

U.S. creates Hawaiian Marine Reserve

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U.S. President George W. Bush has designated the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands a national monument, making it the world's largest protected marine reserve.

The Thursday designation covers about a 100-mile-wide, 1,400-mile-long Pacific area that supports more than 7,000 marine species, many of which are found nowhere else on Earth, The Washington Post reported.

The uninhabited islands in the area include nearly 70 percent of the United State's tropical, shallow-water coral reefs, a rookery for 14 million seabirds, and the last refuge for the endangered Hawaiian monk seal and the threatened green sea turtle, the newspaper said.

The designation means the new national park -- larger than 46 of the 50 states and bigger than all other U.S. national parks combined -- has also become the world's largest protected marine area, surpassing Australia's Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

Officials say the designation means the end of all fishing in the area within five years and a prohibition against removing any wildlife, coral or minerals from the zone. Visitors wishing to snorkel, dive or take photographs will have to obtain a federal permit.

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