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## **Two atolls chosen for world listing**

Two atolls in the Marshall Islands will be formally nominated for World Heritage status next year, following several weeks of discussion among local officials in the RMI.

A total of 11 atolls and islands have been put on a ‘tentative list’ for consideration, while Bikini and Ailingnae have been selected from that initial list to be nominated.

The World Heritage application process requires countries to put forth a ‘tentative list’ of potentially eligible sites, and then produce nominations with detailed information on each site.

RMI officials decided, following the review of the 11 atolls, that significant work that supported nominations had already been done at both Bikini and Ailingnae, so it was agreed to move ahead with nominating these two.

“There’s very strong evidence to support Ailingnae and Bikini,” said Ellia Zebedy, who’s been involved in the work through the Alele Museum that is pushing ahead the nominations.

Bikini’s history as the first post-World War II test site for nuclear weapons — a technology that changed the world — gives it a distinction worthy of consideration, as does the atoll’s diverse marine life.

Ailingnae, like several other uninhabited atolls, is unmodified by humans and is a traditional bird and turtle breeding ground.

These two atolls, thanks to their respective local governments, already have

management and environmental protection plans in place and various marine surveys have been conducted previously, she said.

These are important elements of the application process, Zebedy said.

Gaining World Heritage status raises the profile of such sites throughout the world, Zebedy said.

A majority of the World Heritage sites see thousands of tourists each year because they are on the list of unique locations in the world. “When they’re listed as a World Heritage site, it’s because they’re the ‘best of the best,’” she said. Aside from tourism, World Heritage also requires sustainable management and preservation, which insures that these sites are there for future generations to enjoy.

The nomination applications need to be ready by the end of 2006 to be submitted in early 2007, she said.

## **Bokak and Bikar’s special world status**

In addition to Bikini and Ailingnae, nine other atolls are on a ‘tentative list’ of islands in the RMI that have potential to be nominated for World Heritage status.

These include a group of small, uninhabited northern atolls: Bikar, Bokak, Rongerik, Taka, Jemo and Erikub. It also includes Likiep, Mili and its neighbor Nadrikdrik.

The group of uninhabited northern atolls includes two — Bikar and Bokak — that are unique in the world. They are the only arid atolls in the world. Most of the six northern uninhabited atolls are also important bird and turtle breeding grounds, and several were traditionally used as food ‘pantries’ by islanders living on nearby atolls.

Likiep has strong cultural values because of the impact of the German colonial period on the island’s customs and economy.

Mili and Nadrikdrik have a tremendous level of natural beauty and a high-level of biodiversity.