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Hawaii Research Team is Awarded \$900,000 for Exploration of Papahānaumokuākea to Benefit Future Conservation Efforts

First award under new partnership to address research needs for the management and conservation of unique Hawaiian fish, wildlife and habitats

WASHINGTON, D.C. (APRIL 26, 2018) – The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation ([NFWF](#)) today announced that its [Papahānaumokuākea Research and Conservation Fund](#) will award a \$900,000 grant to a collaborative team of researchers from the Bishop Museum and the University of Hawaii to conduct a research expedition planned for the summer of 2018.

The inaugural grant was made possible by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration ([NOAA](#)), [Salesforce](#) CEO Marc Benioff and his wife Lynne, and with the strong support of U.S. Senator Brian Schatz (D-Hawaii). The grant will support research and conservation of Hawaii's unique resources in Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument ([PMNM](#)).

"The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation targets outcome focused grant making to promote the conservation and sustainability of the Nation's fish and wildlife," said Jeff Trandahl, executive director and CEO, NFWF. "In the case of Papahānaumokuākea, these natural resources are so unique and remote that the first step to conservation and management is increasing our understanding of these systems and threats to their survival."

Papahānaumokuākea is a remote archipelago of islands, reefs and atolls in the northwestern sector of the Hawaiian Island chain. Many of the thousands of species of fish and wildlife that inhabit this area are found nowhere else on Earth, including threatened and endangered species such as the Hawaiian monk seal, green sea turtle and Laysan albatross.

"Papahānaumokuākea is one of the greatest natural laboratories on Earth," said Randy Kosaki, NOAA's Deputy Superintendent and Research Coordinator for Papahānaumokuākea. "The work funded by this grant represents a unique opportunity to study the structure and function of a pristine coral reef ecosystem."

Much of the northwestern Hawaiian archipelago remains unexplored, particularly in depths of 100 feet or more. This collaborative research effort will focus on French Frigate Shoals (Kānemiloha'i), an ecologically important atoll where more than 90 percent of Hawaiian green sea turtles nest and a large portion of the northwest Hawaiian Island monk seal population reproduces.

The grant was made possible in part by a private donation from Marc and Lynne Benioff, who in 2016 established the [Benioff Ocean Initiative](#) to study and solve ocean issues around the world. The Benioffs are also supporters of the World Economic Forum's [Friends of Ocean Action](#), a

global partnership to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources, and have contributed to [The Ocean Cleanup](#), a nonprofit that aims to rid the world's oceans of plastic.

“The health of our oceans must be a global priority,” said Marc Benioff. “Lynne and I are honored to support some of the world's best ocean scientists in their study of Papahānaumokuākea. By furthering our understanding of the unique Hawaiian ecosystems in this special place, we'll be better equipped to protect our oceans for generations to come.”

Research activities will explore how changing environmental conditions will impact low-lying sand and coral reef habitats and associated species (turtles, seals, birds, fishes, coral, algae), explore and catalog the deeper mesophotic zone diversity, and understand trophic connections between shallow and mesophotic coral ecosystems at French Frigate Shoals (FFS). These research themes will help address management questions about the importance and interconnectivity of different habitats across the Hawaiian archipelago to help understand complex food webs, and allow for proactive management of environmental stressors like coral bleaching and sea level rise.

“It was important for us to secure funding for this research because of the potential it has for the monument, our ecosystem, and our planet,” said Senator Schatz, a member of the Appropriations Committee. “By leveraging funds from both the public and private sectors, we have the opportunity to better understand, manage, and conserve one of our most important natural resources. I look forward to seeing the results of this research cruise.”

In addition, several educational and awareness initiatives are being developed including interactive exhibits at Bishop Museum and NOAA’s Mokuāpapa Discovery Center.

“NOAA’s Office of National Marine Sanctuaries welcomes the collaborative partnership between the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and our program,” said Athline Clark, NOAA Superintendent for PMNM. “We hope the joint funding provided by both organizations will enhance research opportunities and inform management results.”

The Papahānaumokuākea Research and Conservation Fund is part of NFWF’s broader Hawaii Conservation Program. For more information on these initiatives, please visit www.nfwf.org/hawaiiconservation.

About the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation

Chartered by Congress in 1984, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) protects and restores the nation's fish, wildlife, plants and habitats. Working with federal, corporate and individual partners, NFWF has funded more than 4,500 organizations and committed more than \$4.8 billion to conservation projects. Learn more at www.nfwf.org.

About the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

NOAA’s mission is to understand and predict changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and to conserve and manage our coastal and marine resources. Join us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and our other [social media channels](#).

The Office of National Marine Sanctuaries serves as the trustee for a network of underwater parks encompassing more than 600,000 square miles of marine and Great Lakes waters from Washington state to the Florida Keys, and from Lake Huron to American Samoa. The network includes a system of 13 national marine sanctuaries and Papahānaumokuākea and Rose Atoll marine national monuments.

Papahānaumokuākea is cooperatively managed to ensure ecological integrity and achieve strong, long-term protection and perpetuation of Northwestern Hawaiian Island ecosystems, Native Hawaiian culture, and heritage resources for current and future generations. Four co-trustees - the Department of Commerce, Department of the Interior, State of Hawai‘i and the Office of Hawaiian Affairs - protect this special place. Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument was inscribed as the first mixed (natural and cultural) UNESCO World Heritage Site in the United States in July 2010. For more information, please visit www.papahanaumokuakea.gov.

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