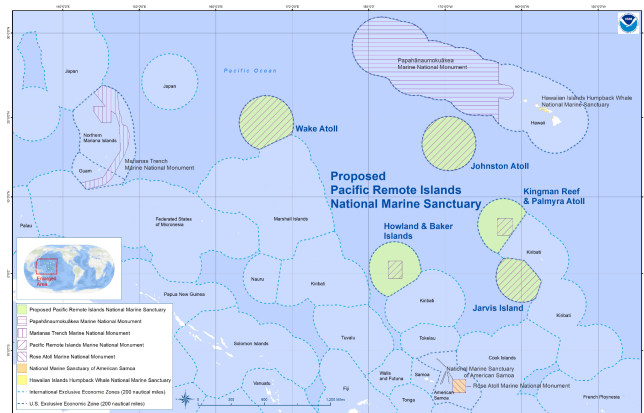
- May 10, 2023: Honolulu, Hawai'i – 50 in-person, 42 virtual participants
- May 11, 2023: Hilo, Hawai'i – 30 in-person, 41 virtual participants
- May 17, 2023: Hagåtña, Guam – 32 in-person, 16 virtual participants
- May 18, 2023: Saipan, CNMI – 80 in-person, 20 virtual participants
- May 19, 2023: Rota, CNMI – 18 participants
- May 20, 2023: Tinian, CNMI – 17 participants
- May 24, 2023: Pago Pago, American Samoa – 133 in-person, 41 virtual participants
- May 25, 2023: Virtual only – 12 virtual participants
- May 31, 2023: Virtual only – 7 virtual participants

NOAA received approximately 57,000 written and oral public comments via regulations.gov, mail, email, or the public meetings. Comments were supportive of and opposed to the proposed designation and/or certain aspects of it. Comments focused on a broad range of topics, issues of concern, and recommendations, including: sanctuary boundaries; resource protection; sanctuary regulations; fisheries management; socioeconomic impacts; incorporation and inclusion of Indigenous Pacific Islander values, practices, and management; and historic properties.

The 45-day public comment period closed on June 2, 2023. Written public comments are available to view on the [Federal eRulemaking Portal](https://www.regulations.gov), docket #: NOAA-NOS-2023-0052. For questions, contact [proposed.primns@noaa.gov](mailto:proposed.primns@noaa.gov)



Map displays the general area under consideration for a new national marine sanctuary. Image: NOAA



Map displays the general area under consideration for a new national marine sanctuary and nearby Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs). Image: NOAA

## Sanctuary Designation Timeline



[Frequently Asked Questions](#) on the proposed national marine sanctuary designation in the Pacific Remote Islands.

## From Around the Pacific

### Workshop to Discuss a Proposed National Marine Sanctuary in the Pacific Remote Islands

The American Samoa Government (ASG) and NOAA co-hosted [a workshop and public forum](#) on September 12 and 13, 2023, at the Governor H. Rex Lee Auditorium in Pago Pago, American Samoa. The workshop brought together more than 230 federal and territorial agency representatives and stakeholders to discuss the proposal for a national marine sanctuary in the Pacific Remote Islands (PRI), and to share information about possible benefits and impacts. Topics included an overview of the PRI, the national marine sanctuary designation process, perspectives from American Samoa, how fisheries support food and economic security for American Samoa and the U.S., and the importance of the PRI to American Samoa and other territories. A public forum with about 100 participants was held on the evening of September 12, 2023. It provided an opportunity for the ASG and NOAA to share information about the proposed national marine sanctuary and listen to community concerns.

Information and discussions will help inform the development of the draft sanctuary designation documents, including a proposed rule (i.e. proposed regulations), draft environmental impact statement (per the National Environmental Policy Act), and draft management plan. NOAA anticipates releasing these documents for public comment in 2024.



