

# Hawaiian Monk Seal

## Critical Habitat in the Main Hawaiian Islands

### Q: What is critical habitat?

A: Critical habitat is a specific area, or areas, that are essential to an endangered or threatened animal or plant in order for it to survive, not go extinct and recover to a healthy population.

This area(s):

- may require special management, like protection from development;
- may include an area that the species is not currently using, but will need to use as its population grows and recovers; and
- is only officially designated after a public comment period.

### Q: Is critical habitat similar to a Marine Protected Area (MPA), Marine Life Conservation District (MLCD), Shoreline Fisheries Management Area (SFMA), sanctuary, reserve, refuge, park, or wilderness area?

A: No. Designation of critical habitat does NOT restrict public access.

### Q: Will I still be able to recreate in beach areas that have been designated as critical habitat for the Hawaiian monk seal?

A: Yes. A critical habitat designation will not impact access to, and recreation on, the public beaches of Hawaii.

### Q: Will I still be able to fish in an area that has been designated as critical habitat for the Hawaiian monk seal?

A: Yes. A critical habitat designation only affects Federal activities (those that are federally authorized, carried out or funded). This means that any fishing within State waters (3 miles or less from shore) will not be affected by critical habitat designation.

### Q: Can private developments still occur in an area that has been designated as critical habitat?

A: Yes. The only developments that may be affected are those activities requiring Federal funding or authorization, such as filling of a wetland or repair of a seawall. This precaution is in place to insure that Federal agencies do not destroy or adversely modify critical habitat through development or other activities.

### Q: If Hawaiian monk seal critical habitat is designated, when would that happen?

A: Currently NOAA Fisheries is working towards a proposed rule for the revision to critical habitat for the Hawaiian monk seal. Through this process NOAA will be reviewing all current information available and analyzing any impacts that may result from a critical habitat designation. All of this information will be available to the public for comment when the proposed rule is announced. Critical habitat is not in effect until the final rule. The final rule is usually determined a year after the proposed rule when all comments have been received and evaluated.

### Q: What is the next step in the process of revising monk seal critical habitat?

A: The next step in the process is the publication of a proposed rule describing the revision of monk seal critical habitat, which will be followed by a public comment period and public meetings.



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**Activities NOT affected by critical habitat:**

**Non-Federal activities on private land, such as:**

- Construction
- Farming
- Logging
- ATV use
- Hunting

**Non-Federal activities on non-Federal public land or water, such as:**

- Beach recreation
- Walking the dog
- Hunting
- Ocean recreation in State waters
- Shoreline and lay gillnet fishing in State waters
- Boating & jet-skis in State waters
- Operation of tour vessels in State waters

**NOAA Fisheries Service, Pacific Islands Regional Office**

[www.fpir.noaa.gov](http://www.fpir.noaa.gov)

**NOAA Fisheries Service, Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center**

[www.pifsc.noaa.gov](http://www.pifsc.noaa.gov)