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Environmentalists Praise Bush's Action to Create the World's Largest Marine Protected Area: Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Sanctuary

(June 15, 2006 – Washington, DC) President George W. Bush will announce today his intention to establish the world's largest marine protected area – over 84 million acres - to safeguard a remote, biologically rich string of islands and submerged lands known as the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI). These are the most intact tropical marine ecosystems under US jurisdiction. There have been endeavors to protect the area since the days of President Teddy Roosevelt, including the designation of the area as an ecosystem reserve by President Bill Clinton, Hawai'i Governor Linda Lingle's action last year to protect all state waters in the region from commercial activities and efforts by Hawai'i's Congressional delegation. The Bush-proposed NWHI national marine sanctuary is the lynchpin to giving the federal area more permanent and stronger protections. Environmental Defense, Marine Conservation Biology Institute, KAHEA: the Hawaiian-Environmental Alliance and the Ilio'ulaokalani Coalition praise President Bush's bold actions. The groups will closely examine specific proposed measures to ensure that they are consistent with the visionary purpose of the sanctuary. It is essential that destructive practices are not allowed under the guise of "research".

"This an unprecedented win for endangered Hawaiian monk seals, green sea turtles, black-footed albatrosses, tiger sharks, the incredible reef corals in these waters, the people of Hawai'i and all Americans, now and in generations to come," said Marine Conservation Biology Institute President Dr. Elliott Norse. "It's the start of a new era of protecting places in the sea before they're degraded beyond recognition. In my opinion, this is the best thing President Bush has done for the environment."

"The President is creating the world's largest marine protected area. It's as important as the establishment of Yellowstone," said Environmental Defense President Fred Krupp.

At over 84 million acres in size, the proposed marine sanctuary is more than 38 times larger than Yellowstone National Park, and larger than Australia's Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. Following the process for scientific and public input outlined by Congress, the Bush Administration has developed a plan that will manage the sanctuary to protect the marine

animals, coral reefs and seabird breeding habitat in one of the most remote coral reef ecosystems on Earth. Over 7,000 species are found in the region, at least one-third of which are unique to Hawai'i.

President Bush will make the announcement with the release of a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) notice to the public outlining the availability of draft management regulations for the proposed NWHI Sanctuary. In addition, a draft management plan and environmental impact statement will be released for public hearings later in the summer. The Bush Administration signaled its intent in 2004 to manage the sanctuary so as to provide strong and long-term protection of its marine ecosystems in their natural character.

"The Native Hawaiian community has been at the forefront of protection efforts," said `Ilio`ulaokalani Coalition President Vicky Holt Takamine. "If these rules can be strengthened to prevent commercial activities in the NWHI, to maintain existing protections, and to match the stringent rules for state waters of the NWHI, we have a good chance of protecting this sacred place."

"The Northwestern Hawaiian Islands are fast becoming a magnet for large research vessels and questionable research," said KAHEA: The Hawaiian-Environmental Alliance Executive Director Cha Smith. "It will be of great importance to ensure that research is limited to activities necessary for management and restoration efforts and that educational activities bring the place to people and not take people to the place. "

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Environmental Defense, a leading national nonprofit organization, represents more than 400,000 members. Since 1967, Environmental Defense has linked science, economics, law and innovative private-sector partnerships to create breakthrough solutions to the most serious environmental problems. www.environmentaldefense.org www.oceansalive.org

Marine Conservation Biology Institute is a nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing the new science of conserving life in the sea and to protecting, recovering and sustainably using our ocean ecosystems. Its headquarters are in Bellevue, WA. www.mcbi.org

KAHEA is an alliance of Kanaka Maoli (Native Hawaiian) cultural practitioners, environmental activists and others concerned with protecting customary and traditional rights and Hawai'i's fragile environment. www.kahea.org

`Ilio`ulaokalani Coalition. is an island-wide grassroots organization comprised of kumu (master teachers) and loea (cultural experts) whose purpose is to link and apply traditional Hawaiian cultural principles, practices and skills to effect educational, social, environmental and economic change for the betterment and advancement of native Hawaiians and the community at large.