

WAKE ISLAND FACT SHEET

Natural resources

Physical Setting

- Wake Island is located 3,960 km west of Honolulu, Hawaii.

Geologic Structure

- Northernmost atoll in the Marshall Islands geological ridge and perhaps the oldest living atoll in the world.
- Significantly modified by the U.S. to create a military base before and after World War II (WWII).

Ecosystem Description

- Major habitats are the three low coral islands consisting of shells, coral skeletons, and sand, supporting atoll vegetation adapted to arid climate. Much of shoreline fortified with concrete and sheet pile.
- Shallow coral reefs presently thrive around the perimeter of the atoll and have recovered from military construction, fuel spills, and explosions from the deposition of ships and other war material. Beyond the shallow reefs, the outer reef slope descends sharply to great depths.

Biological Characteristics

- Approximately 100 species of corals reported, somewhat lower than larger and less isolated neighboring atolls to the south.
- Fish populations are abundant; have not been fished heavily since WWII; and support at least 323 species, including large populations of the Napoleon wrasse, sharks of several species, and large schools of the Bumphead parrotfish, all of which are globally depleted.
- Supports a rare grass species, *Lepturus gasparricensis*.
- Wake supports 12 species of resident nesting seabirds and 6 species of migratory shorebirds - all of these are populations of regional significance and include 2 species of tropicbirds, 3 species of boobies, Great Frigatebird, Sooty Tern, Brown Noddy, and Wedge-tailed Shearwater.



- Black-footed Albatross and Laysan Albatross recently recolonized Wake; one of the few northern albatross colonies outside the Hawaiian archipelago.
- Supports foraging populations of the threatened Green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) and resident populations of Spinner dolphins.

Historical

- First sighted by Spanish explorer Mendana in 1568, named for British sea captain William Wake, who arrived in 1796.
- Wake was formally claimed by the US during the Spanish American War, when it was possessed for use as a cable station.
- Pan American Airways established a seaplane refueling base and 48-room hotel on Peale Island in 1935; first permanent residents.
- On December 11, 1941, the Marine garrison and 1,200 civilians completing construction of a major air and submarine base were attacked by the Japanese; the only amphibious landing attempt to be repulsed by shore-based guns during WWII in the Pacific. In a second attack on December 23, Wake's survivors were overwhelmed by Japanese soldiers, who maintained control over the atoll until September 1945.
- At least two Japanese destroyers, two transport landing craft, and multiple aircraft were lost in

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the vicinity of Wake Island during the December 1941 assault.

- Placed on National Register of Historic Places in 1985 in recognition of its role in WWII and later designated as a National Historic Landmark.

Cultural

- Early navigators from the Marshall Islands visited Enen Kio (Wake Atoll in Marshallese) to hunt sea turtles and birds and to obtain facial tattoos.

Human use & current management

- Wake Island is a U.S. military base operated by the U.S. Air Force. Additional use is allowed on a case-by-case basis to support U.S. interests.
 - Limited infrastructure and personnel support services are available on Wake Island. The host base operations include four on-island active duty Air Force and approximately 120 contract personnel.
 - Wake Island maintains a 9843' x 150' runway, the longest strategic runway in the Pacific Islands.
 - Wake Island supports a US Army launch support facility maintained by the Space and Missile Defense Command.
 - In December 2007 the Air Force identified desired future mission capabilities, including contingency operations, emergency/planned divers, and as a stopover point for transpacific missions. A potential use for civilian aviation is under consideration. The Air Force plans to increase use to match pre-Typhoon IOKE activities.
 - Marine fishery resources in the Exclusive Economic Zone are managed by the Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration based on fishery management plans developed and recommended by the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council.
- USGS Circular 1286 [<http://pubs.usgs.gov/circ/2005/1286/>]
 - USFWS. 2005. Regional Seabird Conservation Plan, Pacific Region. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Migratory Birds and Habitat Programs, Pacific Region, Portland, Oregon.
 - Wake Island Base Operations Website: <http://www.smdc.army.mil/KWAJ/logistics/wake.html>
 - Science 82: 345-364.
 - Fishery Management Plan for Bottomfish and Seamount Groundfish of the Western Pacific Region, Fishery Management Plan for Pelagic Fisheries of the Western Pacific Region, Fishery Management Plan for Coral Reef Ecosystems of the Western Pacific Region and implementing regulations found at 50 CFR Part 665. Draft Pacific Pelagic Fishery Ecosystem Plan (see www.wpcouncil.org)
 - Map of Essential Fish Habitat Areas, visit www.wpcouncil.org/maps.htm
 - For more on Species of Concern, link to http://www.fpir.noaa.gov/PRD/prd_species_of_concern.html

Key references

- Devereux, Colonel James P.S. USMC. 1947. The Story of Wake Island. The Battery Press.
- Stanley, D. 1991. Micronesia Handbook: Guide to the Caroline, Gilbert, Mariana, and Marshall Islands. Moon Publications Inc., Chico, California.

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