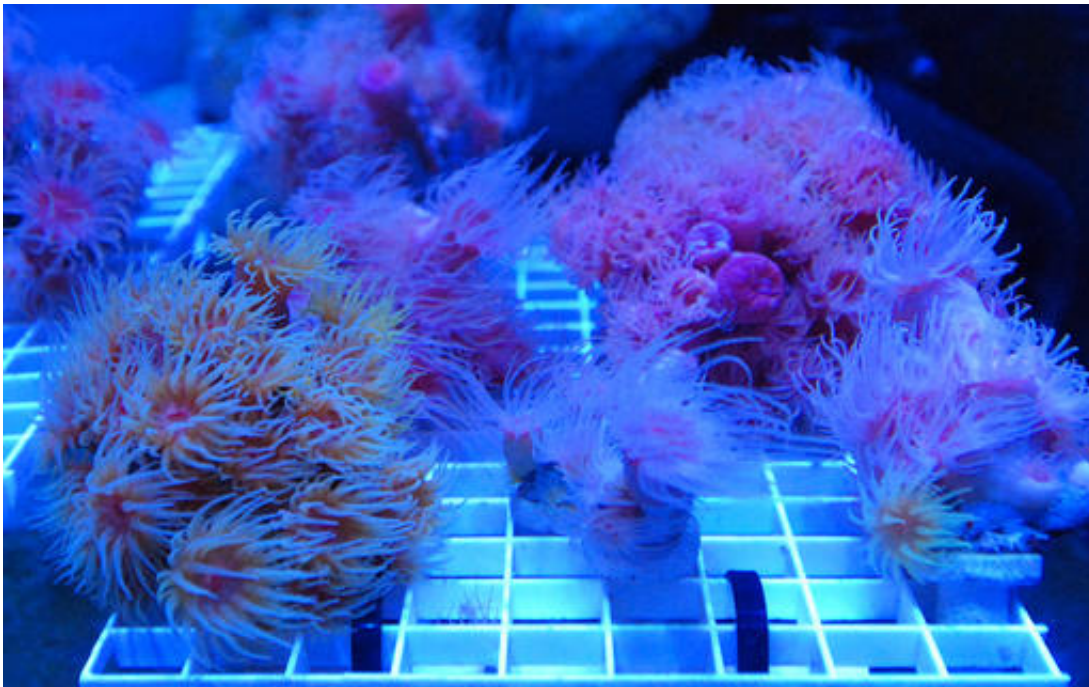


Global warming is key topic at Hawaii conservation congress

September 2 2016, by Caleb Jones



In this Feb. 11, 2016 file photo, rare species of Hawaiian coral being used to create a seed bank grows in a tank at a coral nursery in Honolulu. At the largest international gathering of coral reef experts in May, scientists called for action to save the world's reefs. The international community is coming together to address global warming, wildlife trafficking and environmental conservation at the World Conservation Congress in Hawaii. The start of the International Coalition for the Conservation of Nature World Conservation Congress, which is being held in the U.S. for the first time, began Thursday, Sept. 1, 2016 with a Native Hawaiian ceremony. (AP Photo/Caleb Jones, File)

The international community came together Thursday in Hawaii for 10 days of talks by leading academics, conservation groups and government officials to address the impacts of global warming, wildlife trafficking and environmental conservation.

Hawaii Gov. David Ige announced a major sustainability initiative to preserve his state's delicate ecosystem at the opening ceremony of the International Coalition for the Conservation of Nature World Conservation Congress —committing to protect more watershed areas and reefs ecosystems through increased regulation .

Ige said Hawaii will also double its local food production to reduce dependence on many items shipped to the islands, and impose a biosecurity plan to remove and prevent the introduction of invasive species that harm local wildlife.

The measures come on top of an existing plan for Hawaii, which is the nation's most oil-dependent state, to become energy independent by 2045.

"As an island state, Hawaii is particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, including increased storms, coral bleaching as well as local impacts that place our reefs at risk," said Jack Kittinger, director of Conservation International's Hawaii program in a statement. "CI is grateful to the Governor for committing to protect our natural environment so that it can continue to benefit our communities now and into the future."



In this June 2, 2016 file photo, a Zimbabwe National Parks official inspects the stock during a tour of the country's ivory stockpile at the Zimbabwe National Parks Headquarters in Harare. The international community is coming together to address global warming, wildlife trafficking and environmental conservation at the World Conservation Congress in Hawaii. The start of the International Coalition for the Conservation of Nature World Conservation Congress, which is being held in the U.S. for the first time, began Thursday, Sept. 1, 2016 with a Native Hawaiian ceremony. (AP Photo/Tsvangirayi Mukwazhi, File)

The conference is being held in the U.S. for the first time, and Ige called Hawaii a "microcosm of our planet earth" but also the "endangered species capital of the world."

Also Thursday, President Barack Obama was travelling from Honolulu to one of the most remote corners of the Pacific Ocean—Midway Atoll—to amplify his call for global action on environmental protection.

In his latest conservation push, Obama is expanding the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument, which includes Midway, to four times its current size. Speaking to leaders of Pacific island nations ahead of his trip, Obama said that 7,000 species live in the waters, and 1 in 4 are found nowhere else in the world.

"Ancient islanders believed it contained the boundary between this life and the next," Obama told Pacific Island nation leaders Wednesday night before the conference started. "This is a hallowed site, and it deserves to be treated that way. And from now on, it will be preserved for future generations."

The marine monument will grow to 582,578 square miles under Obama's expansion, an area more than twice the size of Texas. The world's largest, the monument reflects Obama's strategy of using his executive powers to put lands and waters off-limits to development, despite concerns from critics who argue his heavy-handed approach comes at the expense of vulnerable local economies.



U.S. Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell addresses the gathering at the International Coalition for the Conservation of Nature World Conservation Congress opening ceremony, Thursday, Sept. 1, 2016, at the Neal S. Blaisdell Center arena in Honolulu. (Bruce Asato/The Star-Advertiser via AP)

A study released Wednesday ahead of the conservation conference concluded that Africa's population of savanna elephants is rapidly declining. The animals are in danger of being wiped out as international and domestic ivory trades drive poaching across the continent, the study said.

The African savanna elephant population plummeted about 30 percent from 2007 to 2014 and is currently declining at about 8 percent annually, according to the survey funded by Microsoft co-founder and philanthropist Paul Allen.

"If we can't save the African elephant, what is the hope of conserving the rest of Africa's wildlife?" asked elephant ecologist Mike Chase, the study's lead researcher.

After the most powerful El Nino on record heated the world's oceans to never-before-seen levels over the past two years, huge swaths of once vibrant coral reefs that were once teeming with life are now stark white ghost towns disintegrating into the sea.

The world's top marine scientists are still struggling to find the political and financial backing to tackle the loss of these globally important ecosystems.



Dancers from several halau perform with the Lalakea Foundation at the International Coalition for the Conservation of Nature World Conservation Congress opening ceremony, Thursday, Sept. 1, 2016, at the Neal S. Blaisdell Center arena in Honolulu. (Bruce Asato/The Star-Advertiser via AP)

At the largest international gathering of coral reef experts in May, scientists called for action to save the world's reefs.

Australia's famed Great Barrier Reef is among those hit hard, and the scientists urged the government of Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull to do more to conserve it.

"This year has seen the worst mass bleaching in history," the letter said. "The damage to this Australian icon has already been devastating."

The conference in Hawaii is hosting more than 8,000 people from 180 nations.

© 2016 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: Global warming is key topic at Hawaii conservation congress (2016, September 2) retrieved 9 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2016-09-global-key-topic-hawaii-congress.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--