

What You Can Do



Your participation in two important public comment opportunities will help to save the Hawaiian monk seal.

- The NWHI Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve is in a process lead by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to consider if and how the Reserve would become part of the National Marine Sanctuary program. Public participation in this process is very important.

- The Hawai'i's Department of Land and Natural Resources will be holding hearings on their revised regulations for the very biologically rich state waters in the NWHI. DLNR now proposes to establish a Refuge in state waters, providing crucial protection for monk seal habitat and food sources.

You can also

- > Demand the immediate enforcement of the protections put in place by the NWHI Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve Executive Order.
- > Support adequate funding for the monk seal recovery strategy, for appropriate research and for implementing active enforcement of existing protections in the NWHI. Funding for scientific exploration and research must be balanced with the need for policing the waters in order to actively protect the vulnerable NWHI resources.
- > Insist that NMFS respond to public concern about their research priorities. All research of the monk seal must, by law, support survival efforts.
- > Defend orchestrated attempts to weaken the Endangered Species Act.
- > Support funding for repair of the retaining wall at Tern Island (French Frigate Shoals) to stop monk seal strandings and to reduce potential pollution of the reef.
- > Ensure that the Marine Mammal Commission and Monk Seal Recovery Team recommendations are carried out and that adequate funding for implementation and appropriate research is secured.
- > Help to spread the word to your friends, public and of our youth about the fragile state of our highly endangered Hawaiian monk seals. Survival of the 'Ilioholoikauaua will ultimately depend on the involvement of our 'opio (youth).

If You Encounter a Monk Seal

If you encounter a seal on the beach, please kōkua.

Keep your distance. The law requires people to stay at least 100 feet away from a monk seal.

Discourage others from approaching or harassing seals on beaches.

Prevent dogs from roaming on beaches where seals have been spotted. Dogs pose a serious health threat to the seals.

Please report all sightings to:

National Marine Fisheries Service: (800) 853-1964.

If a seal is injured call: (888) 256-9840



Protecting Native Hawaiian traditional and customary rights and our fragile environment

We must remain pa'a (steadfast, resolute) about the need for a true Pu'uhonua (place of refuge) for the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands' fragile ecosystem and cultural treasures.

KAHEA: The Hawaiian-Environmental Alliance is working to secure permanent and adequate protection for the Northwestern Hawaiian Island ecosystem and its extensive cultural resources. We will continue to keep the public informed about what you can do to save the Hawaiian monk seal from extinction and to protect their home: the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands as a true Pu'uhonua.

We will continue to keep the public informed about what you can do to save the Hawaiian monk seal from extinction and to protect the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands.

Stay informed. Get involved. Support this work.

Sign up with our Action Alert Network on our website:

www.kahea.org

Telephone: (808) 524-8220 kahea-alliance@hawaii.rr.com



A Pu'uhonua (place of refuge) for Future Generations

The Northwestern Hawaiian Islands are the most isolated archipelago in the world. Stretching over 1200 miles northwest of Kaua'i, these extremely fragile atolls and shoals contain 70% of the coral reefs under US jurisdiction. A network of over 3 million acres of coral reef encompasses tremendous biodiversity, including some of the world's oldest living coral colonies, sea turtles, and million of seabirds. The NWHI are ceded lands and hold great significance in Native Hawaiian culture and history. Ancient `oli and mele tell of the fire goddess Pele and her family traversing the NWHI and stopping at Mokumanamana (Necker Island) on their way to the Main Hawaiian Islands.

The 84 million acre NWHI Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve was created in December 2000 in an Executive Order (E.O.) by former President Clinton and supported in numerous public hearing opportunities throughout the Islands and in Washington, D.C. The E.O. protects the NWHI's ecological and cultural resources, recognizes indigenous rights, and grandfathers in the existing small commercial and recreational fisheries. The E.O. establishes kapu areas to protect habitat, prevents over-fishing, coral harvesting, seabed mining, and closes the lobster fishery.

We must insist that the proposed Sanctuary incorporate these and other important protections outlined in the Executive Order for the NWHI Reserve.

