



KŪKULU KE EA A KANALOA
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Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Kaho'olawe Island Reserve Earns Prestigious Blue Park Award at the UN Ocean Conference for Outstanding Conservation Value



PC: Marine Conservation Institute

[Nice, France, 12 June 2025]— Marine Conservation Institute announced that Kaho'olawe Island Reserve won the prestigious gold-level Blue Park Award for exceptional marine biodiversity conservation today at the 3rd UN Ocean Conference. With this award, Kaho'olawe Island Reserve joins a growing network of 34 awarded Blue Parks around the global ocean that have met the highest science-based standards for conservation effectiveness.

Dr. Lance Morgan, President of Marine Conservation Institute, announced the 2025 Blue Parks at an event co-hosted by Marine Conservation Institute, the Republic of Costa Rica, the High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People, MigraMar, EarthEcho International, and The Blue Quest.

"We are honored to receive this Gold Blue Park Award. Receiving this Award is a powerful affirmation of our decades-long efforts to restore and protect the Kahoʻolawe Island Reserve. This recognition honors the cultural and ecological significance of the Reserve and affirms that our strong protective regulations, community engagement, and innovative management framework approach is making a real impact," stated Ashley Razo, Public Information Specialist for the Kahoʻolawe Island Reserve Commission.

The Kahoʻolawe Island Reserve surrounds the smallest of the main Hawaiian Islands, encompassing waters rich in biodiversity and cultural significance. The MPA is characterized by unique reef flats and serves as a crucial sanctuary for many fish species, exhibiting the highest fish biomass in the main Hawaiian Islands. The protected waters host a remarkably diverse array of marine life, including manō (sharks), naiʻa (dolphins), hāhālua (manta rays), koholā (humpback whales), ʻilioholoikauaua (monk seals), honu (turtles), and manu kai (seabirds).



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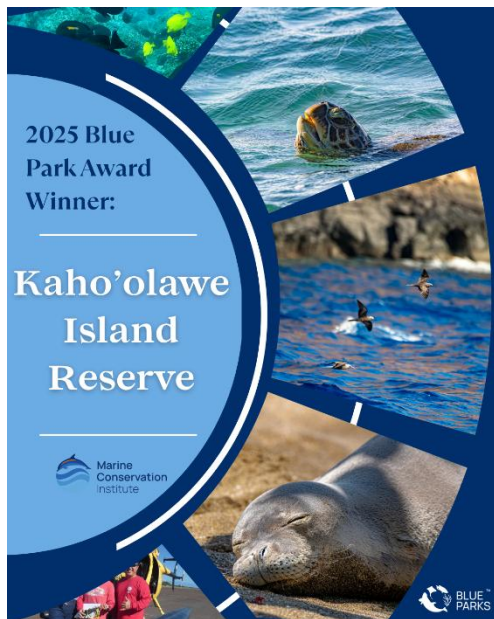
The MPA's management body, the Kahoʻolawe Island Reserve Commission, includes representation from the breadth of Hawaii's legislative and Indigenous voices and focuses on both ecological restoration and cultural preservation. They integrate traditional cultural practices into restoration efforts and allow only Traditional Hawaiian subsistence fishing to restore traditional management and cultural practices. Kahoʻolawe Island Reserve is a model for combining marine conservation with cultural revitalization.

"This award recognizes our integrated system approach in blending modern resource management techniques with a Native Hawaiian culturally appropriate framework designed to serve future generations. We are not only restoring ecosystems, but also ensuring access to marine and island resources for traditional practices and cultural perpetuation," expressed Michael Nahoʻopiʻi, Executive Director of the Kahoʻolawe Island Reserve Commission.

"Congratulations to the 2025 Blue Parks," Dr. Lance Morgan said. "To achieve the 30×30 target,

we not only need more protected areas, but we need those areas to effectively protect wildlife and deliver the conservation benefits that will support coastal communities. Blue Parks are incredible models of success, and the teams of ocean champions behind these efforts inspire us all.”

The Kaho‘olawe Island Reserve is the second Blue Park awarded in the state of Hawai‘i, following Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument in 2017, and the third in the United States overall. Since its launch in 2017, the Blue Parks initiative has recognized outstanding marine protected areas around the world that span more than 3.5 million square kilometers of ocean across 23 countries. Each Blue Park is thoroughly evaluated by an international panel of esteemed marine scientists to ensure it represents one of the most effective examples of marine life protection globally. The Blue Parks initiative highlights that the quality of protection, not quantity alone, is critical for the 30×30 target to achieve biodiversity conservation and restore ocean health.



About Blue Parks

The Blue Park Awards, established by Marine Conservation Institute in 2017, recognize marine protected areas that meet science-based standards for effective conservation. Blue Parks safeguard biodiversity, promote ecosystem resilience, and protect the natural beauty of our ocean for future generations.

Blue Sparks are collaborative marine conservation efforts that are making progress toward the Blue Park Standard.

About Marine Conservation Institute

Founded in 1996, Marine Conservation Institute is a U.S.-based nonprofit working globally to secure strong protection for at least 30% of the ocean by 2030. Through scientific research, policy advocacy, and initiatives like the Blue Parks and Marine Protection Atlas (MPAtlas.org), the organization works to ensure that ocean protection is both meaningful and lasting.

For further questions please contact:

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