

The screenshot shows the Earth Island Journal website. At the top, the title "Earth Island Journal" is displayed in a large serif font, with the tagline "News of the World Environment" below it. A search bar is located in the top right corner. Below the title, there is a navigation menu with links for "Home", "Current Issue", "Latest News" (which is highlighted), "Archive", and "About". On the left side, there are social media sharing buttons for "Tweet", "Like" (with a count of 23), and "G+", along with the Earth Island Institute logo. The main content area features a "Latest News" section with a headline: "Four Pacific Marine National Monuments Face Threat Under Trump Order" by Christopher Pala, dated August 14, 2017. A sub-headline reads: "Fishing interests push to roll back the world's biggest set of ocean reserves as Secretary Zinke prepares recommendations". On the right side, there is a "SUBSCRIBE TODAY" promotion for \$15 a year, featuring a cover image of the journal with the headline "THE END FOR ELEPHANTS?".

This is Kitty Simonds' moment.

For the four decades that she has been running an obscure but powerful federal fisheries management agency in Honolulu, Simonds has fought tooth and nail against any restrictions on fishing in the waters surrounding US possessions in the Pacific, from Hawaii to the Northern Marianas.

And for four decades, the restrictions have done nothing but grow — particularly the no-fishing marine reserves that have, as she puts it, “engulfed” more than half the US waters in the Central Pacific for, she believes, no useful purpose.



Photo by [Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument](#) Fish on a deep reef in Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument. Papahānaumokuākea is one of four marine monuments currently under review by the Trump Administration.

But today, Simonds is attempting to harness the ideology of the Trump administration with a campaign named “Make America Great Again: Return US Fishermen to US Waters.” It aims to roll back the world’s biggest set of marine reserves — no matter that the fishing closures have had no perceptible effect on ever-increasing catches of over-fished [species](#), or that most of the Hawaii commercial fishing fleet is crewed by poor foreigners working in [slave](#)-like conditions.

Simonds’ opening came on April 25, when President Donald Trump signed an executive order asking Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke to review 27 national monuments created under the 1906 Antiquities Act since 1996, with an eye to rescinding or shrinking them or simply allowing economic activities like mining or drilling.

The Antiquities Act empowers the president, without the consent of Congress, to turn federal lands containing “historic landmarks, historic and prehistoric structures, and other objects of historic or scientific interest” into “national monuments,” which protects them from any extractive use. It does

not provide for the president cancelling the designation, although Congress may do so.

Trump's focus is squarely on the more controversial monuments on land, particularly Bears Ears in Utah. But caught in the dragnet of the 27 monuments are four marine monuments in the Pacific as well as one off the New England coast, all established in the last decade.

More than a million public comments were submitted and Zinke is expected to submit his recommendations on August 25.

One public comment is especially likely to get an attentive reading: the 12-page letter submitted by Simonds, whose title is executive director of the Western Pacific Fisheries Management Council, known as Wespac. Her letter claims that “each designation and expansion ... curtailed economic growth” and “placed an economic burden on the region's fishing and indigenous communities.” In a [presentation](#) this year, she [claimed](#) the monument “compromised national food security.” She called for fishing — supervised by Wespac — to be re-established in all Pacific marine monuments.

Ray Hilborn, a fisheries scientist at the University of Washington who sits on the Hawaii council's scientific committee, call the monuments “Fake protection.” All they do, he says in an interview, is “force the fishermen to go farther and spend more fuel to catch the same fish.”

Mainstream marine scientists and conservationists are worried that Simonds' pleas to “change the monument boundaries” or remove the no-fishing provisions will hand Trump an opportunity to strike a blow against conservation science and create the illusion of bringing back well-paying fishing jobs lost to environmentalists.

In the Pacific, the giant — in name length as in area — is the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument. Established in 2006, and vastly expanded in 2016, it wraps around a 1,200-mile string of largely uninhabited islands, mostly atolls, geographically known as the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. The monument's name, chosen by two prominent Native Hawaiians, joins Papahānaumoku, a mother figure symbolizing the earth, and Wākea, a father figure representing the sky.

