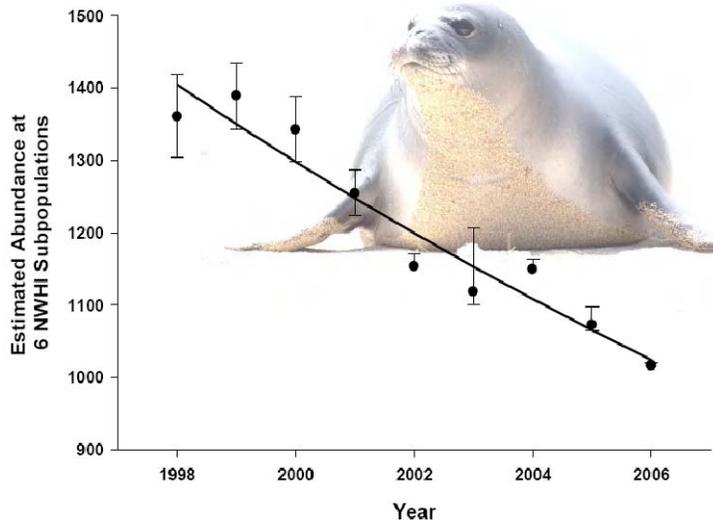


The Decline & Recovery of the Hawaiian Monk Seal

The Most Endangered Endemic Marine Mammal in the America

Hawaiian monk seals are the most endangered endemic marine mammal in the America, and one of the most endangered marine mammals in the world. Over the last 50 years, the Hawaiian monk seal population has declined by more than 60% and is now at its lowest level in recorded history, approximately 1100 individuals. Since 1998 the total number of Hawaiian monk seals declined at an average annual rate of 4.1%. At this current rate of decline, the population size will slip below 1,000 animals in the next few years. This is a pivotal point, from which they may not recover. With public support and effective state management, we will be able to turn this situation around.



Decline in estimated abundance of Hawaiian monk seals at the six main NWHI colonies since 1998.

These human and environmental factors have contributed to the decline:

- Overfishing
- Habitat loss
- Shark predation
- Entanglement
- Human disturbance
- Food availability
- Harassment by male seals
- Deaths of pups
- Aging population
- Harmful algal blooms
- Climate change



Image: James Watt/ NOAA



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Steps towards Seal Recovery

Hawaiian Monk Seal Protection

Hawaiian monk seals are protected by the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) and the Endangered Species Act (ESA), which listed the Hawaiian monk seal as endangered in 1976. For more information on the ESA visit:

www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/laws/esa. These acts aim to protect the species and the ecosystems upon which they depend. Harming, harassing, taking, or killing animals protected by these laws is strictly prohibited, and offenders can be fined as much as \$50,000. These laws also demand that governmental agencies do what they can do help these species recover and prevent them from going extinct.



Hawaiian Monk Seal Recovery

A monk seal recovery team was established by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) in 1983 to coordinate research and management activities for the seal's recovery. The Hawaiian monk seal recovery team (HMSRT) released a new recovery plan in August, 2007. The recovery plan can be found at: www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/pdfs/recovery/hawaiianmonkseal.pdf. The recovery plan identifies actions that collectively could stabilize and eventually recover the species, including:



- Improving female survival
- Reducing shark predation
- Captive care for injured or malnourished seals
- Removal of hazardous debris

It's essential to move forward with Hawaiian monk seal recovery now. Every year we wait brings the Hawaiian monk seals closer to extinction. Survival rates of monk seal pups have dropped from 80-90% in the 1970s to lower than 15% today. As the older breeding females begin to pass away, there are fewer younger animals maturing, which could lead to a catastrophic collapse of the entire population. Unless major actions are taken toward recovery in the next 5 or 10 years, the population of Hawaiian monk seals will continue to decline. Hawaiian monk seals need our help now. With adequate public and private support and effective state and federal management we will be able turn this situation around.

Save Our Seals

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