

SeaStates 2017

Marine Protection in America's Ocean Areas



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Oceans are essential to human survival and prosperity, yet our activities are pushing many critical marine species toward extinction¹. Marine biologists suggest that the best way to maintain the oceans' diversity, abundance and resilience is to protect marine life in their ecosystems, especially in marine protected areas (MPAs) that minimize extractive activities such as fishing, mining and oil and gas development².

However, numerous MPAs lack the regulations and design characteristics critical to ensuring they successfully safeguard marine life³. No-take marine reserves, in contrast, prohibit all extractive activities and deliver the conservation benefits that marine life need to thrive⁴. Protecting biodiversity in marine reserves increases the abundance and diversity of marine life exported to surrounding areas^{4,5}, both securing food resources for millions of people and preventing loss of species. In this report we group these fully protected no-take marine reserves with large and isolated strongly protected MPAs³ where commercial extraction is prohibited, recreational fishing is by permit, carefully managed and highly restric-

tive, and subsistence use is minimal.

SeaStates is a rigorous, quantitative account of strongly protected MPAs in the waters of US coastal states and territories updated annually by the team at the Atlas of Marine Protection (mpatlas.org). First published in 2013, our annual reports are intended to be a tool to measure and evaluate the progress towards effective marine protection in US waters.

Strongly Protected MPAs

Areas where commercial extraction is prohibited, recreational extraction is by permit, carefully managed and highly restrictive, and subsistence use is minimal. As of this report, in addition to fully protected no-take reserves, the term has been used only to describe a few large, remote MPAs where the impact of recreational use by permit is minimal due to the isolated location, size and management structure of the MPA.

Our Findings

As of the end of 2017, the US has 23.2% of its waters in strongly protected MPAs. State and territorial waters have 1.3% of their waters in "strongly protected" MPAs while 23.9% of federal waters out to 200nm are strongly protected.

It should be noted that if the Pacific Islands are removed from the analysis, only 1.0% of state waters and 0.01% of federal waters are in "strongly protected" MPAs.