More than 230 federal and territorial representatives and stakeholders participated in a workshop in Pago Pago. Photo: NOAA

### Reef Assessment and Mapping Mission in American Samoa and the Pacific Remote Islands

Aboard the NOAA Ship *Rainier*, scientists conducted surveys across the Pacific Remote Islands and American Samoa to measure water depths for seafloor mapping and gather information on corals, fish, and changing ocean conditions. [This mission](#), Rainier Integrates Charting, Hydrography, and Reef Demographics (RICHARD)— is part of NOAA's Coral Reef Conservation Program's National Coral Reef Monitoring Program surveys. This [long-term survey](#) has over 20 years of paired biology and ocean chemistry data throughout the Pacific to monitor status and trends of U.S. coral reefs and gain a better understanding of how climate drives coral health and sustainable fisheries. Research will also improve tsunami modeling and support habitat management and restoration. The mission includes surveys in [National Marine Sanctuary of American Samoa](#) and the [Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument](#), which protects extensive coral reefs in the central Pacific.



NOAA Ship *Rainier* at Pago Pago Harbor in American Samoa Photo: NOAA

### Exploring the Deep in the Pacific Remote Islands

Scientists aboard Ocean Exploration Trust's E/V *Nautilus* are spending eight months in 2023 exploring the Central and Eastern Pacific, mapping unsurveyed seafloor and characterizing deep-sea habitats, through detailed remotely operated vehicle observation and integrating emerging technologies. Expeditions are planned around the



priorities of the science and resource management community to close knowledge gaps in our unfolding understanding of our changing ocean planet. The E/V *Nautilus* [2023 expeditions](#) are sponsored by NOAA Ocean Exploration via the [Ocean Exploration Cooperative Institute](#), Ocean Networks Canada, the Office of Naval Research, and the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management.



Deep sea corals and sponges on a boulder in the Line Islands north of Kingman Reef. Photo: Ocean Exploration Trust

## The National Marine Sanctuary Foundation Announces Coral Restoration Grants in the U.S. Pacific Islands

The [National Marine Sanctuary Foundation](#), established in 2000, is the official non-profit partner of NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries. The Foundation directly supports America's national marine sanctuaries through a mission to protect species, conserve ecosystems, and preserve cultural and maritime heritage. It accomplishes its mission through community stewardship and engagement programs, on-the-water conservation projects, public education and outreach programs, and scientific research and exploration. Foundation programs center around connecting people and communities to sanctuaries and creating the next generation of ocean stewards through educational experiences. The Foundation fosters innovative projects that are solution-oriented, scalable and transferable, and develop strategic partnerships that promote the conservation and recovery of species and their habitats. The Foundation recently announced seven grants awarded throughout the Pacific Islands totaling more than [\\$2 million to support coral restoration in the four U.S. Pacific Island](#)

[jurisdictions](#) of American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), Guam, and Hawai'i. The grants are funded by NOAA.

## Biden-Harris Administration Investments Strengthen Climate Resilience, Enhance Equitable Access to Benefits of NOAA's National Marine Sanctuary System

The Department of Commerce and [NOAA](#) [announced it will invest nearly \\$50 million](#) from the [Inflation Reduction Act](#) to make infrastructure improvements to facilities at six national marine sanctuaries across the country. In the Pacific, NOAA intends to invest \$17 million to help build climate resilience in the Kīhei, Maui visitor and community center for [Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary](#), which will mitigate threats from upland flooding, powerful storms, and sand inundation. Funds would also support construction of a boathouse for the sanctuary's 38-foot boat *Koholā* (humpback whale) that is used for large whale research and entanglement response. The [National Marine Sanctuary System](#) protects some of the most iconic underwater place throughout the United States, and these investments will make the facilities, including visitor and community centers, more resilient to climate change, improve the facilities' capacity to engage in research and conservation, and help NOAA inspire the public to be good stewards of our coasts, Great Lakes, and ocean.



Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary's visitor center is in Kīhei, Maui. Photo: NOAA

## Newsletter Updates

[Sign up](#) to receive newsletter updates on the proposed national marine sanctuary of the Pacific Remote Islands