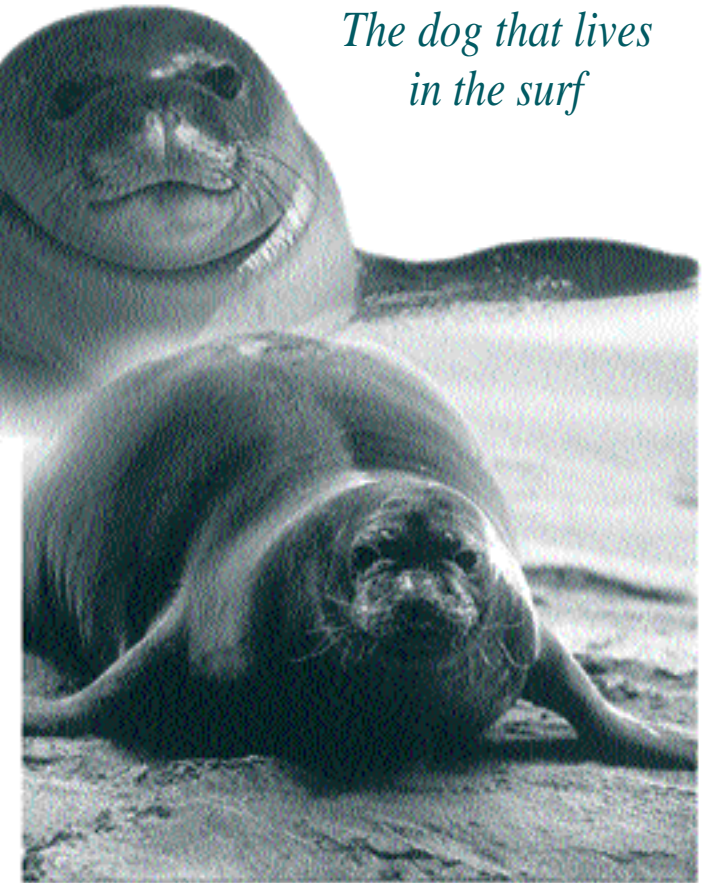
NOAA has initiated a process to incorporate the NWHI Reserve into the National Marine Sanctuary program. Public participation in this process is extremely important to retain the protections provided in the current law: the NWHI Executive Order.

The state waters in the NWHI represent the heart of the coral reef ecosystem and contain the majority of rich biodiversity. The Reserve boundaries do not include state waters. The state's proposed regulation for these waters establishes a refuge and protects key monk seal habitat. Public hearings will likely begin in the Spring, 2003.

Please contact KAHEA for more information about the NWHI Sanctuary designation process and the proposed regulations for state waters.

'Ilioholoikauaua

*The dog that lives
in the surf*



The Hawaiian Monk Seal

(*Monachus schauinslandi*)

On the Verge of Extinction

On the Verge of Extinction

Na 'Īlioholoikauaua (Hawaiian monk seals) are on the verge of extinction! The most recent population and survival data reveal a continuing slow decline. The Hawaiian monk seal is the most endangered marine mammal in waters under U.S. jurisdiction.

'Īlioholoikauaua (dog that lives in rough waters) is considered endemic (unique) to the Hawaiian Islands and is thought to be the oldest seal in existence, with ancestors dating back 15 million years.

In the last 50 years, the Hawaiian monk seal population has declined by over 60%. This was primarily a result of excessive hunting, commercial fishing boat interactions, entanglement in abandoned fishing gear, military activities and a disparate male to female gender ratio. In the last 10 years, however, monk seal survival rates may have been seriously compromised by the commercial lobster fishery, which systematically diminished key prey (food sources).

It is alarming that there are only 1,300-1,400 Hawaiian monk seals left. **If these ancient marine mammals are going to continue to exist, we all need to take action.**

Existing Protections

In 1909, the creation of the Hawai'i National Wildlife Reservation in the NWHI provided initial protection for seals on land and near shore. The Marine Mammal Commission formed in 1972 and requested that the National Marine Fishery Service determine a management strategy for monk seal survival. In 1976, the Hawaiian monk seal was listed as endangered under the federal Endangered Species Act, making it illegal to harm or injure the seals. About 20 years ago, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service implemented protection within the NWHI National Wildlife Reservation boundaries. In 1980, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), the agency legally responsible for marine mammal protection, created the Monk Seal Recovery Team to focus additional effort on saving the seal. The State of Hawai'i also listed the seal as an endangered species, and internationally, the seals are protected under the Convention of International Trade in Endangered Species.

In 2000, President Clinton issued an Executive Order which created the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve and provided significant conservation measures, which help to protect the highly endangered monk seal.

So why, with all these protection measures, do monk seals continue to decline?



Why Do Seal Numbers Continue to Decline?

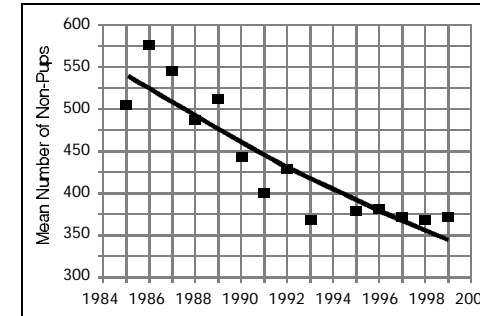
The National Marine Fishery Service is responsible for the protection of the Hawaiian monk seal. Unfortunately, protection efforts to date have not prevented the continued reduction of monk seal populations.

