

STRATEGY	OBJECTIVES
Disease Risk: Reduce disease-related mortality	Evaluate and reduce risk of exposure and transmission of disease to monk seals
	Detect early incidences of disease in monk seal population
	Be prepared with strategies to treat affected animals and prevent disease spread
Seal-fishery Impacts: Reduce monk seal-fishery impacts through engagement, outreach, and prevention	Build trust and relationships with fishing communities and leaders to foster sustainable collaboration and cooperation and to work toward common goals
	Disseminate positive and accurate information within fishing communities to promote behavior that will help both monk seals and fishermen
	Encourage and facilitate reporting of fishery interactions with monk seals to improve response that will better seal welfare and minimize impacts on fisheries
	Develop and communicate best practices to prevent and avoid monk seal-fishery interactions
Response: Prevention and effective response to seals of concern	Develop and maintain appropriate and proactive response preparedness and prevention
	Improve management of Hawaiian monk seal volunteer response network
	Promptly respond to monk seals of concern and render appropriate care or behavioral modification responses
	Effectively communicate with the public about seals of concern
Engagement: Engage communities and build productive relationships	Encourage communities to take a proactive stewardship role in monk seal recovery to broaden ownership and build trusted community-based framework for addressing issues and disputes about monk seal conservation
	Increase use of informal communication to build trust and increase dialogue about monk seal conservation
	Connect monk seals to important societal and cultural values and incorporate information of interest into outreach materials to promote conservation values and a culture of co-existence
Education: Increase effective outreach and education	Use best practices and educational principles in outreach and education efforts
	Encourage collaboration and coordination to improve partnerships, increase information flow and transparency, and broaden the distribution of monk seal outreach
	Create educated visitor and resident populations who are informed and take action to minimize interactions with monk seals to support recovery
Capacity: Build management capacity	Productively coordinate and communicate with partners and stakeholders
	Build support for the recovery program and adequate budgetary, staffing, and partnership resources to effectively implement other strategies
	Improve management partnerships with organizations and regulatory partners to protect monk seals and their habitat



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Main Hawaiian Islands Monk Seal Management Plan Summary

Vision

A healthy and thriving Hawaiian monk seal population in the main Hawaiian Islands, living in a productive and balanced coastal ecosystem and coexisting with the cultural and economic well-being of the people of Hawaii.



Purpose and Scope

Hawaiian monk seals (or *‘iioholoikauaua*) are one of the unique species that make Hawaii’s ecosystem like nowhere else in the world. Monk seals range throughout Hawaii’s coastlines, from the uninhabited atolls of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands to Waikiki Beach. In the main Hawaiian Islands, monk seals have become a focal point for marine conservation, but also for controversy. The proximity of an endangered wild animal to human development, commerce, recreation, and culture creates challenges to finding sustainable co-existence. Recognizing this challenge, the 2007 revised Recovery Plan (National Marine Fisheries Service) included a recommendation to develop a plan that addresses the full scope of monk seal management needs in the main Hawaiian Islands.

NOAA Fisheries intends for this plan to identify threats, management strategies, objectives, and activities that are important for Hawaiian monk seal management in the main Hawaiian Islands. The crux of recovery is strong partnerships and stakeholder-based management, in which Hawaiian communities play a vital role. Through the activities we commit to in this plan, NOAA Fisheries seeks the help and participation of local communities in ensuring the people of Hawaii have a healthy and productive coastal ecosystem that supports their cultural and economic activities as well as the *‘iioholoikauaua*.