In 1996, soon after President Bill Clinton began his second term, Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt wanted to increase protection for oceans. In an [interview](#) a decade later, he told me the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands jumped out as needing protection first, and he began a long process to designate them a marine sanctuary, a status that sometimes allows fishing.

Near the end of his second term, Clinton, disappointed by the lack of progress largely due to Wespac's delaying tactics, considered using the Antiquities Act to protect the islands, Babbitt said. But when the secretary brought up the idea to Simond's close ally and former boss, Senator Daniel Inouye, the influential Democrat and longtime chairman or ranking member of a committee that oversees fishing, replied in essence, "Don't you dare," Babbitt said, and Clinton backed off, opting to start a much slower and weaker marine sanctuary process instead.

Meanwhile, in the late 1990s, an initially lucrative lobster fishery was spiraling out of control: as adult lobsters became scarce because of overfishing, Wespac authorized the Honolulu-based fishermen, in violation of elementary notions of fisheries management, to take small, juvenile lobsters (to be sold as "garnish") and females with eggs. In 2000, the fishery was closed by a federal court and the lobster population never grew back to its previous density, scientists say. A separate bottom-fish fishery involving just eight vessels "is not ecologically sustainable," a 2005 [study](#) found.

"It's precisely because fisheries mismanagement was so abysmal that the monument was created," said Jay Nelson, at the time the head of the Ocean Legacy program of the Pew Charitable Trusts and a strong backer of the monument designation.

Simond's council is one of eight set up nationally in 1976 by the Stevens-Magnuson Act to advise the National Fisheries Service on rules to frame commercial fishing in US waters. The act, which outlaws fishing an overfished stock, has turned the US into the world's best custodian of its fish stocks — but one that imports 90 percent of its seafood, much of it unsustainably caught.

All eight councils are dominated by fishing interests, not scientists, and are naturally skeptical of impediments to fishing like no-take marine reserves. Though all councils have marine reserves in their jurisdictions, Wespac

stands out, says Rick Gaffney, a former Wespac council member who also served on the Marine Protected Area Federal Advisory Committee and worked with colleagues on most of the seven other councils.



Photo by [Coast Guard News](#) A fishing boat is inspected by the US Coast Guard off Honolulu. The Hawaii fleet is exempted from US labor laws, and advocates have called the employment system a "human rights travesty."

"I've never seen any other council take such a consistently strident position against any and all marine protected areas," he says. He notes that Simonds is the longest-serving executive director of any fishery council and always secures the biggest budget, which allows her to effectively lobby on behalf the 140 longline vessels based in Hawaii that are her core constituency. "She's by far the most powerful of the eight council directors," he says.

"Among NOAA people, you mention Wespac and they roll their eyes," says Paul Achitoff, referring to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Achitoff is the Honolulu managing attorney for the non-profit Earthjustice, which has challenged in court many of Wespac's recommendations. "Wespac is the single most anti-conservation outfit in the Pacific," he adds.

One measure of Wespac's clout is that the Honolulu fleet is able to skirt the laws that require that three quarters of the crew of a US fishing vessel be US citizens, and that they be paid at least minimum wage. Thanks to Inouye's intervention on behalf of the Hawaii Longline Association, whose head is

usually a Wespac council member, the Hawaii fleet is exempted from US labor laws and is allowed to employ some 600 foreign crew hired abroad by middlemen for multi-year contracts, paid as little as a dollar an hour and not allowed to go ashore even when their vessel is in Honolulu. Kathryn Xian, head of the Pacific Alliance to Stop [Slavery](#), calls the system a “human rights travesty.”

When George W. Bush succeeded Clinton in 2001, he endorsed the marine sanctuary process that Clinton had started to end fishing in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. But in 2006, he lost patience with the lack of progress and became the first president to use the Antiquities Act to protect a piece of ocean for its scientific value. Papahānaumokuākea became the biggest no-take reserve in the world. In a compromise with Wespac, the destructive eight-vessel bottom-fish fishery was allowed to continue for four more years.

