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Why is NOAA Fisheries considering translocation in the Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS)?

The monk seal population is on a downward trend to extinction because most pups die in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI) before they reach age 3. NOAA Fisheries is proposing several types of translocations to address various monk seal management and survival issues. One type of translocation being considered would bring healthy female pups from the NWHI to the main Hawaiian Islands (MHI) to become healthy juveniles. The MHI would be a temporary “nursery” area to help the pups get past the stage (birth to 3 years) when most die in the NWHI and prevent the loss of future NWHI mother seals.

This would not permanently increase the number of seals in the MHI because once the females are about 3 years old, and before they are old enough to have pups, NOAA Fisheries would return them to the NWHI where they have a high chance of survival and reproduction – survival for seals age 3 and older is very good across the entire archipelago (see table below). Having these healthy, pup-bearing females in the NWHI may help to slow or reverse the current declining population trend, particularly if environmental factors change to favor monk seal survival.

Location	Juvenile Survival	Adult Survival	Est. Seal Population	Population Trend
NWHI	poor	good	900 - 950	declining
MHI	good	good	150 - 200	increasing
Overall	poor	good	1050 - 1150	declining

How will NOAA Fisheries address public concerns about implementing a translocation program?

If translocation is a course of action selected through the PEIS process, and authorized by the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) permitting processes, NOAA Fisheries would do the following before any translocation between the NWHI and MHI would be attempted:

- Conduct extensive outreach and engagement activities with local communities and stakeholders, including fishermen and ocean users, to explain the translocation process and understand and address public concerns PRIOR to translocation activities.
- Implement programs to reduce seal-human interactions, including interactions between seals and fishing, in close coordination with fishing and ocean user communities.
- Implement any translocation action as a phased-in process – if/when we start, we would start with small numbers of seals (less than 10) to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of translocation.

The temporary translocation program (from the NWHI to the MHI and back to the NWHI) would continue only if successful, with any increase in numbers of translocated seals carefully managed. We would consider translocation to be successful if:

- Survival of seals moved temporarily to the MHI is better than survival of comparable seals in the NWHI that are not translocated.
- Survival of seals returned to the NWHI is better than the survival of comparable seals in the NWHI that are not translocated.
- NOAA Fisheries demonstrates its ability to capture and return all surviving translocated seals.
- NOAA Fisheries demonstrates its ability to address serious issues with problem seals in the MHI.



Are Hawaiian monk seals indigenous or native to the Main Hawaiian Islands? Why does it seem there are no cultural references and little historical evidence of them?

All evidence indicates that Hawaiian monk seals are native (indigenous) to the Hawaiian Islands, including the MHI. Hawaiian monk seals are the only seal in the world that lives in a tropical coral reef ecosystem. Hawaiian monk seals are endemic to Hawaii, meaning they are only found in Hawaii and nowhere else in the world. We have documented reports of monk seals sighted in the MHI going back to the 1800's, and archaeological remains of monk seals dating to AD 1400-1700 were found on the Island of Hawai'i.

Although not as prominent in Native Hawaiian culture as other sea creatures, like sea turtles, recent research reveals that some Hawaiian families have traditional ties to monk seals and there are some historical Hawaiian cultural references to monk seals. This research is presented in a report available at: http://www.fpir.noaa.gov/Library/PRD/Hawaiian%20monk%20seal/MonkSeal_Report_IAI_Final.pdf

Many folks have not seen or heard much about monk seals in the MHI in the past few generations because they have only recently become more numerous again in the MHI. The MHI seal population is naturally increasing because of high reproductive success of the seals already here, not because seals are moving here from the NWHI.

Will fishermen be prosecuted for unintentional fishery interactions?

Because monk seals are protected under the ESA and MMPA, fishery interactions may result in investigations by law enforcement officials to determine if charges should be filed. However, NOAA Fisheries has prepared voluntary guidelines for the fishing community on ways they can avoid fisheries interactions. Actions by fishermen consistent with the NOAA Fisheries recommended voluntary guidelines may be considered mitigating factors in any investigation or legal action. The guidelines are available at: http://www.fpir.noaa.gov/Library/PRD/Hawaiian%20monk%20seal/HMS-fishing_guidelines-FINAL-PUBLIC.pdf

Will monk seals attract sharks and thus increase people's risk of shark attack?

All the information we have to date indicates that more monk seals in the MHI has not, and will not, lead to more shark attacks on humans. For instance, while the monk seal population has increased in the MHI over the past 10 years, incidents of shark attacks on people have shown no corresponding increase.

The high shark predation on monk seal pups in the NWHI is seen only at one islet in French Frigate Shoals and consists of a small number of sharks. This is an atypical behavior observed nowhere else and is thought to have been caused by unusual factors unique to French Frigate Shoals.

How is the Hawaiian Monk Seal Critical Habitat process related to the PEIS?

While the two processes are not dependent on each other, the processes are related because each is governed all or in part by the ESA. Both actions require similar public engagement processes and address the recovery of Hawaiian monk seals.

They differ in that critical habitat designation is required for all endangered species and identifies the specific areas essential for an endangered (or threatened) species to recover to a healthy population and not become extinct. Critical habitat designations only affect federally funded or permitted projects in order to help prevent federal agencies from negatively impacting ESA listed species' habitats. Please visit this website for more information on critical habitat: http://www.fpir.noaa.gov/PRD/prd_critical_habitat.html

This PEIS is required because funding, permitting, and implementing some of the research and enhancement measures covered in the Hawaiian Monk Seal Recovery Plan are federal actions which 'trigger' the PEIS under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The purpose of the PEIS is to evaluate the potential environmental impacts of the proposed Hawaiian monk seal recovery actions that require permits, including research and enhancement activities. Issuing permits to carry out the proposed activities triggers consultation under the ESA to ensure the research and enhancement will not jeopardize the existence of monk seals or destroy or adversely modify critical habitat.