



INTERAGENCY PRESS RELEASE

EXPEDITION

2002

NORTHWESTERN HAWAIIAN ISLANDS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Expedition 2002: Interagency Research Effort

(Honolulu, HI—September 4, 2002)—A *hui* of scientists and educators leave Sunday, September 8, 2002 for a four-week expedition expected to uncover more about the vast Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI) ecosystem. Called NOWRAMP 2002, the NWHI Reef Ecological Assessment and Monitoring Program is a multi-agency effort involving two vessels.

Media Note: The expedition launches Sept. 8 from the U.S. Coast Guard Station at Sand Island. Participants will be available for interviews dockside the morning of Sept. 8 from 10:45 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. All media attending must provide names in advance, and show identification to Coast Guard.

Primary collaborators are the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) National Ocean Service and National Marine Fisheries Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the State Department of Land and Natural Resources, along with the University of Hawai'i, Bishop Museum, National Park Service, and others.

It is the second multi-vessel expedition of this type and the first to include maritime archaeologists who will, for the first time, investigate sunken ships in the 1,200 mile area. The first NOWRAMP expedition in 2000 assessed the NWHI for biodiversity, status and management needs.

"We are so privileged to have the best people and resources available to participate in this rapid assessment of the most remote large-scale coral reef ecosystem on the planet," says Robert P. Smith, NOAA's Reserve Coordinator for the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve. "This expedition represents a true partnership of scientific, cultural and historical expertise among a variety of organizations and individuals."

The expedition is an essential building block for a coordinated science program in the NWHI. Documentation of the expedition and the marine environment is also key to the effort. Long-term stewardship of the 1,200-mile area is the ultimate goal.

Two research vessels, the Rapture and the Townsend Cromwell, will head to the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands as they did in tandem in 2000, to expand the baseline of knowledge and information about the biological, historical, and cultural resources of the area. This baseline information is critical for the development of effective management strategies and future priorities for the region, and will



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be of value to all agencies with NWHI jurisdiction. This will be the last research trip of the Townsend Cromwell, which has conducted marine research in Hawai'i and the Pacific for nearly 40 years. The vessels are expected to return to O'ahu Monday, October 7, 2002.

"One of the things unique about this cruise is the multidisciplinary approach," said Dr. Rusty Brainard, NOAA Fisheries Honolulu Laboratories Coral Reefs Ecosystem Investigation Chief. "We're looking at the living spectrum from the coral and the fish to the algae and invertebrates. We're trying to look at all of these parts of the marine ecosystem simultaneously and comprehensively thanks to this partnership."

"This partnership of State and Federal agencies with the academic community will establish a deeper knowledge base about the coral reefs of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands," says Dr. Randall Kosaki, the state's NWHI Coral Reef Research Coordinator who is serving as the chief scientist for the NOWRAMP 2002 expedition. "These reefs comprise nearly 70 percent of all the coral reefs in the United States, and yet they remain largely unexplored."

Don Palawski, project leader for remote National Wildlife Refuges across the Pacific said although the Fish and Wildlife Service has been protecting the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands for almost 100 years, "we are still learning about their unique natural and cultural resources."

"Expeditions like this allow us to not only conduct scientific research, but also to share incredible images and knowledge with the American people so they understand the phenomenal importance of this ecosystem and its needs for management and protection," Palawski added.

A web site will have daily updates and news from the expedition: www.hawaiianatolls.org

An interactive exhibit opens at the Hawai'i Maritime Center on the waterfront in Honolulu on October 5, 2002 featuring NOWRAMP research efforts. Footage from the expedition will be shown daily at the exhibition. Classes of elementary students (and other groups) will be able to submit questions via E-mail and have them answered by scientists aboard the expedition. Teleconferencing with scientists aboard the NOWRAMP research vessel may also be part of the interactive exhibit.

University of Hawai'i researchers and scientists from the Mānoa and Hilo campuses are also participating. UH units involved include UH Mānoa's Kamakakuokalani Center for Hawaiian Studies, Department of Information and Computer Sciences, Laboratory for Interactive Learning Technologies, Hawai'i Undersea Research Lab, Sea Grant College Program, and the Waikiki Aquarium, as well as researchers from UH Mānoa's School of Ocean & Earth Science & Technology and Department of Botany, and the UH Hilo Marine Science Department.

MEDIA NOTE: Footage from the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Expedition 2002 will be available on Sept. 13th or 14th and Sept. 22nd through Hastings & Pleadwell, 808-538-0797.

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