

# NOAA announces plan for endangered Hawaiian monk seal

August 12 2015, by Caleb Jones

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In this Feb. 10, 2009, file photo, a Hawaiian monk seal basks in the late afternoon sun on the beach in Hau'ula, Hawaii, on the north shore of Oahu. Federal fisheries authorities want to more than double the small population of endangered Hawaiian monk seals in the state's main islands. Authorities on Tuesday, Aug. 11, 2015, released a draft management plan for the endangered species, of which approximately 200 live in the main Hawaiian Islands. (AP Photo/Jim Collins, File)

Federal fisheries authorities want to more than double the small population of endangered Hawaiian monk seals in the state's main islands.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration National Marine Fisheries Service on Tuesday released a draft management plan for the [endangered species](#), of which approximately 200 live in the main Hawaiian Islands.

There are approximately 1,100 Hawaiian monk seals total, with most of them living in the uninhabited Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. The species was listed as endangered under the U.S. Endangered Species Act in 1976.

NOAA's Hawaiian Monk Seal Recovery Coordinator Rachel Sprague said that while the [population](#) of monk seals in the main Hawaiian Islands has been increasing, the overall population continues to decline.

"The main Hawaiian Islands have a fairly small portion of the overall monk seal population," Sprague said in a telephone interview with The Associated Press. "If climate change or [sea level rise](#) or infectious disease did get into the population, they could be really catastrophic for such a small population. Rather than thinking about trying to really do a lot of active interventions, we're more trying to set up a situation for the future to support the monk seal population growing to a level where they could be considered recovered."

One of the primary goals of the plan is to create a stable or growing population of more than 500 seals in the main Hawaiian Islands by providing enough shoreline and marine habitat to allow the monk seal to breed and forage naturally.

NOAA says the main challenges in implanting a management plan come

from human-related impacts. Humans and their pets can potentially spread disease to the seals, seals can become caught or tangled in fishing lines and have even been intentionally killed.

NOAA scientists helped save an endangered Hawaiian monk seal that recently had a fish hook removed from his stomach.

The 12-year-old male seal was found with a fishing line coming out of its mouth in December, 2014. An endoscopy discovered a hook embedded in his stomach.

A team of veterinarians removed the fishing line and hook on New Year's Eve and the seal was later returned to the wild.

The management plan includes six strategies for helping the population. They include identifying sick or injured seals and reducing the risk of disease, education and outreach programs and better communication with fishermen. The plan also calls for more effective community management and volunteer participation.

Sprague said [monk seals](#) fill a similar role to sharks in the larger ecosystem as they are "generalist" top predators that eat a lot of different things, but it's hard to fully understand what would happen if they were to go extinct.

"It really all is interconnected," she said. "We really don't know enough about what's going to be the one that we pull out that will make the whole thing collapse. Things just get more and more unstable the more species we lose."

Officials have opened the draft to a 30 day public review and comment period.

**More information:** Management plan: [apne.ws/1hwyXcJ](https://apne.ws/1hwyXcJ)

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