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Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Update

KAHEA launches online petition to save the Hawaiian monk seal



Na Ilioholoikauaua (the Hawaiian monk seal)

We have a rare opportunity to save one of the last wild places on earth and to save the Hawaiian monk seal from extinction, writes Cha Smith of KAHEA.

The Northwestern Hawaiian Islands are comprised of atolls, sandbars and outcroppings and stretch for 1200 miles off Kaua'i. They are a nearly intact pristine and biologically diverse coral reef ecosystem and provide important habitat to thousands of species. These ancient and remote islands represent one of the last intact marine ecosystems on the planet. With over 3.5 million acres of coral reef, they are truly a world treasure.

Two public processes will determine the long-term protection measures for the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. NOAA initiated a Sanctuary designation process for the NWHI Reserve

and the State Department of Land and Natural Resources has proposed draft regulations that would establish a state refuge for the biologically rich state waters.

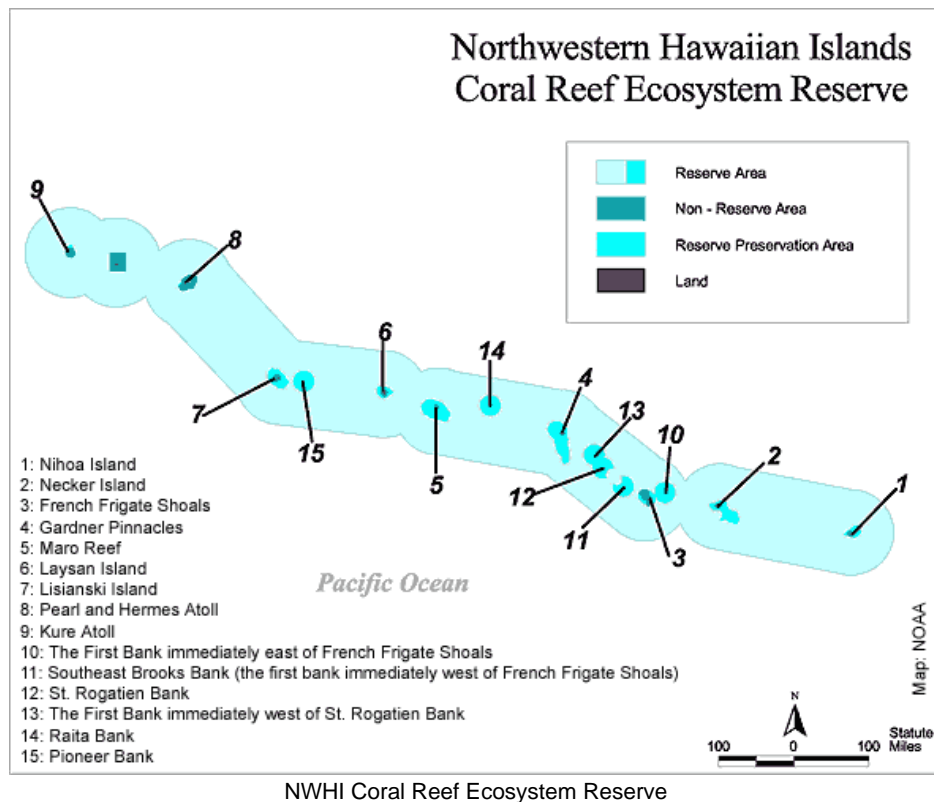
The Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) will be releasing draft regulations for state waters in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands very soon. The agency is planning public hearings on the revised regulations for state waters in the NWHI the last two weeks of July 2004.

State waters in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands represent the heart of the coral reef ecosystem and contain the vast majority of biodiversity. The 84-million acre Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve boundaries surround, but do not include these waters.

It is commendable that DLNR is proposing refuge status for these important waters. However, the proposed regulations contain serious flaws that must be addressed. Strong regulations are necessary to protect vulnerable reefs and to provide habitat protection for the highly endangered Hawaiian monk seal, threatened and endangered sea turtles and millions of seabirds. We encourage public support for the State's Refuge plan – with important conservation changes.

KAHEA will be posting the draft Refuge plan, comment deadlines and Talking Points highlighting needed changes. Please visit our website www.kahea.org for more information.

In April, 2004, the Sanctuary process called for public comment on its Draft Reserve Operations Plan. This plan is intended to guide management of the Reserve and serve as the foundation for the proposed Sanctuary. The NWHI Reserve Advisory Council developed and submitted to NOS a strong conservation-based Operations Plan. However, NOS returned for comment the proposed plan that had been weakened in important ways.



