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**NOAA'S Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine
Sanctuary Urge Boaters to Use Caution, Follow Whale Protection Rules**

With Hawaii's humpback whale season underway, NOAA is reminding boaters and other ocean users to stay safe and legal.

Endangered humpback whales are protected in Hawaii. If you're on or in the water and whales are in the vicinity, federal regulations require you stay at least 100 yards away from them, and 1,000 feet away when operating an aircraft. The "approach" regulations apply to all ocean users – power boaters, sailors, jet skiers, kayakers, paddlers, windsurfers, swimmers, divers – throughout the Hawaiian Islands.

"Everyone must be particularly cautious during whale season," said Naomi McIntosh, superintendent, Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary. "If a humpback whale is sighted, you're advised to stay well outside the 100-yard approach area. Keeping your speed down is also very important in helping us protect these animals."

In the past two years, NOAA reported 12 cases involving violations of humpback whale approach zone regulations, including approaches by swimmers, non-motorized watercraft, and motorized watercraft. In a recent case, a commercial whale watch vessel was charged with violating the approach regulation on five separate occasions.

The case was settled in court on Maui when the owner and operator admitted all the violations charged and agreed to pay a civil penalty of \$30,000. Humpback whale approach zone violations should be reported to NOAA's Office of Law Enforcement at 1-800-853-1964. Additional guidelines and safety tips, can be found at http://hawaiihumpbackwhale.noaa.gov/explore/safe_boating.html

Humpback whale season in Hawai'i generally runs from November through May, and as many as 10,000 humpback whales winter in the state's waters. These acrobatic, 45-ton marine mammals attract wildlife enthusiasts, but they also pose safety hazards to boaters. Vessel-whale collisions occur every year in Hawai'i and are a serious threat to boaters and whales. Ocean users are also subject to safety risks when whales surface, breach, or slap their massive tails or flippers.

The Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary was created by Congress in 1992 to protect humpback whales and their habitat in Hawai'i. The sanctuary, which lies within the shallow (less than 600 feet), warm waters surrounding the main Hawaiian Islands, constitutes one of the world's most important humpback whale habitats.

The sanctuary is administered by a partnership of NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries and the State of Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources. Visit: <http://hawaiihumpbackwhale.noaa.gov>.

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