



William Chandler, VP for Government Affairs

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*The Honorable Michael K. Simpson, Chair
Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives, RHOB B-308
Washington, DC 20515*

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

Marine Conservation Institute, based in Bellevue, WA, is a nonprofit conservation organization that uses the latest science to identify important marine ecosystems around the world, and then advocate for their protection. As a member of the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE), we support the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS), particularly the monuments and refuges that conserve marine environments. I wish to thank the members of the Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies for the opportunity to submit written testimony to support the President's Request of \$494.8 million in FY 2013 for the NWRS. This is an \$8.8 million increase over the FY 2012 enacted level. Marine Conservation Institute recommends \$3.53 million of that increase be allocated for the management of our nation's unique marine monuments.

President George W. Bush established four marine national monuments in the Pacific Ocean: Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument, Marianas Trench Marine National Monument, Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument, and Rose Atoll Marine National Monument. Together, these monuments protect approximately 335,348 square miles of marine habitat, and constitute about one-third of the entire Refuge System. The four monuments include 12 marine refuges and more than 20 islands, atolls and reefs spread across the Pacific Ocean. Each monument was designated because of its individual ecological and cultural uniqueness.

Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument

Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument, also referred to as the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, is home to millions of seabirds, an incredible diversity of coral reef species (including deep-sea corals), and the highly endangered Hawaiian monk seal. Approximately 90% of Hawaii's green sea turtles nest in the monument, as do about 99% of the world's population of Laysan albatross and 98% of the black-footed albatross. These islands are also important to Native Hawaiians for culture, history, and religion.

Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument

The Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument contains some of the last remaining, relatively intact coral reef and pelagic ecosystems in the Pacific Ocean. Any one of the seven coral islands within the monument contains nearly four times more shallow water, reef-building coral species than the entire Florida Keys. The monument provides habitat for an estimated 14 million seabirds and many threatened or endangered species, such as leatherback, loggerhead, and green sea turtles; humphead wrasse; bumphead parrotfish; and the globally depleted giant clam. An estimated 200 seamounts, most of which have yet to be identified or explored, are predicted to exist in the pelagic zone within 200 nautical miles of the seven islands. Seamounts are important biodiversity hotspots because they provide habitat and localized nutrients for many species in the vast pelagic waters of the Pacific.

Rose Atoll Marine National Monument

Rose Atoll Marine National Monument is home to a very diverse assemblage of terrestrial and marine species, many of which are threatened or endangered. Rose Atoll supports 97% of the seabird population of American Samoa, including 12 federally protected migratory seabirds and 5 species of federally protected shorebirds. Rose Atoll is the largest nesting ground in the Samoan Islands for threatened green sea turtles, and is an important nesting ground for the endangered hawksbill turtle. Rose Atoll also provides sanctuary for the giant clam, whose population is severely depleted throughout the Pacific Ocean.

Marianas Trench Marine National Monument

The Marianas Trench Marine National Monument protects areas of biological, historical and scientific significance. The monument is home to many unusual life forms found in its boiling and highly acid waters, highly diverse and unique coral reef systems (more than 300 species of stony coral), and an astonishingly high population of apex predators, including large numbers of sharks. The monument also encompasses the Mariana Trench, the deepest ocean area on Earth, which is deeper than Mount Everest is tall.

Marine National Monument Management Implementation

President Bush gave the Department of the Interior (US Fish and Wildlife Service) management responsibility over the three newest monuments, while the Department of Commerce has primary responsibility for managing fishing in the outer waters of each monument. Although it has been over three years since their designation, very little funding (<\$200,000 annually) has been added specifically for managing the Rose Atoll, Marianas Trench, and Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monuments. As a result, monument plans and fishing regulations have not been completed and most islands remain essentially unmanaged and unmonitored.

It is imperative that USFWS establish appropriate management measures to adequately protect the land, waters and seafloor of all four marine monuments. In particular, the USFWS must have adequate funds to finalize management plans for the three newest monuments, hire adequate personnel, provide transportation to visit the islands on a regular basis, develop plans to restore damaged reefs and lands, and consult with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric

Administration and the US Coast Guard to provide proper surveillance and enforcement of illegal activities such as trespassing and illegal fishing.

Restoration actions are needed at most of the islands, including restoring natural habitats, removing discarded equipment and structures from past military occupations, and dealing with old waste disposal sites. Additionally, human exploration and occupation introduced many invasive species to the islands which should be removed.

For example, two fishing vessels that grounded in the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument have yet to be removed and are currently devastating the surrounding coral ecosystems. In 1991, a 121-foot Taiwanese fishing boat sank on Palmyra Atoll; in 2007 an abandoned 85-foot fishing vessel was discovered on Kingman Reef. These two islands are home to some of the most pristine coral reefs in the world. The Palmyra wreck sits directly on the reef and continues to damage the ecosystem by leaching iron into the water which has accelerated the rapid growth of a nuisance corallimorph, *Rhodactis howesii*. According to a recent report by the US Geological Service, more than 740 acres of the coral habitat has been smothered and destroyed so far by the corallimorph whose growth continues to be promoted by the wreck's presence.

A recent study by L. Wegley, et al. on nearby Kingman Reef, indicates that the live coral cover surrounding the wreck has decreased to less than 10% of its original size due to accelerated algae growth and corallimorph infestation. The reef destruction extends 1.5 kilometers along the reef horizontally, and was observed spreading down the reef slope to approximately 35 meters. As this growth continues unabated, it is expected to spread towards the north facing shoreline where fragile coral gardens are located.

Appropriations Needs

Marine Conservation Institute requests that the subcommittee increase funding for NWRS operations by \$8.8 million to a level of \$494.8 million in FY 2013 to better manage our nation's refuges. We recommend that \$3.5 million of that amount be allocated to the marine monuments, which now receive approximately \$200,000 annually. USFWS responsibilities in the Pacific Islands have increased substantially since the designation of the monuments in 2009, but funding has not followed suit.

Additional monument funding would allow USFWS to properly manage Midway Atoll Airfield, and more adequately protect and restore the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument. Furthermore, the additional funding would allow USFWS to provide adequate management of the three newest monuments. Funding is needed to hire managers for Marianas and Pacific Remote Islands (a Rose Atoll Manager has been funded over the last several years); hire one public planner position to aid in management responsibilities; and pay for associated administrative costs such as office space costs and travel expenses. Additional funds would also continue to address nuisance and invasive species that are hurting native wildlife populations,

and hire additional law enforcement officers to combat illegal entry and fishing. The remaining funds would pay for an initial cost assessment for removal of the two shipwrecks mentioned above that are damaging coral reef habitats.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our views.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "WJ Chandler". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

William Chandler