

EMERGING THREATS IN THE PACIFIC:

Deep sea mining and attacks on marine sanctuaries

The Trump administration is trying to open marine waters around the Pacific to highly destructive industrial activities. Earthjustice is supporting local groups in American Samoa and beyond to respond. We're fighting to: protect ocean ecosystems, defend cultural heritage, and ensure public participation in federal decision-making.



A coral reef at Rose Atoll Marine National Monument in American Samoa. (Pete Leary / USFWS)

What is deep sea mining?

Deep sea mining is a new and **untested technology** that proposes extracting minerals from some of the deepest parts of the ocean. Scientists believe biodiversity loss and habitat destruction will be **unpreventable** and **irreversible** if mining using the proposed methods advances at scale.

These methods involve removing polymetallic nodules from the seafloor. These potato-sized lumps contain manganese, cobalt, nickel—and **toxics dangerous to human health**—that go into the construction of electronics, batteries, weapons, and other technologies.

Who is behind the push for deep sea mining?

The extremely **high financial costs** and **environmental risks** associated with deep-sea mining have limited the industry's development beyond a few

small, exploratory projects. But the potential value of these metals has attracted profit-driven multinational companies with speculative interests in the mineral supply chain.

There is currently no commercial scale deep seabed mining in U.S. or international waters, but corporations have appealed to the Trump administration to fast track deep sea mining.

In 2025, President Trump issued an executive order directing the Secretaries of Interior and Commerce to move toward issuing permits to deep sea mining corporations in both U.S. and international ocean waters.

This includes plans to lease over **30 million acres of federal waters off American Samoa**.

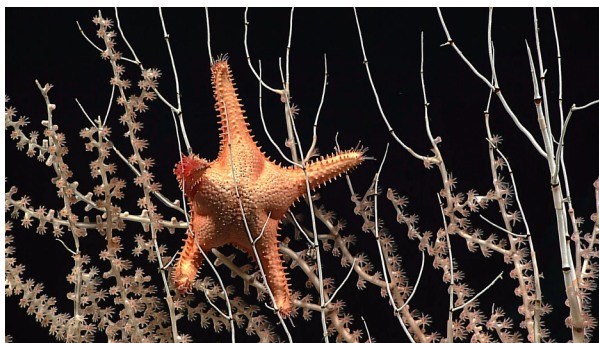
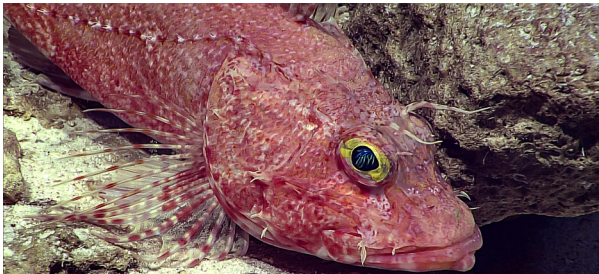
The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management is currently preparing a draft leasing notice and has proposed hosting a lease sale later in 2026.

For more information visit www.earthjustice.org.

What would deep sea mining impacts look like?

- Decimation of deep-sea species, including species new to science
- The disturbance of the seabed floor
- Sustained sediment and heavy metal pollution in the water column
- Contamination of fish, whales, sharks, and other species with toxic metals
- Destruction of coral reefs through acidification

All these impacts could harm American Samoans.



Deep sea marine life in Rose Atoll, including, from top to bottom, a fish in the Pontinus genus, an octopus, and a starfish in bamboo coral. (NOAA Okeanos Explorer)

Weakening protections for marine national monuments

Marine national monuments are designated to protect and conserve some of the world's last pristine ocean ecosystems. The U.S. manages five marine monuments, four of which are in the Pacific Islands region.

In April 2025, President Trump signed a proclamation to open the Pacific Islands Heritage Marine National Monument to commercial fishing. Earthjustice filed a lawsuit and secured a court order reinstating the commercial fishing ban.

Marine monument in American Samoa targeted

In June 2026, Trump signed another proclamation to open more marine monuments to commercial fishing. The targeted areas include **Rose Atoll Marine National Monument**, as well as Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument and the Mariana Trench Marine National Monument.

Allowing commercial fishing removes large numbers of target fish and other marine animals as unintended bycatch, disrupting the underwater ecosystem and food chain.

Our oceans already face dire threats from climate change and acidification. Commercial fishing in protected areas would compound the damage. Even short-term commercial fishing can cause lasting harm to pristine marine environments.

Marine monument protections safeguard biodiversity, strengthening ocean ecosystems and helping buffer them against threats like climate change.