



MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION

22 March 2010

Ms. Diana Hynek
Departmental Paperwork Clearance Officer
Department of Commerce
14th and Constitution Ave., NW, Room 6625
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Ms. Hynek:

The Marine Mammal Commission has reviewed the *Federal Register* notice regarding a proposed survey of public perceptions and attitudes about Hawaiian monk seals (75 Fed. Reg. 4042). As noted in the agency's *Federal Register* notice, the Hawaiian monk seal is protected under the Endangered Species Act, the Marine Mammal Protection Act, and Hawaii state law. Despite these protections, the population—concentrated primarily in the remote Northwestern Hawaiian Islands—has declined by about two-thirds since the 1950s and continues to decline at a rate of about 4 percent a year.

One bright spot in an otherwise dismal outlook for the species is its recent reoccupation of the main Hawaiian Islands. Recent surveys indicate that more than 100 seals now occupy this area, and births have increased from only one documented before 1990 to 18 in 2008. However, seals in the main Hawaiian Islands are vulnerable to numerous threats, including disturbance by people and dogs, entanglement and hooking in recreational fishing gear, and transmission of disease from pets or feral animals. Management efforts to address such threats must include an effective education and outreach program to inform the public of both the need for and ways of protecting monk seals.

In the Commission's view, the data to be obtained through the proposed survey will be valuable in developing such an outreach program. Such efforts are critical to understanding how to conserve Hawaiian monk seals in the main Hawaiian Islands, which, in turn, may be essential to the very survival of the species. Accordingly, the Marine Mammal Commission supports the proposed survey as a first step in reducing human-monk seal interactions.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Suzanne Montgomery for". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Timothy J. Ragen, Ph.D.
Executive Director