In response to a call to action by KAHEA, Environmental Defense, and The Ocean Conservancy, NOAA received 25,000 comments calling for the strongest possible protections for the NWHI. Public comment called for regulations and enforcement, an ecosystem-based management plan, protection of cultural rights and recognition of the unique and fragile nature of this phenomenal archipelago.

An Indigenous Advisory Group on subsistence fishing, including many kupuna (elder Hawaiians) who fish commercially, was convened by the Sanctuary program to develop Fishing Alternatives in the NWHI. The advisory group stated that protection of the NWHI is a part of Native Hawaiian cultural identity and *kuleana* (responsibility). They advised that no commercial extraction should be allowed in this Pu'uhonua (Refuge) and supported continued cultural access.

In addition, independent scientists hired by NOAA to review the existing scientific and economic data concluded that the NWHI are a fragile but relatively intact component of the entire Hawaiian Islands ecosystem, which is substantially degraded in the Main Hawaiian Islands. The consultants recommend an ecosystem based conservation approach that is consistent with existing Reserve protections, the USFW (US Fish and Wildlife Service) Refuges and the proposed Sanctuary. This approach will ensure ecosystem integrity as required by law. They reject the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council's fishery management plan, designed to extract maximum biomass without insuring protection of the NWHI ecosystem.

This report concluded that due to poor economic performance, the lack of sustainability of the small commercial fishery and the fragile nature of the ecosystem, no commercial extraction is appropriate in the proposed Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Sanctuary. A summary of the SRG Report and the full report can be found at www.kahea.org.

Na Ilioholoikauaua (the Hawaiian monk seal) needs our help

KAHEA is circulating a petition directed to federal agencies that encourages immediate action on behalf of the gravely imperiled monk seal. **The petition effort links the fate of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands with that of the Hawaiian monk seal.**


PLEASE SIGN OUR ON-LINE PETITION TODAY:

<http://www.kahea.org/petition.php>

Read More about Ilioholoikauaua and the on-going public process to protect their home, the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands at www.kahea.org.

Marine Mammal Commission report released

The Marine Mammal Commission's Annual Report to Congress for 2003 has recently been published. While our own publishing deadline has precluded us from including a review of the report's findings in this issue of TMG we are, following customary procedure, making the Hawaiian monk seal chapter available for download in the Monachus Library.

Marine Mammal Commission. 2004. Hawaiian monk seal (*Monachus schauinslandi*). Pages 79-95 in Chapter III, Species of Special Concern, Annual Report to Congress, 2003. Marine Mammal Commission, Bethesda, Maryland. [[Monachus Library](#)  96KB]

Hawaiian Press Watch

Kaua'i monk seals 'wired' for tracking **March 9, 2004**

That manmade thing glued to the back of that endangered Hawaiian monk seal doesn't appear to bother him... Researchers know he's a him because they netted and sedated the critter, glued the satellite-tracking device to his fur, took blood and tissue samples for his annual physical examination, then returned him to the wild (The Garden Island).

Jean-Michel Cousteau's Voyage to Kure **March 6, 2004**

The devastation we witnessed from pollution was not limited to plastics. Hundreds of tons of fishing nets clog the reefs along the NWHI, tearing away precious coral and entangling all sorts of marine life, including sea turtles, Monk seals and seabirds. Valiant efforts by NOAA to retrieve these mountains of abandoned nets can't keep up with their sheer numbers. Our divers assisted in hauling up some of the nets we found in deeper waters, and I can assure you it's a tedious and difficult task to disentangle these monstrous webs caught on the fragile coral reefs... Along this ribbon of life, we found teaming populations of spinner dolphins and large apex predators such as reef sharks, jacks, and amberjacks. We encountered many of the Hawaiian endemic species of reef fish, including the rare masked angelfish and Hawaiian grouper; all perfect reminders of an intact coral reef ecosystem... While their population has dwindled to less than 1,500, the seldom-seen monk seals were our companions at many of our dive sites, frolicking around our vessel, sunning themselves on the beaches and were inquisitive around our divers (From Jean-Michel Cousteau's Log – Voyage to Kure, August 2003).

Monk seal on Maui seen begging for food **Feb 27, 2004**

Maui — A Hawaiian monk seal reportedly has been begging for food in Ma'alaea Harbor in recent days, and wildlife officials yesterday issued a reminder that feeding or harassing such animals is against state and federal law (Honolulu Advertiser).

Public reminded to avoid contact with monk seals **Feb 27, 2004**

Maui – Joe Fell-McDonald was working at the stern of a federal humpback whale sanctuary vessel

at Maalaea Harbor when he looked back and saw an adult monk seal staring at him... “He seemed to be saying, ‘Where’s my food?’” Fell-McDonald said. “After a brief staring contest, the seal swam to the next boat, then on to the next and so on, always acting as if he was looking for food or something” (Honolulu Star-Bulletin).

