

Summary of recommendations agreed upon at an informal interagency planning meeting on issues relating to the endangered hawksbill turtle in Hawaii.

Held on February 3, 1994, at Hawaii Volcanoes National Park.

Participants:

Larry Katahira and Charlotte Forbes
Resource Management Division
Hawaii Volcanoes National Park

Susan Pultz
Pacific Islands Office
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

George Balazs
Marine Turtle Research Program
Honolulu Laboratory
National Marine Fisheries Service

Note: The following recommended actions were not prioritized. They are presented here in the order they were discussed. In most cases the appropriate agencies, organizations, and/or individuals responsible for accomplishing these tasks were not specifically identified. This summary constitutes the opinions of the participants, and does not necessarily reflect the official views of the agencies represented.

1. A need exists for appropriately worded informational signs at key hawksbill nesting areas to alert beach visitors and ocean users of the protected status and conservation needs of sea turtles (such as undisturbed habitats, absence of disorienting light, etc.).
2. A comprehensive management and research plan is needed for the Kamehame nesting site. This should include an evaluation of the potential for designating the beach as a sea turtle "sanctuary" or "refuge", as well as eliminating detrimental fishing activities.
3. Ecotourism enterprises currently using, and possibly negatively impacting, the Kamehame nesting area and nearshore waters should be contacted in order to develop positive lines of communication and exchange relevant information on sea turtle conservation and biology.
4. Hawksbill nests deposited low to the water (within the intertidal zone) at Kamehame and other beaches under close surveillance by authorized researchers should be skillfully relocated at the earliest possible time to a safe and suitable site a short distance away.

5. Authorized researchers should continue to carefully document and quantify all negative impacts to the successful incubation, hatching, and overall productivity of nests, and the survival of hatchlings in reaching the sea. Particular attention should be given to documenting the scope and magnitude of density-dependent nest destruction at Kamehame.

6. Comprehensive training programs must be conducted for all volunteers and other personnel assigned to monitor, tag, and study hawksbills at nesting beaches. Efforts should be made to recruit volunteers that can commit to the study for a major portion of the nesting season.

7. Mammalian predators of eggs and hatchlings should continue to be controlled at key nesting beaches. Periodic consultations should be made with a professional veterinarian and/or a recognized humane society with regard to acceptable capture and euthanasia procedures.

8. An investigation is warranted to determine ownership and the possibility of permanent closure of the unimproved roadway infringing upon the sand dunes bordering Punaluu beach. Exact ownership of land associated with the pavilion at Punaluu should also be determined in order to more effectively address hawksbill conservation issues.

9. The County of Hawaii should be commended for steps it has taken to accommodate nesting hawksbills and hatchlings by reducing the intensity and wavelength of artificial lighting associated with the parking lot at Punaluu Beach Park. Additional modifications along these same lines are warranted with regard to lighting within the pavilion.

10. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Park Service Office of Research and Resources Management should liaison with regard to the research and management of nesting hawksbills and nest productivity in Hawaii.

11. The appropriate federal and state regulatory agencies need to be contacted by resort developers at the earliest time possible in order to ensure compatibility of their project with regard to hawksbill recovery and conservation goals.

12. Research needs to be conducted to determine the species and possible predatory role of ants on hawksbill eggs and hatchlings noted at local nesting beaches.

13. Research needs to be conducted to determine why green turtles are nocturnally resting ("basking") at Kamehame beach in proximity to where hawksbill nesting occurs.

14. As existing personnel and funds permit, reports of turtle nesting at previously unstudied locations should be promptly followed up with an on-site assessment. Assistance should be obtained from appropriate agencies and owners to gain access to nesting sites situated on private property.

15. Satellite telemetry is needed to identify the resident foraging pastures used by hawksbills nesting along the east coast of the island of Hawaii. Oceanic migrations to locations outside of the Hawaiian Islands are a possibility.

16. Private conservation organizations in Hawaii should be encouraged to carry out additional public education programs about Hawaiian sea turtles.

17. Research and management programs focused on the hawksbill turtle need to be initiated at known nesting sites on the islands of Molokai and Maui.

18. The need exists for additional cooperation among federal, state and county agencies, along with private land owners, in order to effectively manage hawksbills nesting areas.

19. Research is needed on adult male hawksbills due to their critical contribution to the reproductive process and the current absence of any data on their status and ecology.