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**Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary
advises ocean users to use caution and follow rules to protect whales**

With the arrival of humpback whale season, ocean users are reminded to keep a safe distance as the whales return to Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary and adjacent waters. Humpback whale season in Hawai'i generally runs from November through May, peaking between January and March. More than 10,000 humpback whales winter in Hawaiian waters each year.

Endangered humpback whales are protected in Hawai'i. Federal regulations prohibit approaching within 100 yards of whales when on the water, and 1,000 feet when operating an aircraft. These and other regulations apply to all ocean users, including vessel operators, kayakers, paddle boarders, windsurfers, swimmers and divers throughout the Hawaiian Islands.

"It's important for everyone to be extra cautious during whale season, for their own safety and the protection of the animals," said Ed Lyman, marine mammal response manager for the sanctuary. "Collisions with vessels are a major source of injury and death for humpback whales in Hawai'i." Calves are particularly vulnerable to vessel strikes because they are difficult to see and must surface more frequently.

Humpback whales attract wildlife enthusiasts, and they are a joy to watch. However, a 45-ton wild animal can pose a significant hazard to ocean users and vessel-whale collisions can result in death or injury to boaters.

Humpback whales congregate in ocean waters less than 600 feet deep throughout the main Hawaiian Islands. "An extra set of eyes scanning the waters ahead and to the sides of a boat can prevent collisions with marine life, marine debris, divers and other vessels," said Lyman. "Be on the lookout, especially during whale season."

Lyman also stresses the importance of ocean users helping monitor humpback whales in the sanctuary. "By locating distressed animals, reporting and providing the initial documentation and assessment on the animal, ocean users are the foundation of our conservation efforts," Lyman said.

If you come across an injured or entangled marine mammal, please maintain the required safe distance and call the NOAA Marine Mammal Hotline (888-256-9840) immediately, or the U.S. Coast Guard on channel 16. If reporting a suspected approach zone violation, please call the NOAA Fisheries Enforcement Hotline at 800-853-1964. Additional guidelines and safety tips can be found at http://hawaiihumpbackwhale.noaa.gov/explore/whale_guidelines.html.

The 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 (DLNR). The sanctuary works to protect humpback whales through research, education, conservation and stewardship. Join us on [Facebook](#).

DLNR's mission is to enhance, protect, conserve and manage Hawaii's unique and limited natural, cultural and historic resources held in public trust for current and future generations of visitors and the people of Hawaii nei in partnership with others from the public and private sectors. 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/>