Isle monk seals film their own TV special **Feb 19, 2004**

Fitted with underwater cameras, Hawaiian monk seals are teaching Hawaii researchers more about their lives than ever before... From a seal’s-eye view, the animals are showing what and how they eat, and how they play and fight with each other in their underwater world... Scenes in the 30-minute special were compiled during eight years in the French Frigate Shoals, using 40 different seals who carried the small, back-mounted cameras for several days each (Honolulu Star-Bulletin).

Threatened Seals Forage Far From Home, Cameras Show **Feb 19, 2004**

The Crittercam study immediately offered new insights into the foraging behavior of the highly endangered monk seals. Researchers had long focused on the lush coral reefs—with plenty of fish around them—as the natural feeding ground for the seals. But Crittercam footage showed the seals do not stay on the reef; Instead they venture far off shore for food... “They go out onto these deep slopes, which appear barren with pretty much just sand and loose rock, and that’s where they make their living,” [Frank] Parrish said. “This [knowledge] has changed our mind-set. Now that we know the seals are feeding outside the atolls, we have to take that habitat into consideration in the protection of the seal” (National Geographic News).

Cameras to be mounted on young monk seals **Feb 18, 2004**

The science of tracking endangered Hawaiian monk seals has gone up a notch... Through “Crittercam” technology, small cameras will be mounted on the backs of juvenile seals, whose survivability in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands has suffered, possibly due to limited food, scientists said (The Garden Island).



Hawaiian monk seal equipped with Crittercam.

Human contact may be threat to monk seals **Jan 31, 2004**

A Hawaiian monk seal appeared in Lahaina this week, exhibiting the same begging behavior — approaching people with its mouth wide open — as the demeanor of a seal on Kaua’i that was later found dead.

Death of seal on Kaua’i coast puzzles marine scientists **Jan 29, 2004**

Marine mammal experts are mystified by the death of an apparently healthy Hawaiian monk seal, found last Thursday evening at the water’s edge at Kapa’a... A necropsy on the 425-pound adult male seal showed no sign of injury or illness... Veterinarian Bob Braun was assisted in the investigation by NOAA Fisheries marine mammal biologist Brad Ryon, who said the animal had no recent injuries and did not appear to be starving, although there was no food in its belly (Honolulu Advertiser).

Research Ethics

The 1st Biennial Workshop on Ethics in Marine Mammal Research was held in Greensboro, North Carolina, on December 14, 2003 during the 2003 meeting of the Society for Marine Mammalogy. The workshop was introduced by the organizers, Charles Littnan and Tim Ragen who presented results from an ethics survey conducted at the 2001 Society for Marine Mammalogy meeting.

Other speakers and topics included: Marc Bekoff, “Minding animals: ethics and human intrusions”; Steve Leathery, “The ethics of research and enhancement permits”; Peter Corkeron, “Ethics and environmental impacts of research involving marine mammals: some brief (and biased) thoughts”; Dave Johnston and Andy Read, “Tagging marine mammals: ethics and field research”; Jason Baker, “Evaluating the effects of field research handling on study subjects: Hawaiian monk seal case study”; Pam Tuomi, “Ethics in captive marine mammal research”; Ian Boyd, “Professional ethics in marine mammal research”; C. Scott Baker and Phil Clapham, “The ethics of scientific

whaling: what are the alternatives?"; David Lavigne and Tim Ragen, "Recognizing the ethical dimensions of marine mammal science". Abstracts are posted on <http://moray.ml.duke.edu/faculty/read/smmethics2003>.

— News item courtesy INWR Digest Number 27 April 2004:
<http://www.ualberta.ca/~inwr/DIGEST/index.html>.

Midway births on the rise

With the current pupping season virtually complete on Midway Atoll, John Klavitter, a Wildlife Biologist with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, reports 16 registered monk seal births – a new record [see also [Midway births](#), TMG 5 (2): 2002]. The increase is especially striking in comparison to births during the 1980s and early 1990s, when only one pup was born each year. Limiting access to beaches at Midway since the Navy's departure, reports Klavitter, is undoubtedly partially responsible for the increase.

EndQuote

Hey dude, where's my fish?

Fell-McDonald said yesterday the encounter earlier this week was the second time he has been close to the same monk seal at the harbor.

He said the seal was very curious and looked like he was asking, "What's up, dude?"

Source: [Public reminded to avoid contact with monk seals](#), Honolulu Star-Bulletin, HI, 27 February 2004.

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