

Gill-net ban at Kiholo Bay may halt

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KIHOLO, Hawaii — A ban on the use of gill nets is intended primarily to protect turtles that feed and rest at remote Kiholo Bay on the Big Island.

But a Hilo-based researcher said it may also prevent overfishing of the bay, where an abundant number of native species, including *akule*, are found.

Rules designating Kiholo a "special fisheries management area" allow state Land and Natural Resource Department offi-

cers to arrest people who use the nets, which trap and drown turtles.

The chief purpose of the rules is to protect the endangered green sea turtle, which spawns at Kiholo but migrates to the northwest Hawaiian Islands to breed at about age 25.

The Big Island is considered one of the major habitats for the native turtles. This includes Punalu'u Bay in Ka'u, where the hawksbill turtle breeds and has been studied for years.

Robert Nishimoto, who holds a doctorate in outdoor biology, said the rule was widely favored by fishermen who go to

Kiholo to catch popular species of fish.

The state action will help not only the green sea turtle, but also the hawksbill turtle, which also uses the bay, situated midway between Kawaihae and Kailua-Kona.

Kiholo once was considered as a state park site, but it remains undeveloped with limited access. Fishermen reach it from the ocean or by walking many miles along an ancient Hawaiian trail that is parallel to the coastline.

The state's director of land and natural resources, Michael Wilson, said public support of

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overfishing, biologist says

the rules is essential.

"It's one thing to create a management area and hope that people abide by the rules," he said. "It's another thing to have an entire community in support of our efforts and willing to make sure one of Hawaii's most beautiful species is protected."

A Land Department spokeswoman in Honolulu said the rules have no effect on pole or line fishermen or throw-net users.

The action is among several aimed at improving the chances of Hawaiian turtle survival. A few miles north, the Mauna

brated July 4 with an "independence day" program by releasing turtles hatched in captivity.

The rules are less demanding than those for a marine conservation zone, such as the one at Kealahou Bay in South Kona, which restrict far more activities and where violations can lead to harsher penalties.

Much of the work at Kiholo has been enhanced by ongoing studies by science students at Hawaii Preparatory Academy in Waimea.

They have studied the resting and feeding habits of the green