Hawaiian monk seals are found along the Hawaiian Islands archipelago and nowhere else in the world. Thus, their survival or extinction is entirely our responsibility. Hawaiian monk seals are known by several traditional names, including *ʻīlioholokai* or *ʻīlioholoikekai* (“dog running in the sea”), *ʻīlioholoikauaua* (dog running in the roughness [rough seas]), *nā mea hulu* (“the furry ones”), and *sila* or *kila* (Hawaiian versions of the English word, “seal”). Compared to other marine life forms, such as sharks and turtles, the traditional Hawaiian cultural significance of monk seals appears to be inconsistent and geographically scattered. Hawaiian monk seals were nearly hunted to extinction in the mid-1800s, and have been in a prolonged and steep population decline, more or less continuously since the 1950s. There are only about 1,100 Hawaiian monk seals alive today. While the overall Hawaiian monk seal species continues to decline, the small monk seal population in the main Hawaiian Islands is currently growing steadily. There are approximately 200 monk seals living in the main Hawaiian Islands. Though there is occasional movement of seals between the main islands and the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, the growth we see in the main Hawaiian Islands is because of the new births and survival of seals that are already here, NOT from immigration of seals from the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. Since the late 2000s, approximately 20 monk seal pups have been born each year in the main Hawaiian Islands (additional pups are born on Niihau), with births occurring on each of the main islands. This small but increasing population of seals in the main Hawaiian Islands is perhaps the most promising aspect of monk seal recovery, but the growing numbers of seals in areas that are heavily populated by humans is also creating a new set of recovery challenges, from risk of infectious diseases to interactions with fisheries. This management plan describes the management challenges and strategies needed to help guide the main Hawaiian Islands to a future of co-existence between monk seals and humans.

Management and recovery challenges in the main Hawaiian Islands are primarily associated with human-related impacts, including:

- **Infectious disease**, potentially transmitted by humans, pets, other terrestrial animals, and marine mammals (through natural contact)
- **Fisheries interactions**, such as hooking and entanglement, or depredation of fishermen’s bait and catch
- **Other seal-human interactions**, including the intentional killings of seals or seals aggressively or playfully interacting with humans
- **Habitat threats**, including climate change, invasive species, water quality issues, coastal development, and modification of the sea floor
- **Human dimensions**, including management capacity, communication and community engagement, and knowledge and attitudes



Conservation Goals

NOAA Fisheries expects the following conservation targets and goals to be accomplished through implementation of this plan:

- Stable or growing wild main Hawaiian Islands monk seal population of at least 500 seals
- Sufficient shoreline and marine habitat in the main Hawaiian Islands to support resting, pupping, molting, foraging, and other natural behaviors of at least 500 monk seals

The people of Hawaii will also experience positive benefits from the successful management of Hawaiian monk seals and their marine and terrestrial habitats:

- Natural shorelines will lead to quality ocean access
- Safe wildlife viewing will promote opportunities for recreational ocean livelihoods and traditions through ecotourism
- Sustainable fisheries will foster better opportunities for fishery-based livelihoods and traditions
- Avoidance of overly close human-wildlife interactions will lead to improved public safety while viewing, engaging in recreational activities, and conducting other activities in proximity to monk seals



Management Strategies

To develop this plan, NOAA Fisheries used a participatory process that reflects ideas and input from experts, partners, stakeholders, and community members, including outcomes from workshops and meetings to discuss monk seal management issues. This management plan is not only a guidance document for NOAA Fisheries, but also a way to communicate the strategic direction of the recovery program to all external agencies and stakeholders. The plan describes the priorities, areas of need, and potential roles to those who may be mandated to or interested in being involved in monk seal recovery efforts.

The Main Hawaiian Islands Monk Seal Management Plan presents six strategies that are designed to work together to successfully address the challenges facing monk seal conservation. Each strategy has several objectives, and the plan describes activities that will help achieve each objective, as well as outcomes through which to track success. The table (on back) presents a summary of the six strategies and their objectives.

The management strategies describe the general steps in creating our vision of a thriving, balanced coastal ecosystem in the main Hawaiian Islands that allows for the local monk seal sub-population to contribute to the overall recovery of the species. The strategies are not meant to be comprehensive, and the plan does not contain detailed instructions on how to execute activities to achieve reductions in threats to monk seals. Specific operational work plans will require the cooperation of many current and future partners, and our hope is that this plan and the strategies within are just the beginning step in building capacity for monk seal conservation in the main Hawaiian Islands.