Simonds was undeterred. “We’re not asking the president to get rid of the monument, but we want to continue our bottom-fish fishery because it’s perfectly healthy,” she told me at the time. She said she wanted to start a sustainable fishery for reef fish and to harvest coral, two highly controversial practices.

When bottom-fishing ended in 2010, Inouye [obtained](#) an appropriation that gave \$288,502 to each of the 15 fishermen who had received lobster licenses (for free) and hadn’t fished in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands for 10 years. Jim Cook, then head of the longline association and a member of Wespac’s council, denied at the time that the lobster population was depleted and argued that each lobster fisherman should have received \$1.5 million in compensation.

Another \$2.2 million in public funds was distributed to the eight holders of (equally free) bottom-fish licenses.

Marine scientists say that at a time when world fishing fleets are getting their catch ever deeper and farther, giant marine reserves like Papahānaumokuākea serve a refuge for species like the bigeye tuna, the mainstay of the sashimi trade, whose numbers in the western and central Pacific have fallen to 16 percent of their unfished level.

Studies have shown that while some individual fishes will travel out of giant reserve and get caught, others will spend their whole lives inside. This allows the females to reach their full size and produce offspring with greater survival rates and in bigger numbers. More importantly, according to a [study](#) published earlier this year, the homebodies will pass on their lazy genes to their offspring and in time, the density of fish in the reserve will grow as fishers reduce the numbers outside it.

“The bigger the conservation area and the more fishing that goes on outside it, the faster the stocks will grow back inside it,” says lead author Jonathan Mee, a biologist in Calgary’s Mount Royal University.

The expected increase of density inside the monument of far-traveling, depleted species like bigeye tuna, billfish, sharks, sea birds, and turtles will have another benefit, according to Alan Friedlander, a marine ecologist at the University of Hawaii. Many seabirds depend on tuna to drive small fish to the surface, where the birds can scoop them up. “More tuna around the islands where seabirds nest means they won’t have to travel as far to feed their young, so they’ll be more productive,” he says. Seabirds are the bird group in greatest decline globally, a [study](#) found.

On January 6, 2009, two weeks before leaving office, Bush created three more marine national monuments.

The biggest, called the Pacific Remote Islands, included six islands: Wake and Johnston atolls, which host small military installations; Howland and Baker, which lie just north of Kiribati’s Phoenix Island Protected Area, a no-take zone since 2015 (and the world’s most fish-rich reserve); Jarvis and Palmyra, which holds a small, rotating scientific staff.



Photo by [USFWS - Pacific Region](#) Table corals in the Pacific Remote Islands Monument, one of three marine monuments created by President Bush during his final weeks in office.

Jane Lubchenko of Oregon State University, whom President-elect Barack Obama had already appointed as head of NOAA, said at the time that she had tried to persuade the Bush administration to protect the entire Exclusive Economic Zone of all the islands, stretching out to 200 nautical miles. But even though only about 8 percent of the Hawaii fleet's catch came from there, strong opposition from Wespac led Bush to ban fishing only in the first 50 nautical miles.

Bush's second-largest marine monument, called the Marianas Trench, was largely symbolic: it banned fishing in only a small area at the northern tip of the US Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas, just south of Iwo Jima, Japan, and much too far to be fished by the small fleet of near-shore vessels based in Saipan, in the south of the commonwealth. Public opinion and the Marianas chamber of commerce embraced the idea of a bigger monument, but local politicians came out scathingly against.

On a grant from the Fund for Investigative Journalism, I traveled in 2008 to Saipan, where Simonds was known affectionately as "the Queen of the Pacific." I [discovered](#) that the politicians who campaigned against the monument often had served on the Wespac council (and were paid \$734 a day to attend meetings). One, Arnold Palacios, then the speaker of the Commonwealth House of Representatives, had written to Bush that "the loss of control over such a vast area ... is an assault on the traditions and culture

of the islands.” Manny Duenas, a former Wespac vice-chair from Guam, which was not included in the monument, called it “a springboard to ensure the cultural genocide of a people.”

