



NOAA

NATIONAL OCEANIC AND
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Sanctuary Ocean Count Project Receives National Recognition

The Sanctuary Ocean Count, the signature outreach project for NOAA's Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary, was named the Take Pride in America Outstanding Volunteer Program during a ceremony in Washington, D.C., today. Take Pride in America®, is a nationwide partnership program authorized by Congress to promote the appreciation and stewardship of our nation's public lands.

The annual Sanctuary Ocean Count, launched in 1996 when 150 volunteers took to the shorelines of O'ahu to count Hawaii's endangered whale population and document the animals' surface behavior, now draws more than 2,300 volunteers across O'ahu, Kaua'i, and Hawai'i. In the past 17 years, more than 20,000 volunteers have contributed more than 100,000 hours of in-kind support.

"The Sanctuary Ocean Count engages local communities and visitors in ocean conservation," said Malia Chow, sanctuary superintendent. "This award recognizes the work of thousands of volunteers who have participated in this project over the years."

The goal of the Ocean Count project is to increase public awareness of the sanctuary and current ocean issues, including threats to humpback whales while also promoting responsible viewing of all marine wildlife. The project offers Hawai'i residents and visitors an opportunity to monitor humpback whales in their breeding grounds by conducting a yearly shore-based census during the peak season.

Although the census does not claim to provide scientifically accurate results, it serves as a tool to supplement scientific information gathered from other research activities. The count also provides snapshot data as well as information on how whales use inshore waters on a typical peak season day.

"Since the beginning of the Sanctuary Ocean Count project, thousands of residents and visitors have experienced the unique thrill and excitement of seeing whales and marine life in the sanctuary," said Christine Brammer, Sanctuary Ocean Count project manager. "The public's participation in this project has also resulted in a greater level of commitment to protecting the marine environment."

Humpback whale season in Hawai'i generally runs from November through May, although whales may be encountered in limited numbers during other months. More than 10,000 humpback whales winter in Hawaiian waters each year. The 2013 Sanctuary Ocean Count will be held the last Saturday of January, February and March. Registration will begin in December at <http://sanctuaryoceancount.org>.

Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary is administered by a partnership of NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries and the State of Hawai'i through the Department of Land and Natural Resources. The sanctuary works to protect humpback whales through research, education, conservation and stewardship. Join us on [Facebook](#).

NOAA's mission is to understand and predict changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and to conserve and manage our coastal and marine resources. Join us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and our other [social media channels](#).

On the Web:

Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary: <http://hawaiihumpbackwhale.noaa.gov>

NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries: <http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov>

State of Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources: <http://hawaii.gov/dlnr/>

Sanctuary Ocean Count: <http://sanctuaryoceancount.org>

