

PACIFIC ISLANDS REGIONAL PRIORITIES

Pacific Islands Region Supports Interns in Marine Conservation Fields

The Pacific Islands Region is collaborating with partners to facilitate student interns working at regional sites. The University of Hawai'i's Institute of Marine Biology has begun collaboration on a new fellowship program that supports master's-level marine science students for two semesters. The students will work at a regional site and complete a two-month internship in a NOAA office in Washington, D.C. In addition, two graduate students in the NOAA Office of Education's Graduate Sciences Program have begun working for regional partners. Upon graduation, the students will then join the Pacific Islands Region team.

Preserve America Supports Projects in the Pacific Islands Region

The Pacific Islands Region was awarded two Preserve America Initiative Grants in 2009. One allowed the region to conduct a historical preservation project focusing on Lahaina's colorful history, and will be used to record oral histories and produce outreach products from that knowledge. A second grant supported a training for University of Hawai'i Marine Option Program students to learn marine archaeology survey techniques. The students were trained by regional maritime archeologists on O'ahu, then traveled to Lāna'i to survey a historic inter-island steamship wreck. In addition, the county of Kaua'i was designated a Preserve America Community, through a process supported by the Pacific Islands Region. This designation makes Kaua'i the second county in Hawai'i to achieve this status.

Rose Atoll Designated a Marine National Monument

On Jan. 6, 2009, Rose Atoll in American Samoa was named a marine national monument. Presidential Proclamation 8337, which established the monument, directs NOAA to initiate a process to add the marine areas of the monument to the Fagatele Bay National Marine Sanctuary under the National Marine Sanctuary Act. The Pacific Islands Region is supporting Fagatele Bay National Marine Sanctuary as it addresses this issue through its management plan review process.

Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale Sanctuary Advisory Council Members

Officers

Honolulu County: William Friedl (Chair)
Alternate: Chris Evans

Research: Adam A. Pack, Ph.D (Vice Chair)
Alternate: Marc O. Lammers

Ocean Recreation: Teri Leicher (Secretary)
Alternate: Terry O'Halloran

Other Non-Governmental Members

Business/Commerce: Jim Coon
Alternate: Stephen Juarez

Citizen At-Large: David Hoffman
Alternate: Jill Komoto

Commercial Shipping: Dale Hazelhurst
Alternate: William Anonsen

Conservation: Lou Herman
Alternate: Robin Newbold

Education: Liz Kumabe
Alternate: Jennifer Barrett

Fishing: Bob Bruck
Alternate: vacant

Hawai'i County: Luana Howell
Alternate: Victoria Newman

Kaua'i County: James Yamamoto
Alternate: Don Thornburg

Maui County: Cheryl Sterling
Alternate: William Worcester

Native Hawaiian: Pohai Kirkland
Alternate: Trisha Kehaulani Watson

Tourism: Michael Stanton
Alternate: Richard Brunner

Whale Watching: Reg White
Alternate: Joana Varawa

State Government

Hawai'i Dept of Business, Economic Development and Tourism, Office of Planning (non-voting): Marnie Meyer

Hawai'i Dept of Business, Economic Development and Tourism, Science & Technology Branch (non-voting): Elizabeth Corbin

Hawai'i Dept of Health, Environmental Planning (non-voting): vacant

Hawai'i Dept of Land and Natural Resources, Division of Aquatic Resources (non-voting): vacant

Hawai'i Dept of Land and Natural Resources, Division of Aquatic Resources HIHWNMS (non-voting): David Nichols

Hawai'i Dept of Transportation, Harbors Division (non-voting): Dean Watase

Hawai'i Office of Hawaiian Affairs: Jerry Norris

Federal Government

NOAA Fagatele Bay NMS (non-voting): Gene Brighthouse

NOAA Fisheries Office of Law Enforcement (non-voting): Jeff Pollack

NOAA Fisheries Pacific Islands Regional Office (non-voting): Lisa Van Atta

NOAA Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale NMS (non-voting): Naomi McIntosh

NOAA Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument (non-voting): 'Aulani Wilhelm

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (non-voting): Cindy Barger

U.S. Coast Guard Law Enforcement (non-voting): Eric Roberts

U.S. Navy (non-voting): Rebecca M.K. Hommon

Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council: Eric Kingma

2009 ACCOMPLISHMENTS



Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary

lies within the shallow, warm waters surrounding the main Hawaiian Islands and is one of the most important humpback whale habitats in the world. Scientists estimate that two-thirds of the entire North Pacific humpback whale population migrates to Hawaiian waters each winter to breed, calve and nurse their young. The continued protection of humpback whales and their habitat is crucial to the long-term recovery of this endangered species. Established Nov. 4, 1992.



Charting an International Course

The sanctuary co-hosted the First International Conference on Marine Mammal Protected Areas in Maui, Hawai'i, from March 30 to April 3, 2009. Although there are over 500 existing or proposed marine protected areas (MPA) for marine mammals that span nearly 90 countries around the world, there was never a dedicated venue for sharing and gathering information. In an effort to bridge this gap, the conference steering committee developed an ambitious program related to the conference theme of "Networks: Making Connections." Over 200 MPA managers, scientists and educators representing 40 countries came together to discuss issues, establish valuable relationships and share information on effective approaches to marine management and conservation. Conference topics included whale sanctuaries, the role of culture in managing MPAs, the role of education, and more. Plans are already underway for the next gathering, which will be hosted by France in 2011.