Marine Protection in 2017

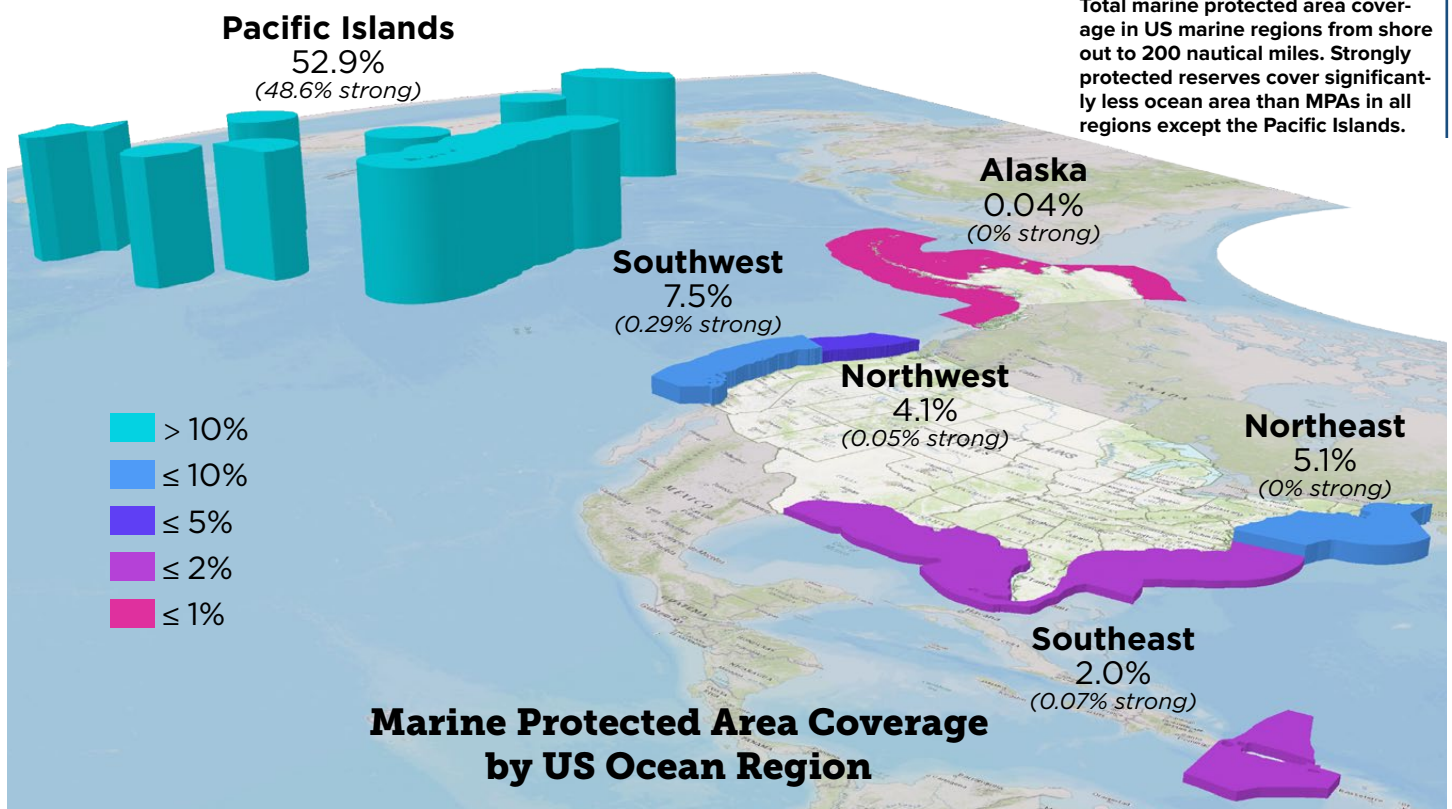
The greatest coverage of strongly protected MPAs once again is in the waters of Hawaii, American Samoa, California and the US Virgin Islands. With no new MPAs or reserves designated in the

past year there was little-to-no change in the official ranks for this report. Our strongly protected category includes all no-take areas plus Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument, Rose Atoll Marine National Monument and Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument.

If the Pacific Remote Islands and Rose Atoll Marine National Monuments are opened up to commercial fishing as currently proposed in a report by the Department of the Interior, US strongly protected numbers would drop from over 23% to only 12.5%.

Biogeographic Representation

Our ocean has many different habitat types with species assemblages unique to each one. While it is critically important that





Reef sharks amidst a school of anthias at Jarvis Island, part of the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument. (credit NOAA)

we balance protection across all habitats in each marine region, we have yet to achieve representative protection in the United States. Prior to President Obama's establishment of the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument, US marine protection was essentially limited to one large marine region in the central Pacific, leaving many unique habitat types in continental waters without protection. The creation of this new monument was a powerful step in the right direction, but its future existence is very much in doubt. Commercial fishermen in New England are fighting hard to roll back the protections from destructive bottom fishing and the Department of Interior has included the monument in its current recommendations to the Trump administration.

Marine Protection Under Threat

While there had been significant conservation progress in US waters under the Bush and Obama administrations, the current outlook for more progress is dim. Even more disturbingly, we face losing much of the progress made under the past several administrations as Trump and his appointees work to repeal regulations and remove environmental protections. There are existing recommendations to either alter the boundaries or open up areas to commercial fishing within three marine monuments. Without meaningful protection from commercial fishing, recreational use and oil and mining activity, these areas will become "paper parks" that provide no further conservation value than unprotected areas. Opening these areas to commercial fishing would cut America's strongly protected marine area in half.

