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*The Honorable Michael K. Simpson, Chair
Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives, RHOB B-308
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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

Marine Conservation Institute, based in Seattle, WA, is a nonprofit conservation organization that uses the latest science to identify important marine ecosystems around the world, and then advocates for their protection for us and future generations. I wish to thank the members of the Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies for the opportunity to submit written testimony on the FY 2014 appropriations in regards to the US Fish and Wildlife Service's (FWS) National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS), particularly the monuments and refuges that conserve marine environments. Marine Conservation Institute is a member of the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE), a coalition of over 20 wildlife, sporting, and conservation organizations advocating for the National Wildlife Refuge System. **Marine Conservation Institute specifically requests \$6.8 million, an increase of \$1.8 million, to more adequately manage and protect the marine national monuments in the Pacific in 2014.**

President George W. Bush established four marine national monuments in the Pacific Ocean: Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument, Marianas Trench Marine National Monument, Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument, and Rose Atoll Marine National Monument. Together, these monuments protect approximately 335,348 square miles of marine habitat, and constitute about one-third of the entire NWRS. The four monuments include 12 marine refuges and more than 20 islands, atolls and reefs spread across the Pacific Ocean. Each monument was designated because of its individual ecological and cultural uniqueness.

However, many years after the establishment of these monuments, Marine Conservation Institute is greatly concerned that the NWRS lacks adequate resources to effectively protect and conserve the lands and waters of all four monuments. Marine Conservation Institute believes that even in these difficult budget times, protecting these ocean treasures should be a priority.

According to the National Ocean Economics Program, the US ocean and coastal economy contributes more than \$258 billion to our nation's GDP annually. Compared to other marine ecosystems, the marine monument ecosystems are relatively intact, rich in biodiversity and relatively free from the problems plaguing many other marine ecosystems: over-exploitation, disturbance, and pollution. Using these remarkably intact tropical ecosystems, US scientists are

developing an understanding of what healthy and productive places really look like, which helps us identify negative impacts to marine ecosystems closer to home and shows us the benefits of restoration activities.

Significance of our Nation's Marine National Monuments

Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument

Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument, also referred to as the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, is the largest conservation area (139,797 square miles) under US jurisdiction. It was established to protect the exceptional diversity of natural and cultural resources. The monument is home to millions of seabirds, an incredible diversity of coral reef species, and the highly endangered Hawaiian monk seal. Approximately 90% of Hawaii's green sea turtles nest in the monument, as do about 99% of the world's population of Laysan albatross and 98% of the black-footed albatross. In 2010, the Monument was designated as a World Heritage Site by the United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), expanding recognition globally of the Monument's unique natural and cultural resources.

Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument

The Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument contains some of the last remaining, relatively intact coral reef and pelagic ecosystems in the Pacific Ocean. Any one of the seven coral islands within the monument contains nearly four times more shallow water, reef-building coral species than the entire Florida Keys. The monument provides habitat for an estimated 14 million seabirds and many threatened or endangered species, such as leatherback, loggerhead, and green sea turtles; humphead wrasse; bumphead parrotfish; and the globally depleted giant clam. An estimated 200 seamounts, most of which have yet to be identified or explored, are predicted to exist within 200 nautical miles of the seven islands. Seamounts are important biodiversity hotspots because they provide habitat and localized nutrients for many species, including commercially important species, in the vast pelagic waters of the Pacific.

Rose Atoll Marine National Monument

Rose Atoll Marine National Monument is home to a very diverse assemblage of terrestrial and marine species, many of which are threatened or endangered. Rose Atoll supports 97% of the seabird population of American Samoa, including 12 federally protected migratory seabirds and 5 species of federally protected shorebirds. Rose Atoll is the largest nesting ground in the Samoan Islands for threatened green sea turtles, and is an important nesting ground for the endangered hawksbill turtle. Rose Atoll also provides sanctuary for the giant clam, whose population is severely depleted throughout the Pacific Ocean.

Marianas Trench Marine National Monument

The Marianas Trench Marine National Monument protects areas of biological, historical and scientific significance. The monument is home to many unusual life forms found in its boiling and highly acid waters, highly diverse and unique coral reef systems (more than 300 species of stony coral), and an astonishingly high population of apex predators such as sharks, an indicator

of a healthy ecosystem. The monument also encompasses the Mariana Trench, the deepest ocean area on Earth, which is deeper than Mount Everest is tall.

Marine National Monument Management

Through the FWS, the Department of the Interior is a co-trustee of Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument in partnership with the Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and the State of Hawaii. In the case of Marianas Trench, Pacific Remote Islands, and Rose Atoll Marine National Monuments, FWS NWRS has overall management responsibility, but works in partnership with NOAA on managing fishing in the outer waters of each monument.

Management Needs

Unfortunately many years after the establishment of these monuments, inadequate funds have left most monument management plans and fishing regulations unfinished and most islands remain essentially unmanaged and unmonitored. Without adequate funding to conserve, restore and protect our nation's marine monuments, the marine monuments continue to be vulnerable to: illegal fishing, accidental ship groundings and oil spills, and introduction of invasive species. There have been several documented cases of both illegal foreign fishing and illegal trespass by commercial and recreational vessels. Additionally, millions of dollars have already been spent to remove invasive species to protect important seabird colonies.

The NWRS received approximately \$4.6 million for management of all four marine national monuments in FY 2013. This is a decrease of \$1.0 million from FY 2012 levels, severely decreasing science capabilities and visitor services. Cutting visitation to Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument closes the public's only window into these magnificent marine places.

Of the remaining \$4.6 million in FY 2013, only 20% (\$0.9 million) of the NWRS monument funding provides resources for monument resource management, restoration, and research. The remaining \$3.7 million helps FAA maintain the airfield at Midway Atoll (northern end of Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument) for emergency commercial airplane stopovers transiting the Pacific Ocean. Without Midway, those aircraft would need to alter their routes, incurring additional flight time and fuel costs. Congress has mandated the airfield remain open which has caused strain on NWRS' science capabilities and visitation opportunities at Midway Atoll.

Additionally, a recent severe storm destroyed vital infrastructure at Tern Island located within Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument. Tern Island facilities provided critical space for government employees and university researchers to conduct vital research and monitoring efforts on corals, seabirds, sea turtles, and marine mammals. However, these critical facilities for providing food storage, safe water, equipment storage and shelter were destroyed in the recent storm. FWS estimates the cost of repairs at \$5,000,000.

Appropriations Needs

Marine Conservation Institute requests that the subcommittee increase funding for NWRS operations by \$1.8 million in 2014 to better manage our nation's marine monuments. An additional \$1.0 million in 2014 directed towards Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument could help to reinstate visitation and science capabilities at Midway Atoll and begin to restore research capabilities at Tern Island.

Furthermore, an additional \$0.8 million would allow FWS to provide adequate management of the three newest monuments. Funding is needed to hire managers for Marianas and Pacific Remote Islands (a Rose Atoll Manager has been funded over the last several years); hire one public planner position to aid in management responsibilities; and pay for associated administrative costs such as office space and travel. Additional funds would help address invasive species that are hurting native wildlife populations, provide surveillance and enforcement capabilities and strengthen partnerships with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and US Coast Guard.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our views.



Emily Douce