

MPA NEWS



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US Marine Sanctuaries Law Reauthorized

President Clinton signed a bill on November 13 to reauthorize the US National Marine Sanctuaries Act (NMSA). The reauthorized NMSA entails some changes in the law, including a new requirement that the US' existing national marine sanctuaries be deemed to have "sufficient resources" to implement their management plans before any new sanctuaries are designated. The reauthorized law also allows the US President to designate any coral reef in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI) as a "coral reef reserve" to be managed by the US Secretary of Commerce.

This is the second time this year the NWHI coral reef ecosystem has been in the nation's news. In late May, President Clinton initiated a 90-day review process with state and regional stakeholders to decide whether more protection was needed for the NWHI coral reefs, which account for 70% of US coral reefs. As of mid-November, no recommendation had yet been announced.

The reauthorized bill also creates a scholarship program in honor of the late Nancy Foster to provide financial support for graduate students in the fields of oceanography, marine biology, and maritime archeology. Foster, a former director of the National Marine Sanctuary Program, served most recently as assistant administrator for the US National Ocean Service.

Innovative management

The new NMSA also encourages the application of innovative management techniques in the sanctuaries. Dan Basta, acting director of the National Marine Sanctuary Program, said this fits well with the program's current direction, which he characterized as having a new focus on ecosystem-based management.

For the program's three sanctuaries off the central California coast, Basta has initiated a project to facilitate their management as a system rather than as three independent sites. The three sanctuaries are in Monterey Bay, the Gulf of the Farallones, and Cordell Bank. He anticipates starting the project in earnest early in 2001.

The program is also backing a proposed project to educate the public on the connected marine systems through the Gulf of Mexico and up the southeast coast of the US. Called "Islands in the Stream", the project would feature a research cruise from Belize to the US state of North Carolina with stops at ports along the way.

Basta said the platform would be good for raising public awareness about the connectedness of the regional ecosystem. "If you're looking to educate, event-driven projects really get people's attention," he said.

For more information:

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