Already, two large land monuments have been reduced and are being challenged in court by multiple environmental and native American groups. The Antiquities Act does not explicitly give presidents the right to alter existing monuments and previous changes were made out of public necessity or national emergency. If the president accepts the guidance of his Interior Secretary to alter marine monuments, there will be additional legal challenges likely to drag on for years.

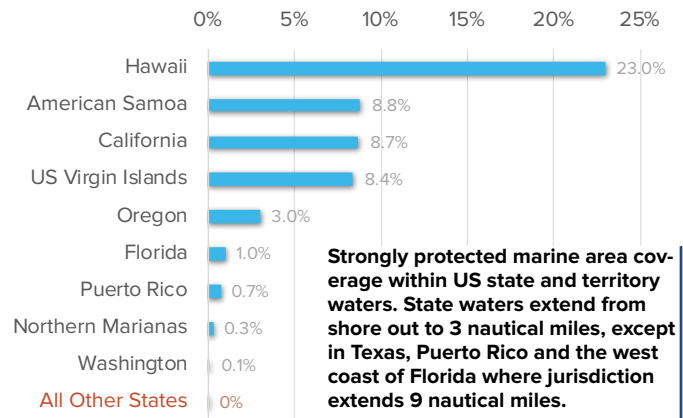
Recently, Congressmen Rob Bishop (R-Utah) introduced legislation, the National Monument Creation and Protection Act (H.R. 3990) to strongly curtail the ability of presidents to safeguard important national treasures through the Antiquities Act. The 1906 Antiquities Act, signed into law by President Theodore Roosevelt, has served as an important and powerful tool for the protection of important irreplaceable US wildlands and historical sites.

[map of monuments at risk on back](#) 

On the Road to 30%

Marine scientists recommend strongly protecting at least 30% of the ocean in ecologically representative and well-connected systems of marine protected areas or other effective conservation

Strongly Protected Marine Area Coverage by US States and Territories



measures. At the 2016 International Union for the Conservation of Nature's World Conservation Congress, a motion was passed by an overwhelming majority to protect at least 30% of each marine habitat in a network of MPAs with the ultimate aim of creating a fully sustainable ocean.

Currently only 2% of global oceans are in strongly protected MPAs that are fully designated and implemented and we have a long way to go until 30% is protected. While the US is likely to roll back its protections and relinquish its leadership on the global stage, many other countries have ramped up their efforts to meet their obligations under international agreements. In the short-term, the world is moving steadily towards fulfilling their promises under the Convention on Biological Diversity to protect 10% of marine waters by 2020. All countries but the US are now signatories to the Paris Climate Agreement, and the world is increasingly united in its efforts to protect our planet.

References

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Data Sources

Information used in this report was obtained on December 20, 2017. For current data, please consult <http://mpatlas.org>. We acknowledge NOAA MPA Center for original information about US marine protected areas.

