

# MPA NEWS



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## US designates 1.2-million-km<sup>2</sup> MPA in which all commercial extraction is banned

With a stroke of his pen in September, US President Barack Obama expanded the size of the existing Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument (PRIMNM) to 1.269 million km<sup>2</sup>, creating the world's largest MPA in which all commercial resource extraction is banned. Commercial fishing, petroleum exploration, and deep sea mining are off-limits in the expanded MPA.

To put the MPA's expanded size in perspective: it is more than five times as large as the United Kingdom.

Before the expansion, the site had covered a total area of 225,000 km<sup>2</sup> around multiple US-governed islands and atolls in the south-central Pacific. The newly expanded boundaries bring an additional 130 seamounts inside PRIMNM, as well as deep water corals. The expanded MPA also provides protection for the habitats of wide-ranging animals including sea turtles, cetaceans, sharks, tunas, and at least 19 species of seabirds.

Technically PRIMNM is not a no-take area. Limited recreational fishing is still allowed, although it is rare in the monument. Its remote waters can take several days to reach by boat from the nearest ports.

### Background

PRIMNM is a composite MPA - a group of five distinct protected sites, each separated from the others by hundreds of kilometers of ocean. Most of the space between the sites is high seas, beyond any nation's jurisdiction. The five protected sites are (1) Wake Island; (2) Jarvis Island; (3) Johnston Atoll; (4) Kingman Reef & Palmyra Atoll; and (5) Howland & Baker Islands.

President Obama expanded the monument using his executive powers under the (US) Antiquities Act, which does not require Congressional approval for designation of national monuments. Former President George W. Bush used the same authority in 2009 to designate the original, smaller version of PRIMNM ([MPA News 10:7](#)), whose boundaries extended 50 nm from each of the atolls and islands.

In June 2014, when President Obama first announced his intent to expand PRIMNM, he proposed expanding the MPA's boundaries to 200 nm from each atoll and island ([MPA News 15:6](#)). This would have created an MPA of 2 million km<sup>2</sup>. Following a public consultation process in which the government received more than 170,000 comments on that proposal, President Obama implemented a smaller expansion: extending the protection around Wake, Jarvis, and Johnston to 200 nm, but leaving the remaining sites' boundaries at 50 nm.

The larger June proposal was opposed by some commercial fishing organizations, including the American Tunaboat Association, the Hawai'i Longline Association, and the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council (WPRFMC), which oversees fisheries in Western Pacific waters of the US. Anti-expansion arguments included that the move would displace some fishing activity and that such a large and remote protected area would be difficult to enforce. When President Obama proclaimed the smaller-than-proposed expansion in September, the WPRFMC expressed appreciation for the compromise (<http://bit.ly/WPRFMCrelease>).

US Secretary of State John Kerry said the Obama Administration recognizes the enforcement challenge. "MPAs are not going to be effective if no one's monitoring them," he said. "And the kind of enforcement that we're going to need [for PRIMNM] is going to take training; it's going to take resources."

### Report on scientific basis for expansion

The scientific basis for the MPA's expansion, as well as potential economic impacts from it, were laid out in a May 2014 report produced by Marine Conservation Institute and National Geographic, available at [www.marine-conservation.org/media/filer\\_public/filer\\_public/2014/06/17/primnm\\_expansion\\_report.pdf](http://www.marine-conservation.org/media/filer_public/filer_public/2014/06/17/primnm_expansion_report.pdf). Marine Conservation Institute was also instrumental in lobbying for the original 2009 designation of PRIMNM by former President Bush.

"When the story of marine conservation is written, President Obama's efforts to expand Pacific Remote Islands Marine Monument and create the largest strongly-protected area on the planet will surely be one of the greatest achievements," said President Lance Morgan of Marine Conservation Institute.

The presidential proclamation is at <http://bit.ly/PRIMNMexpansion>.

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