The third monument consists only of tiny Rose Atoll, near Samoa.

Obama, like Bush, waited six years before using the Antiquities Act for a marine monument. In 2014, he expanded the monuments of the coral islands of Wake, Johnston, and Jarvis to their entire EEZ, extending the diameter of each roundish monument from 100 to 400 nautical miles.

And in August 2016, he expanded the Papahānaumokuākea monument by extending its width from 50 to 200 nautical miles, making it by far the biggest in the world. With the stroke of a pen, he doubled the planet’s no-fishing area from 0.63 percent to 1.2 percent of the oceans. Finally, on September 15, Obama also designated the first marine monument outside the Pacific: the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument, located off the coast of [New England](#) south of Cape Cod.

Daniel Pauly, a fisheries scientist at the University of British Columbia, praises the extension of the Papahānaumokuākea, even if it displaced little fishing. Most of the big commercial species like bigeye tuna live south of the monument, he explains, but global warming is making equatorial waters too hot for them. “We’ve been seeing a general migration toward the poles since the eighties,” he says. “By 2040, we should be able to detect an increase in the tuna population inside the (Hawaii) monument.”

According to Wespac, the Hawaii longliners only caught 6.7 percent of bigeye tuna, the mainstay of the Hawaii longline fleet, in the area that Obama closed to fishing in 2016. And overall, their catch is on the rise: Between 2006, when Papahānaumokuākea was first designated, and 2015, the longliners’ take of bigeye tuna nearly doubled from 4,435 tons to 8,598 tons, according to NOAA figures.

“The longliner fleet had their most profitable year ever — *after* the monument was expanded,” said Sen. Brian Schatz, Democrat of Hawaii, in an interview in Washington. “I’m particularly passionate about Papahānaumokuākea and I believe strongly not only in what we did, but that we did it in the right way. It’s

puzzling in the extreme that they're (Wespac) pushing to amend what was a successful compromise.”

“The Hawaii-based longline industry continues to experience record bigeye catch, which demonstrates that it does not need the Pacific marine monuments to supply the market with tuna,” wrote Seth Horstmeyer, a director with the Pew Bertarelli Ocean Legacy project, in an e-mail.

During several years in which the longliners reached their international quotas before the end of the year, Wespac arranged for them to buy unused quotas from Samoa and Guam, defeating the *raison d'être* of the quotas: to prevent overfishing. As of August 7, 2017, the Hawaii longline fleet had already caught 94 percent of its quota and was expected to reach its limit by [September 1](#), according to NOAA.

Still, on December 16 of last year, Simonds sent a letter to Obama claiming the closure would cost 100 jobs and more than \$10 million. “We believe the federal government should mitigate these impacts through direct compensation,” she wrote. The council voted to “request the Trump Administration remove the monument’s (no-) fishing provisions” and repeated its request in its letter to Zinke.

“Since only American vessels can fish in American waters, reopening the monuments would give our fishermen a competitive advantage against foreign fleets,” says Eric Kingma, Wespac’s international coordinator. “Fishing in international waters is getting more and more competitive, especially because the China fleet is getting bigger,” points out Paul Dalzell, the council’s senior scientist.

Mike Gravitz, director of legislative affairs for the Marine Conservation Institute in Washington, thinks Simonds is facing an uphill fight. “Since they were using the monument waters so little, there are not a lot of monetary benefits to allowing fishing inside them,” he said. “Inouye [who died in 2012] is no longer there and now the whole Hawaii congressional delegation, the state legislature and the governor are all against change.” Whether this will motivate Zinke to let the fishing restrictions in the Pacific to stand when he announces his recommendations on August 25 is not a sure thing, he says. The Trump administration has been very unpredictable.

Link:

http://www.earthisland.org/journal/index.php/elist/eListRead/four_marine_national_monuments_pacific_face_threat_trump/