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## **NORTHWESTERN HAWAIIAN ISLANDS TO BECOME WORLD'S LARGEST MARINE PROTECTED AREA**

HONOLULU - Calling it one of the most significant marine conservation initiatives in the history of the state and the nation, Governor Linda Lingle today praised the announcement by the Bush Administration's Council on Environmental Quality to establish the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands as a National Monument. The designation would make the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands the largest marine protected area in the world.

"This federal action complements our Administration's recent designation of all state waters in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands as a fully protected state marine refuge," said Governor Lingle. "This seamless partnership between the state and federal government, environmental conservationists, and Native Hawaiian organizations will preserve this special chain of atolls and reefs as a natural and cultural legacy. Together, we are proud to continue our commitment to preserve Hawai'i's natural resources for future generations."

Since signing administrative rules last September to establish all state waters in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands as a marine refuge, Governor Lingle and her Administration have worked closely with the federal government to impose similar extraction bans in federal waters.

In December, Governor Lingle; Jim Connaughton, chair, White House Council on Environmental Quality; Jean-Michel Cousteau, founder and president of Ocean Futures; and other federal and state officials visited the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands and Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge.

"Having visited the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands with Jean-Michel Cousteau, I can attest that this is a special place worthy of the highest levels of protection," said Governor Lingle. "I want to thank President and Mrs. Bush, Jim Connaughton of the White House Council on Environmental Quality, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and our other federal and state partners for bringing us to this very important milestone in the preservation of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands."

Governor Lingle, along with Peter Young, director of the Department of Land and Natural Resources, and Sen. Fred Hemmings represented the State of Hawai`i at today's announcement at the White House.

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