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## OUR OPINION

# Funding approval just a start for NWHI preservation

### THE ISSUE

A Senate committee has cleared \$6.1 million for the newly designated national monument.

INITIAL approval of funds for America's newest national monument provides some assurance that its designation as a protected zone won't be in name only. Guidance and leadership from Hawaii's delegation should persuade Congress to deliver the necessary resources for management and preservation of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Marine National Monument.

Though pleased that President Bush designated the 140,000-square-mile area surrounding the northern islands of the archipelago for protection, Hawaii's Senator Inouye and Congressman Abercrombie both voiced uncertainty about funding for its operations.

"Without the funding to back up the high ideals that the president stated in his proclamation last month, the protection afforded to our islands would be a 'paper tiger,'" Inouye said.

As a senior member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, Inouye has the clout to secure funds as the panel approved \$6.1 million this week for research and management of the monument.

Abercrombie, who recently toured the Midway Atoll wildlife refuge, is concerned about enforcement of no-fishing regulations and should continue to pursue agreement from the Coast Guard to take on that task and the funding it will need.

The president's declaration will require working out a strategy for managing the islands under their new status. As a monument, commercial fishing will be phased out and other extractive uses banned. Ocean dumping and water craft also will be prohibited, but the area will remain open to Hawaiians for traditional activities.

Conservation and research will be primary, but it appears some tourism will be allowed. By next summer, the Star-Bulletin's Diana Leone reports, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service hopes to welcome visitors to Midway.

The atoll holds a landing strip for commercial and military aircraft and utilitarian amenities consisting of 36 hotel rooms in a former Navy building and a cafeteria-style dining facility. Though there is hot running water and air conditioning, the offerings are far from the Waikiki-hotel norm tourists might expect.

The wildlife service is trying to determine the number of visitors that can be accommodated without adverse effects, but doesn't expect more than 14 people a week because of airplane capacity and the expense of getting there. However, it isn't hard to imagine that if demand grows, more flights and more hotel rooms would become available.

As the nation's first and only marine monument, there is no blueprint for management of the islands, but since preservation is paramount, human footprints, if any, should be minimal.

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