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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 21, 2009

New NOAA Report Offers In-depth Look at Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Marine Life, Ecosystems

A new NOAA report on the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI), protected by the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument, provides the sharpest picture yet of the region's marine life and ecosystems.

Prepared by NOAA's National Center for Coastal Ocean Science, the report, *A Marine Biogeographic Assessment of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands*, examines the geographic distribution of the island chain's marine life and habitats, and the conditions that determine where they are found.

"This report provides an important summary of the monument's marine ecosystems," said Randy Kosaki, NOAA's monument deputy superintendent and research coordinator. "The report reveals patterns and details about species in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, helping us better understand this special place."

Significant findings highlighted in the report:

- There are approximately 80 types of coral in the NWHI, nearly half of which are found only in Hawaii
- More whale species use the NWHI than researchers previously thought. Fifteen whale species have been observed within the monument's boundaries, indicating the NWHI may be an important area for these animals
- The Laysan albatross, which nests and breeds in the NWHI, ventures more than 600 miles from the islands to obtain food, while other seabirds forage within only a few miles of the islands
- Half of the fish biomass in the NWHI is made up of large predators, such as sharks, jacks and grouper, which helps create a healthy, stable reef

"The ecosystems of the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument are relatively pristine," said Alan Friedlander, a University of Hawaii/U.S. Geological Survey fisheries ecologist and contributor to the NOAA report. "The dominance of top predators that we see in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands is rare and gives us new insight into how natural coral reef ecosystems should function."

Monument managers will use the report as a baseline to monitor changes in the NWHI, identify resource management and research priorities, and develop a Natural Resources Science Plan for conducting future studies in the NWHI. A draft of the monument's science plan will be available for public comment this summer.

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NOAA prepared the report with input from the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument co-trustee agencies, the University of Hawaii, the Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology, and the University of California, among others. The report is available online at <http://ccma.nos.noaa.gov/ecosystems/sanctuaries/nwhi.html>.

Nominated for consideration as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument is administered jointly by three co-trustees – the Department of Commerce, Department of the Interior and the state of Hawaii – and represents a cooperative conservation approach to protecting the entire ecosystem.

Co-trustee agencies, in cooperation with the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, manage the monument through the Monument Management Board. The monument area includes the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve, Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge/Battle of Midway National Memorial, Hawaiian Islands National Wildlife Refuge, Kure Atoll Seabird Sanctuary, and Northwestern Hawaiian Islands State Marine Refuge. For more information, visit <http://www.Papahanaumokuakea.gov>.

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CCMA Biogeography Branch: <http://ccma.nos.noaa.gov/about/biogeography/welcome.html>

Photos of the NWHI can be found at https://marinelife.noaa.gov/media_lib/index.aspx