



**NOAA
FISHERIES**

Pacific Islands Region

NOAA Fisheries Applies for Permit to Conduct Important Recovery Actions for Hawaiian Monk Seals

(Postpones plans to temporarily move young seals to the main Hawaiian Islands)

As required by the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) NOAA Fisheries has applied for a new permit requesting authorization to conduct several key recovery actions for critically endangered Hawaiian monk seals. The permit would span a five-year period, starting as early as January 2014. The permit application is available for public review and comment until April 15, 2013. (<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/permits/monkseal16632.htm>).

NOAA Fisheries believes the research and management actions included in the permit application will increase understanding of the threats facing monk seals and enhance their survival. The application requests permission to:

- continue research activities already in place
- conduct new or improved studies in the areas of population monitoring, foraging and fisheries interaction research, vaccines, and various other health studies
- conduct activities specifically designed to help improve monk seal survival by decreasing or eliminating the impacts of threats like entanglement, emaciation, male seal aggression toward other monk seals, sickness, injury and more

A number of the strategies in the permit application seek to benefit both seals and people by minimizing negative human-seal interactions through dehooking, seal behavior modification, and more.

Of note, **the permit does not** ask permission to temporarily move young seals from the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI) for release in the main Hawaiian Islands (MHI), and then returning them to the NWHI after 2-3 years. This type of temporary movement of seals is referred to as “two-stage translocation.” Translocation is a general term used to refer to a variety of actions that entail moving monk seals from one location to another for the purpose of increasing seal survival and/or reducing negative human-seal interactions.

While the scientific and ecological basis supporting two-stage translocation from the NWHI for temporary release in the MHI is still very strong, NOAA Fisheries does not plan to implement this type of translocation within the next 2-3 years. We are postponing this type of translocation because our ongoing field work in the MHI has given us a better understanding of the complexities of tracking, monitoring and responding to seals that need direct intervention to address issues such as illness and behavior problems. NOAA Fisheries wants to ensure that recovery efforts have the highest likelihood of success, and expect development of the tracking, monitoring and intervention capabilities needed for successful two-stage translocation to take several years. This development will entail building in-house capacity, as well as capacity of our partners and community members who participate in the MHI monk seal response network.

The permit application does include:

- translocation within the NWHI
- translocation within the MHI
- translocation from the MHI to NWHI

Many of these translocations involve reuniting pups separated from their mothers, moving weaned pups to areas of lower shark predation, or moving seals with behavior problems to places they won't put other seals, people or themselves at risk.

Approximately 20 to 30% of the current monk seal population is alive today due to the many recovery activities undertaken by NOAA Fisheries and our partners. Unfortunately, while these gains are impressive, they have not been sufficient to reverse the Hawaiian monk seal population decline. Two-stage translocation remains very promising and is a key component of our long-term recovery plans. We intend to apply it wherever it would achieve the greatest conservation benefit, however we will continue to work toward achieving the capacity needed to implement this action. While key monitoring and management activities are being further developed and refined, NOAA Fisheries intends to conduct additional seal research and to continue engaging the community to strengthen partnerships and to address concerns. It is our goal to ensure that all future management and recovery efforts are as successful as possible by staying engaged with, and responsive to, Hawaii's communities.

Note: The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is preparing a "Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) for Hawaiian Monk Seal Recovery Actions" in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act. The intent of the PEIS is to evaluate the potential direct, indirect and cumulative impacts on the human environment that the alternative approaches to implementing Hawaiian monk seal recovery actions might affect. These actions include those specified in the ESA-MMPA permit application discussed. The PEIS will be completed prior to issuance of the ESA-MMPA Permit. More information regarding the PEIS is available online. (<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/permits/eis/hawaiianmonkseal.htm>)

For more information about the Hawaiian monk seals recovery effort, please click here (http://www.fpir.noaa.gov/PRD/prd_hms_how_noaa_helps.html)