Citation

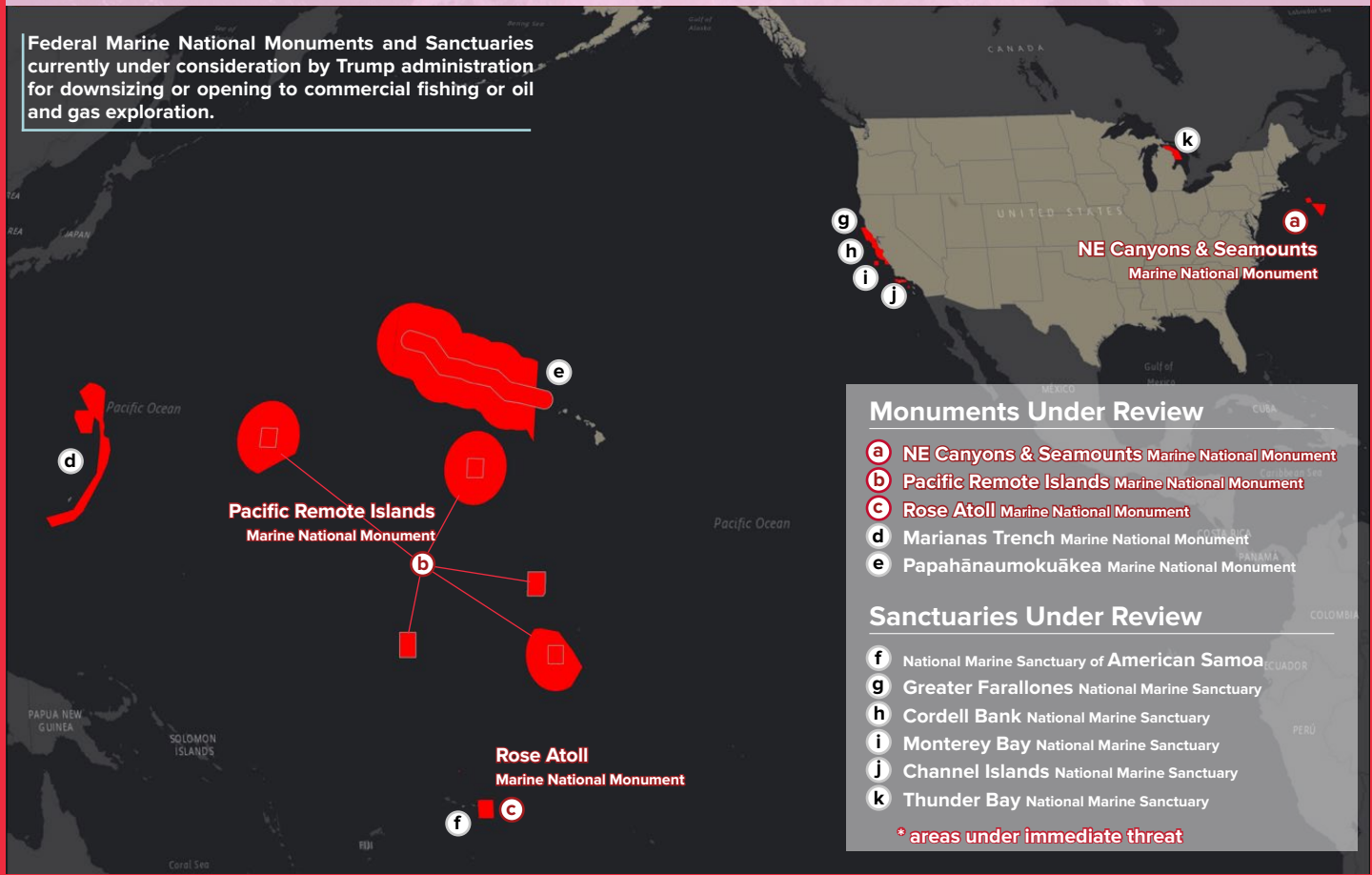
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Our Natural Heritage at Stake: Monuments & Sanctuaries Under Fire in 2018

After two decades of bipartisan commitment and leading the global effort to protect the world's oceans, the US has largely abdicated its leadership role. In 2017, President Donald Trump directed his administration to review these marine monuments shown below and consider reducing their size or re-opening them to commercial fishing. Any action to rescind these strong and meaningful protections would halve our waters protected from destructive human activity and render the monuments essentially "paper parks" lacking in any meaningful contribution to global marine conservation goals. This reduction starkly con-

trasts with the rest of the world as more countries push to meet commitments to protect 10% of their ocean area by 2020. At a time when clear leadership has never been needed more, the US is undermining this worldwide effort. In addition to the monuments, the administration is also reconsidering the protections from oil and gas exploration within our National Marine Sanctuaries, following a recent announcement to open over 90% of US waters to potential petroleum production. We have never faced such a reversal of conservation protections in our country's history.

Federal Marine National Monuments and Sanctuaries currently under consideration by Trump administration for downsizing or opening to commercial fishing or oil and gas exploration.



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