

# Both Sides in Marine Monument Fight Invoke Hawaiian Culture

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In this July 4, 2015, photo provided by the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, G. Umi Kai uses a traditional Hawaiian hook to catch a fish at the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument.

As a Native Hawaiian living in modern Hawaii, one of the times Shad Kane truly felt connected to his ancestors was when he traveled to a remote, 140,000-square-mile area of the Pacific where islands, atolls, islets and coral reefs make up a federally protected marine monument.

There, at Midway Atoll, he plucked feathers from dead birds to make kahili — feathers mounted on a long wooden pole that was used to announce the presence of ancient Hawaiian chiefs and became a royal symbol during the Hawaiian monarchy.

"Going to Midway and being a part of gathering traditional birds in the manner they did is extremely spiritual," the suburban Honolulu man said this month. "It becomes much more personal for me."

He said seeing Midway strewn with remnants of fishing nets, buoys and hooks helped him realize the surrounding area needs protection, too.

This year, a group of Native Hawaiian leaders urged President Barack Obama to expand Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument, while keeping the main Hawaiian islands outside the boundaries. The move would make the monument about 582,000 square miles, more than twice the size of Texas.

The [White House](#) isn't indicating when a decision will be made. Obama also has been asked to designate new national monuments in Utah, Arizona, Nevada, Maine and elsewhere.

The effort to expand the Pacific monument has supporters and opponents invoking Hawaiian culture to further their agendas. Some believe expansion of one of the world's largest marine conservation areas will protect a sacred place, while others say making more waters off-limits will harm fishermen for a cause pushed by environmentalists with deep pockets.

A presidential proclamation established the monument in 2006. Only scientific research and cultural activities are allowed, with commercial fishing and recreational activities such as diving banned.

Getting there requires taking a flight to Midway Atoll or a sailboat. Under ideal ocean conditions, it takes about two days to sail from Kauai to Nihoa, the closest island to the main Hawaiian islands.

Some who say the area needs to be open for commercial fishing rely on an argument that's "completely contrary to the generation that preceded them that actually did go fish and understood the harmful effects" of overharvesting, said William Aila, deputy director of the Department of Hawaiian Home Lands.

Peter Apo opposes adding the massive area to the monument and said doing so contradicts the way ancient Hawaiians managed natural resources.

Apo is a trustee of the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, which supports expansion as long as the agency gets an official say in management of the area, including advocating for Native Hawaiian access.

It's difficult to be a Native Hawaiian and an expansion opponent, Apo said.

"We look like we're bad guys. We're opposing what seems to be addressing a global problem," he said of issues like [climate change](#) and overfishing that supporters point to.

He cited how Hawaiians utilized periods of kapu, or temporary restrictions in response to overharvesting.

"Food security was critical to Hawaiians," Apo said.

It's difficult to estimate the financial effect that expansion would have on the \$100 million per year longline industry, which supplies a large portion of the fresh tuna and other fish consumed in Hawaii, said Sean Martin, president of the Hawaii Longline Association.

He estimated about 2 million pounds of fish annually come from the proposed expansion area, where vessels string lines ranging from a mile to 50 miles long in the ocean to catch fish.

G. Umi Kai, who uses his spare time to craft traditional implements such as wooden weapons and fish hooks made of bone, experienced the tranquility, isolation and fragility of the area when he visited last year.

He fished off rocky shores of two islands in the monument to see if his traditional bone hooks really worked. It was an ideal place for the test, he said, "because the environment was closer to the way Hawaii was 100 years ago."

Aila, of the home lands department, said he hopes the issue will draw Obama to an international environmental conservation gathering scheduled for next month in Honolulu.

By expanding the monument, Aila said the president could build a legacy as well as commit the U.S. to fighting environmental problems such as climate change and coral bleaching, which occurs when warm waters lead coral to expel the algae they rely on for food.

Opponents hope the president sees how divisive the issue is.

"I'm not sure that Obama, who was born, raised here, wants to leave a legacy of a divided Hawaii," Apo said.