The National Marine Sanctuary Program

In 1972, exactly 200 years after the first national park was created, the U.S. made another significant commitment to preserving marine resources by establishing the National Marine Sanctuary Program. Today, the National Marine Sanctuary Program includes 13 national marine sanctuaries and the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve, now being considered for sanctuary status. As a result of the nation’s marine protected areas, the NMSP works to conserve, protect, and restore the nation’s biodiversity, ecological integrity and cultural heritage. The NMSP also encourages more than 350,000 square miles of marine and coastal lands located in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands and from the Aleutian Islands to the American Samoa. The National Park Service oversees a network of national marine sanctuaries, including 119 sites, that span from the Aleutian Islands to the Virgin Islands. These sanctuaries are managed by the National Marine Sanctuary Program (NMSP), and they play a vital role in protecting and preserving marine resources.

What is a National Marine Sanctuary?

Our national marine sanctuaries embrace a part of our collective heritage as a nation. Within their protected waters, marine life, including the bluefin tuna and the rare silvery, coral communities, flourish, and they are home to a diverse array of marine species. National Marine Sanctuaries include beautiful rocky reefs, lush kelp forests, white sand beaches, deep-sea canyons, and submerged archaeological sites. Each sanctuary is managed by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, in accordance with the Marine Protection, Research, and Sanctuaries Act of 1972. This act established a national system of marine sanctuaries to preserve and protect the nation’s marine resources. The NMSP works to conserve, protect, and restore the nation’s biodiversity, ecological integrity, and cultural heritage. The NMSP also encourages the sustainable use of ocean resources through an ecosystem-based approach to management.

Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve

Since its inception, the reserve and its partners have been committed to supporting effective management and sound stewardship of the reserve and its associated resources. The reserve is a valuable resource for understanding the role of coral reefs in the ocean and their importance to the health of the planet. Through this commitment, the reserve aims to become a model for coral reef conservation.

What You Can Do

- Learn more about your ocean
- Join the National Marine Sanctuary Program
- Visit the NMSP website
- Attend a community meeting
- Support the NMSP
- Get involved and learn about the NMSP’s efforts to protect marine resources