Sanctuary Learning Center Opens in Kihei

The sanctuary celebrated the grand opening of the new Sanctuary Learning Center in Kihei, Maui. Construction on this new 4,600-square-foot building began in late 2004 and the facility opened its doors to the public on April 13, 2009. Sen. Daniel Inouye, Sen. Daniel Akaka, NOAA Administrator Dr. Jane Lubchenco, Hawaiian cultural practitioner Kimokeo Kapahulehua and other dignitaries participated in the grand opening ceremony with over 200 community members. The Sanctuary Learning Center provides expanded facilities for research and education programs that enhance humpback whale protection. The new learning center can seat up to 100 people for presentations, meetings or school programs. The sanctuary plans to continue expanding its education programs on Maui, with more than 6,000 students taking part in activities last year.

Splashing Out from Coast to Coast

To work with humpback whales during the summer months, when the animals migrate to Alaska and other feeding areas, sanctuary staff must journey outside Hawai'i. The sanctuary's marine mammal response manager traveled to Alaska and California in 2009, where he worked in partnership with NOAA Fisheries Service to share his expertise on humpback whale disentanglement from nets, ropes and other debris. Disentanglement and first response training were provided, as well as assistance with response efforts. On the East Coast, the sanctuary's science coordinator headed to New England to collaborate with the Provincetown Center for Coastal Studies, providing his expertise while developing new research and rescue protocols. Both summer programs allowed sanctuary staff to share their knowledge and contribute to the protection of humpback whales.



Sara Graef/Alaska Whale Foundation
NOAA Fisheries MMHSRP Permit 932-1489

Marine Mammal and Sea Turtle Conservation

In coordination with the sanctuary's co-management partner, the Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources, and NOAA Fisheries Service, the sanctuary supported marine mammal conservation throughout the state in 2009. Sanctuary staff and volunteers also aided turtle conservation efforts by coordinating the South Maui and West Hawai'i Turtle Stranding Network, in addition to responding to emergencies involving critically endangered Hawaiian monk seals and other cetacean strandings on Hawai'i, Kaua'i and Maui. The sanctuary continued to coordinate the Hawaiian Islands Disentanglement Network's responses to entangled humpback whales around the main Hawaiian Islands. The primary objectives of this collaborative effort are to provide safe and authorized response and gather valuable information towards reducing the threat of entanglement for large whales. During the 2008-2009 whale seasons, the network launched 23 on-water and in-air responses. As many as eight humpback whales were confirmed entangled, two of which were freed by rescuers.



HIHWNMS, MMHSRP Permit 932-1489



Whale Counters Show up in Force

Volunteers showed up in force on the islands of Hawai'i, Kaua'i and O'ahu, and donated more than 11,000 hours of their time observing humpback whales and their behavior from the shoreline. This year marked the 14th anniversary of the Sanctuary Ocean Count project. This popular outreach effort continues to grow each year and has become a favorite activity of many Hawai'i residents and tourists. In addition to the data that is collected by the whale counters, the project increases awareness about the sanctuary, humpback whales and Hawai'i's ocean environment. Community-based efforts like this engage stakeholders in the protection of the national marine sanctuaries and encourage continued involvement year after year.



Education Programs Reach Record Numbers

The sanctuary's education and outreach programs continued to grow around the state. At the Maui site, more than 15,000 visitors were welcomed and over 6,400 students took part in marine education programs. On the islands of Hawai'i and Kaua'i, staff and volunteers expanded existing programs to reach more students, with topics ranging from protecting humpback whales to saving endangered Hawaiian monk seals and conducting simulated marine research. A variety of special programs also took place around the state. On Lāna'i, students were given the opportunity to become Junior Marine Scientists on board a catamaran operated by Trilogy. Students and parents worked together to learn about water quality after taking samples and also took part in a variety of other hands-on activities. On O'ahu, "Whale Wednesdays" were held in Waikiki in February as part of Humpback Whale Awareness Month. In addition, over 500 students entered their artwork, short stories and poems in the sanctuary's Ocean Contest.

Ocean Awareness Training Expands

The sanctuary partnered with other natural resource agencies and environmental organizations to offer Ocean Awareness certification courses to the community on the islands of Maui and O'ahu. The program, which began on Maui in 2006 and expanded to O'ahu in 2008, is designed to provide participants with broad understanding of Hawai'i's unique marine environment. Training topics include the marine ecology of the Hawaiian Islands, threats to coastal and marine environments, marine life identification and more. Participants learn about current ocean conservation efforts and are provided with opportunities to get involved. Instructors include university scientists, government agency staff, environmental educators and conservation practitioners. The course is open to anyone who wants to learn more about Hawai'i's ocean environment, including those working in the ocean industry. In 2009, over 300 participants took part in the training. Sanctuary staff plan to continue to expand the program on Maui and O'ahu and also hope to spread the opportunity to other islands.



Sanctuary Signs Promote Responsible Wildlife Viewing

The sanctuary has completed phase one of a multi-phase effort to install interpretive signs that educate about marine wildlife and responsible wildlife viewing at popular shoreline locations. The signs provide information on marine protected species including whales, dolphins, seals and turtles, as well as information on Hawaiian reefs. A total of 12 signs have been installed at a variety of locations on the islands of Hawai'i, Maui and O'ahu. Locations range from busy boat ramps to popular scenic lookouts and tourist destinations. Additional signs are in development for other areas around the state. Through the interpretive sign program, the sanctuary aims to provide individuals with the knowledge they need to become involved in protecting marine resources in Hawai'i.