The largest breeding colony is at French Frigate Shoals, where the survival rate of seal pups declined in the late 1980's from 90% to about 10% by 1993. During the mid 1980's, the commercial lobster fishery reached its peak, operating at close to 500% of what scientists felt were sustainable levels. For years, NMFS ignored calls by the Marine Mammal Commission, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Hawaiian Monk Seal Recovery Team to designate habitat protection and to limit or close the lobster fishery because of its impacts on seal survival. Instead, NMFS and the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council (Wespac) oversaw the decimation of lobster populations even in areas of protected seal habitat. In 1993, the lobster population crashed and has not yet recovered.

This devastation, coupled with the high volume of other key monk seal prey (200 species including octopus, squid, etc.) killed in the process of lobster harvesting, seriously compounded other obstacles to monk seal recovery. NMFS finally agreed to shut down Wespac's lobster fishery in the face of impending legal action by Earthjustice. The judge's decision stated, "The data strongly suggest that the [lobster] fishery contributes to the starvation of the monk seals." Fortunately, the NWHI Reserve closed the lobster fishery permanently.

Threats to Hawaiian Monk Seal Survival

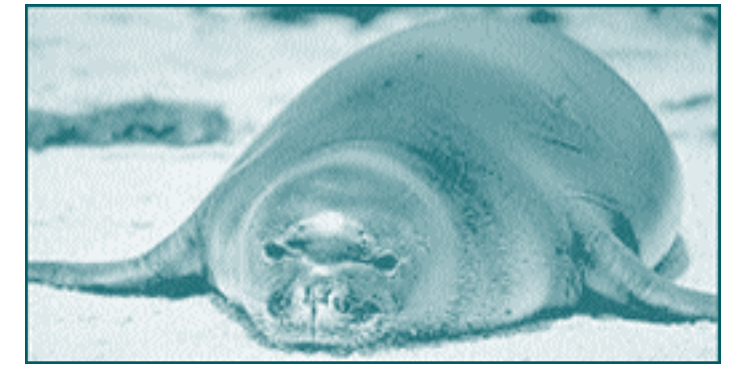
- > Starvation continues to be the greatest hindrance to juvenile and adult survival. Inadequate nutrition also weakens mothers and pups; making them more vulnerable to predators and disease. Low reproduction rates can also be linked to under-nourishment.
- > Wespac continues to seek an increase in commercial fishing activities, initiate a commercial coral harvest, and re-open the lobster fishery.
- > Human disturbance or disruptions (friendly, curious or hostile) pose a serious threat.
- > Toxic contamination needs to be monitored and better understood. What is the link between leaking barrels of PCB's and other hazardous materials left behind by the U.S. military and the decline in seal survival and reproduction rates in these areas?
- > Military surface to air missile (Star Wars) experiments off Kaua'i may directly affect seals.
- > Marine debris, including ghost or abandoned fishing gear impacts survival rates.
- > A lack of adequate enforcement of activities in the remote NWHI is perhaps the greatest threat of all.
- > Aggressive male behavior, termed "mobbing," has resulted in a significant number of female and juvenile deaths. Some seals have been relocated to the Main Hawaiian Islands in an attempt to address this problem.
- > Potential cruise ship expeditions in the NWHI and in the Main Islands pose a significant threat. These "floating cities" use a range of hazardous materials and release hundreds of thousands of gallons of effluent. Other problems include the inability to navigate coral reefs, anchoring in coral and spreading alien species.
 - > Eco-tourism that involves activities or anchoring near monk seal habitat would be unacceptable.
 - > Aquarium fish trade may disrupt habitat, deplete a vital food source or upset a delicately balanced ecosystem.
 - > Inappropriate research, including bio-prospecting and research that involves handling seals unrelated to recovery needs threatens survival.



Mean beach counts of Hawaiian monk seals at the main reproductive rookeries (excluding Midway Atoll), 1985-1999. (NMFS)



Monk Seal Survival Needs



The Hawaiian monk seal's primary habitat and breeding grounds in the NWHI are French Frigate Shoals, Pearl and Hermes Atoll, Laysan, Lisianski, Midway Atoll and Kure Atoll. An increasing number of monk seals appear to be migrating from the NWHI to take up residence in the Main Islands. In order to thrive, the seals need a Pu'uhonua (place of refuge). They need seclusion, adequate available food and secure waters for rearing their young.

- > Undisturbed beaches are necessary for napping, relaxation, molting, and for nursing pups. Even minor human intrusion can disrupt nursing and jeopardize pup survival. Because seals feed offshore often at night, resting on beaches is critical.
- > Access to adequate nourishing prey sustains adults and their young. Seals hunt in and around coral reef as deep as 1,500 feet. They live on a diet of ula (lobster), he'e (octopus), muhe'e (squid), puhi (eel) and various reef fish. They can spend up to a month at sea at one time. Mothers lose up to half their bodyweight during the 5-6 week nursing period, as they do not feed, but subsist on stored blubber.
- > Protected waters, inside the reef are needed where pups can learn to hunt and acquire other vital survival lessons.

To save the Hawaiian monk seal from extinction, we must protect their habitat and ensure that recovery efforts are funded.

