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US President Bush Considers Major New MPAs for Central and Western Pacific

US President George W. Bush has directed his administration to assess whether large marine areas under US jurisdiction in the central and western Pacific should receive greater protection, such as through designation as MPAs. In the central Pacific, this includes the waters surrounding Johnston Atoll; Howland, Baker, and Jarvis Islands; Kingman Reef; Palmyra Atoll; Wake Island; and Rose Atoll. In the western Pacific, the area includes waters around the northern islands of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, including parts of the Mariana Trench.

The areas in question are enormous. The central Pacific areas, for example, total more than 2 million km². President Bush asked his administration to consider "cultural, environmental, economic, and multiple use implications of any [recommended] measures," including the measures' compatibility with various extractive activities, such as fishing, petroleum drilling, and mining. His memo, titled "Potential Marine Conservation Management Areas", is available at www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2008/08/20080825-2.html.

"President Bush is on the cusp of conserving more ocean territory than any leader has ever done," said Fred Krupp, president of Environmental Defense Fund. "That's an amazing legacy to leave the nation."

Elliott Norse, president of Marine Conservation Biology Institute, says protection of these areas will depend on the amount of public support the Bush administration receives in favor of conservation. "This is not a done deal," says Norse. "Everything will depend on who the administration hears from and the quality and quantity of information it receives." Norse says safe havens in the Pacific are needed for corals, migratory species, and big fish species that are in decline. He would like to see the administration protect the entire EEZ of the central Pacific areas in question (with the exception of Rose Atoll, whose governor supports a smaller area), and to apply full no-take regulations. Norse encourages US citizens to let the Bush administration know their position on this issue.

For more information

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