

Threats to the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Ecosystem and Culturally Important Sites

In 2000, NOAA asked the people of Hawai'i what were the main threats that faced the NWHI. Following are the concerns compiled by the NWHI hui that were raised in scores of public meetings and consultations over the past five years. Uncontrolled, illegal, and uninformed access is a serious threat to the ecosystem and to the fragile cultural artifacts, historical relics and burial sites on the lower islands. Increased access leads to the increased potential for errors, landings that can introduce invasive species, disrupt habitat, and violate cultural sites. Currently federal Wildlife Refuges and State Refuge provide sharply-limited access.

Marine debris

Allowing new commercial activities in NWHI

Commercial fishing, including

- The tropical aquarium fish trade
- The live reef fish trade for restaurants and markets
- Mining of corals, sands, deep-sea minerals
- Opening up the closed NWHI lobster fishery
- Expansion of the bottomfish fishery
- Trolling
- Establishment of "coral reef fisheries."

Bio-prospecting

Recreational fishing, including charters, fishing clubs, etc. "Recreational" fishing in the NWHI has often been thinly disguised commercial harvesting.

Increased human impact on fragile ecosystem as result of Reserve and Sanctuary designation.

Increased public attraction to the NWHI through the World Heritage nomination and designation process, sanctuary designation, films, etc. encouraging the public to "explore or experience" the NWHI. Core message must be: *"bring the place to the people, not the people to the place."*

Landing on Islands (refuge from storm conditions, repairs, resting, or for exploration).

Eco-tourism and "educational" tourism and related activities in new areas; airplane and helicopter tours, (buzzing of monk seal and turtle breeding & nursing grounds).

Yachts and sailboats

Extreme sports, including personal watercraft, diving with wild animals, sailboarding, surfing, parachutes, etc.

Cruise ship access

Military use

- Military storage, use, and disposal of hazardous materials,
- Military research including sonar, other invasive or polluting technologies,
- Military exercises, war games, and bombing,
- Deteriorating WWII structures.

Invasive Species lack of required protocol outside of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Refuges for any of the ships (cruise ships, fishing vessels researchers, etc.) accessing the area, ships from foreign ports

Research and "Educational" activities

- a massive increase in NWHI "research" activities since the NWHI Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve was designated,
- Lack of prioritizing of research to meet NWHI management needs,
- Lack of monitoring, oversight or assessment of proposed research,
- Research or educational activity that disturbs monk seal colonies, leads to monk seal morbidity and mortality,
- "Research" performed by commercial fishing vessels,
- Marine testing and research with sonic devices,
- Sophisticated new technologies allowing access to pristine parts of the ecosystem such as re-breathing devices and robotic submersibles.

Dumping: Deep sea dumping of debris, dumping of CO₂, and vessel effluent.

Shipwrecks/vessel groundings (see recent information on the Casitas).

Permit Review process

- Lack of adequate scientific review by independent scientists,
- Lack of public input into permitting review (state Refuge requires public comment for all state permits; permit process currently hidden from public view for federal waters),
- Permits have issued by NOAA for damaging activity, including dumping of black water into the Reserve waters.

Anchor damage to coral reefs.

Construction and Dredging

Poaching

Lack of enforcement

- Lack of VMS, lack of significant penalties for violations of conservation regulations.
- Lack of surveillance and monitoring for illegal activity and unauthorized access.
- Lack of U.S. Coast Guard enforcement activity

Intensive campaign by Wespac targeting the Executive Orders and NWHI protections.