

# Protected sea turtles put kibosh



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By William Cole  
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Abby Wines  
Spokeswoman, Arizona Memorial

Protected sea turtles with a newfound interest in the floating dock for the USS Arizona Memorial have resulted in about 7,000 people not being able to set foot on the memorial since Wednesday, the National Park Service said.

The memorial was closed part of Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Monday due to the presence of apparently foraging sea turtles, said Abby Wines, a memorial spokeswoman.

"Of course, visitors are disappointed when they can't get out to the memo-

rial for any reason," Wines said Monday. "However, I think the visitors seemed to think it was at least a cute reason, an interesting reason. Definitely, they seemed to be more understanding than when we've had to shut down for other reasons."

That happened, too, on most of Sunday, when the wind was clocked at 34.5 mph and the Navy, which operates boats that ferry passengers back and forth to the memorial, decided to pull the plug on the short trip, resulting in about 3,000 others not getting out to the memorial, Wines said.

"Turtles have definitely

## on Arizona Memorial visits

been seen in Pearl Harbor before and around the Arizona Memorial before, but this is the first time they have been staying for an extended period of time right next to the dock," Wines said.

The green sea turtle is threatened, and the hawksbill sea turtle is endangered, the state Department of Land and Natural Resources said in 2014. Although federal and state conservation laws differ, all prohibit disturbing or harming sea turtles without a permit. Even touching turtles is considered disturbance and is illegal, the DLNR said.

The USS Arizona Memorial, a grave for most of the ship's 1,177 crew members killed Dec. 7, 1941, is the state's most visited attraction. A maximum of 4,350 people a day set foot on the memorial, which sits astride the sunken battleship.

Most of the time, one turtle has been spotted at the memorial's floating dock. On Monday there were two, Wines said.

"We're working with a biologist from (the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) to try to figure out how we can best strike a compromise between the needs of the turtle and the desires of the

people," she said.

In May the 894-foot hospital ship USNS Mercy caused damage to the Arizona Memorial's access dock as the big ship was turned in the harbor. NOAA thought that might have had something to do with the new turtle interest in growth on the floating dock, Wines said.

But the dock was always in the water, "so I doubt there was very much disruption to the growth on the bottom and side of it," she said.

"It doesn't really make much sense," Wines said. "The dock didn't change that much."

## Turtles take over Arizona's dock

This sounds like the start of a homegrown riddle, doesn't it: How many sea turtles does it take to roust 7,000 tourists?

But this is Hawaii, where we take our protected species seriously, so it's no joke.

Since last Wednesday, the USS Arizona Memorial has been closed to visitors for chunks of time, due to a few protected sea turtles around the site's floating dock.

The green sea turtle is threatened and the hawksbill sea turtle is endangered, so there are state and federal laws that ban disturbing or harming them.

Thus far, some 7,000 people have been turned away from the memorial. Most visitors are said to have been disappointed but understanding, but let's hope the critters mosey along soon to another, less-interesting site.

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THURSDAY 8/20/15

## Officials clear up rules on turtles

By William Cole  
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The honu hubbub at the USS Arizona Memorial has been resolved.

The famed sunken battleship, a grave for most of the ship's 1,177 crew members killed on Dec. 7, 1941, was deemed a no-go when the Navy detachment piloting launches to the memorial's floating dock noticed threatened green sea turtles nibbling on algae near the boat landing,

officials said.

The memorial was closed parts of four days in late July and early August, resulting in about 7,000 people not being able to set foot on it. The turtle standoff ended up making national news.

As it turns out, some confusion over the Endangered Species Act may have been to blame.

"We're still seeing turtles around," said Abby Wines, a National Park Service spokeswoman. But Irene

Kelly, the Oahu-based sea turtle recovery coordinator for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, spoke with the Navy detachment "and gave them much clearer guidance as to just how close they can get to the turtles," Wines said.

"In this context, we were told that the boats can slowly approach the turtle," Wines said, adding the boats run slowly anyway since they are docking at the memorial over the Arizona.

## that led to standoff at memorial

"So the boats can slowly approach the dock, and the turtle should submerge or move out of the way, and that's what's been happening."

One and sometimes two sea turtles were spotted near the floating dock, Wines said. Kelly said she's not surprised.

"There's algae. So if you look (underwater) at the dock and the memorial now, it's been underwater for how long? Seventy-plus years. And so it's got a

habitat now growing," Kelly said. She added that "it seems to be a productive and healthy habitat, and turtles are taking advantage of that."

The green sea turtle is threatened and protected and falls under the Endangered Species Act, but there are no standoff provisions, Kelly said. The state Department of Land and Natural Resources said in 2014 that although federal and state conservation laws differ, all prohibit disturbing

or harming sea turtles without a permit. Touching a turtle is considered disturbance and is illegal, the DLNR said.

Turtles have always been found in the vicinity of the Arizona Memorial, and the green sea turtle population has been increasing about 5 percent a year within the Hawaiian archipelago, Kelly said.

"As we see the population growing, we're going to see more and more turtles everywhere," she said.