

PAPA HĀ NAUMOKUĀKEA

NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY



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Papahānaumokuākea National Marine Sanctuary encompasses 582,570 square miles of waters surrounding the remote northwestern Hawaiian Islands. Protecting the natural, cultural, and maritime heritage, this special place honors the inextricable link between nature and culture. The connected ecosystems are home to rare species such as the threatened honu (green sea turtle) and the endangered ʻĪlio holo i ka uaua (Hawaiian monk seal), more than 14 million seabirds, and 20 whale species. At least a quarter of the marine species in the region are endemic, found nowhere else on Earth. Papahānaumokuākea is a sacred place to Kānaka ʻŌiwi (Native Hawaiians), who regard the islands and wildlife as kūpuna (ancestors). Papahānaumokuākea is the only UNESCO mixed World Heritage site within the United States recognized for both its universal natural and cultural values.

ABOUT THE ARTWORK

The seascape of Papahānaumokuākea is like no other place on Earth. Its great cultural significance to Kānaka ʻŌiwi is represented through the art of wayfinding and stars at sunrise over Mokumanamana. It is abundant in apex predators like sharks and jacks, endemic species like the ʻĪlio holo i ka uaua and masked angelfish, and seabirds filling the skies. Papahānaumokuākea also holds tribute to a rich maritime history, including U.S. Navy aircraft, the Battle of Midway as represented through the USS *Yorktown*, and a try pot once used in commercial whaling to boil whale blubber into oil.



◀ **MOKUMANAMANA – A Sacred Boundary**
Situated on the Ke Ala Polohiwa a Kāne (Tropic of Cancer), Mokumanamana bridges the worlds of Pō (ancestral spirits) and Ao (living) and has great significance in Hawaiian culture.

WAʻA – Hawaiian sailing canoe ▶
Kānaka ʻŌiwi navigators have revived traditional wayfinding in Papahānaumokuākea, using the voyage from Niʻihau to Nihoa as a test of skills.



◀ **ʻĪLIO HOLO I KA UAUA – Hawaiian monk seal**
Decades of effort have supported the recovery of threatened and endangered species, like honu and the endemic ʻĪlio holo i ka uaua.

MARITIME HERITAGE ▶
In these waters, great naval battles, like the Battle of Midway, changed the course of history, and seafloor artifacts tell the story of commercial whaling.



◀ **BIODIVERSITY**
Scientists in Papahānaumokuākea use advanced dive gear to explore unsurveyed mesophotic reefs down to 330 feet. They have discovered reefs that contain the highest levels of endemic species found anywhere on the planet.

APEX PREDATORS ▶
Papahānaumokuākea is one of the last predator dominated ecosystems, with an abundance of sharks and large fish uncommon in populated areas.



QUICK FACTS

LOCATION

140 miles northwest of the Main Hawaiian Islands

PROTECTED AREA

582,570 square miles

DESIGNATION

January 2025

HABITATS

Abyssal
Pelagic
Seamount
Bank
Reef
Lagoon

KEY SPECIES

Calcareous algae
Corals
Endemic reef fish
Green sea turtle
Hawaiian monk seal
Sharks
Spinner dolphin
Seabirds

(Front) Illustration: Matt McIntosh/NOAA; (Back) Photos: (underwater coral and fish) James Watt/NOAA; (person on shore) Kaleomunuwa Wong; (Hawaiian sailing canoe) ʻĪlana Paikai/ʻŌiwi TV; (Hawaiian monk seal) James Watt/NOAA; (whaling trypot) Greg McFall/NOAA; (underwater reef) Greg McFall/NOAA; (shark in water with bird) Ilana Nimz/NOAA; (below) Andrew Sullivan-Haskins/Papahānaumokuākea Marine Debris Project

BELOW

Papahānaumokuākea is a vast and sacred space with limited human impact. This isolation has preserved these waters in a relatively pristine state, and the few visitors permitted to work here are like time travellers, experiencing a Hawaiʻi before human impact. Managing such a remote and expansive area requires extensive coordination, and presents unique challenges to maintain its natural character and honor its cultural significance.

AMERICA'S UNDERWATER TREASURES

NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries serves as the trustee for a network of underwater parks encompassing more than 629,000 square miles of marine and Great Lakes waters from Washington state to the Florida Keys, and from Lake Huron to American Samoa. For more information on the National Marine Sanctuary System, visit: sanctuaries.noaa.gov



● National Marine Sanctuary
Scale varies in this perspective. Adapted from National Geographic Maps.