

HAWAIIAN MONK SEALS



WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

WHAT ARE HAWAIIAN MONK SEALS?

Monk seals — also known as *`Ilio-holo-i-ka-uana*, or “the dog that runs in the rough seas” — are the official marine mammals of Hawai‘i. They have lived throughout the Hawaiian archipelago for millions of years, but their population has dramatically declined since the 1950s, making them one of the world’s most critically endangered ocean mammals.

WHY DOES THE HAWAIIAN MONK SEAL NEED OUR HELP?

Scientists estimate that there are only about 1,000 Hawaiian monk seals left on Earth, and that their best chances of survival are on the main Hawaiian Islands, including Oahu and Kauai, where they can best avoid sharks and other predators.

WHAT'S BEING DONE TO PROTECT HAWAIIAN MONK SEALS?

In 2008 the Center for Biological Diversity, KAHEA: The Hawaiian-Environmental Alliance and Ocean Conservancy petitioned the National Marine Fisheries Service to protect monk seals by designating critical habitat areas along the undeveloped coasts of the main Hawaiian Islands. The agency held public hearings and took more than 20,000 comments on the proposed regulations to designate critical habitat areas on five islands in 2011. The final rule will be released in the summer of 2015.

WHAT DOES A CRITICAL HABITAT DESIGNATION DO?

Critical habitat means areas that are essential to the conservation and recovery of an endangered species. The Endangered Species Act requires the federal government to take precautions and consult a biologist when it funds, permits or carries out activities that may “adversely modify” — that is, damage or destroy — critical habitat. As a result the federal government may need to take steps to avoid and minimize harm to the habitat by doing things like limiting water pollution, moving construction further from shore, or restoring coastal habitat. That means cleaner, healthier oceans and waters for monk seals and everyone that uses the ocean.

DOES CRITICAL HABITAT PREVENT ACCESS, FISHING, DEVELOPMENT OR OTHER ACTIVITIES?

Critical habitat protections won't affect people's ability to visit the beach, surf or engage in recreational or subsistence fishing and gathering. The designation does not make the lands federal, restrict public access or forbid activities or developments. Critical habitat is a tool for managing federal activities to make them more environmentally sensitive.

IS THE HAWAIIAN MONK SEAL IN DANGER OF EXTINCTION?

Yes. In its biennial Endangered Species Act report to Congress, the National Marine Fisheries Service identified the Hawaiian monk seal as one of eight marine species likely to go extinct in the near future without targeted conservation efforts. Only 1 in 5 monk seal pups now survives its first year of life, and the population is declining by about 4 percent per year.

DO CRITICAL HABITAT PROTECTIONS HELP?

Yes. Federal government data shows that endangered species with critical habitat protections are twice as likely to be recovering as species without critical habitat.

WHAT CAN PEOPLE DO TO HELP PROTECT HAWAIIAN MONK SEALS?

Support critical habitat protections for monk seals and talk to your friends, family and fellow community members about the importance of safeguarding Hawai'i's wildlife and natural heritage. Write a letter to the editor or call in to radio programs to say that you support protections for the monk seals. And when you see monk seals on the beach, leave them alone, encourage others to do the same, and report anyone harassing monk seals to the authorities. It's our responsibility to mālama monk seals and help bring them back from the brink of extinction — a crucial part of maintaining Hawai'i's rich and important biodiversity.

Cover photo by Klaus Stiefel; below by Mark Sullivan

