

**MĀLAMA PONO  
PUNALU‘U  
TURTLE AND  
BEACH  
PRESERVATION  
PROGRAM  
HANDBOOK**

February 2024

## **Who We Are**

Mālama Pono Punalu'u (MPP) is a community-based, volunteer program founded in June 2022. We are comprised of about 40 adult volunteers members and are developing a youth stewardship component.

## **Mission Statement:**

Our mission is to provide a safe and harassment free space for basking Honu (Green Sea Turtles), while making efforts to preserve and maintain the sandy beach area in its natural and pristine state to encourage Honu'ea (Hawksbill Sea Turtle) nesting.

## **Objectives**

Following are ways we are achieving our mission.

1. Provide a safe and harassment free space for basking Honu:
  - a. Maintain the rock enclosure designated for basking Honu
  - b. Encourage our visitors to view from at least 20'
  - b. Post effective signage
  - c. Be a source to answer questions, disseminate information and educate our visitors
  
2. Slow the speed of Black Sand loss, to extend the life of the beach and to maintain enough sand to encourage the continuation of nesting Honu'ea
  - a. Approach and discourage visitors from taking sand
  - b. Create more "Removal of Sand Prohibited" signage
  - c. Plant naupaka in front of lagoon pond to keep high storm surf from pushing sand into pond
  - d. Work with private land owners to participate and work together
  
3. Preserve and Maintain Punalu'u Beach and keep it in its most natural and pristine state:  
Beach Cleaning:
  - a. Removal of fallen coconut leaves, discarded coconut husks and other debris not natural to the beach.
  - b. Remove large rocks washed on the beach by high tides and storm surf. Return rocks back to the ocean or use them to rebuild rock wall.
  - c. Create signage for:
    - No camping on the beach
    - No camp fires on the beach
  
4. Be available to provide minimum beach safety measures after lifeguards go off duty:

- a. First Kit for minor injuries
- b. Be available to answer visitors basic beach questions
- c. Use bullhorn to warn swimmers venturing beyond the buoys
- d. Assist with visitors with common beach injuries:
  - Slips and falls
  - Sea urchin (Vana) pokes
  - Vehicle Lockouts
- e. Call 911 for any emergencies

5. Data Collection:

- a. Track number of visitors viewing Honu
- b. Track number of encroachment incidents
- c. Track number of swimmers in the water during shift
- d. Track number of Honu basking
- e. Individual Honu identification

**In Partnership with:**

Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) - John Kahiapo  
 NOAA  
 University of Hawaii  
 County of Hawai'i  
 (Lifeguard, Local Police, Council Woman - Michelle Galimba)  
 Island of Hawaii Visitors Bureau - Rachael  
 Hawaiian Civic Club of Ka'u

**Volunteer Guidelines and Responsibilities:**

Hours of service (shift):

Turtle and Beach Monitors will be on duty from 4:30PM (when the lifeguards leave) until dark daily.

Daily Crew: A Crew of 2: *Whenever possible*, it is recommended that at least two (2) Punalu'u Beach Monitors be on duty for each shift.

Rationale:

- a. In the event of an incident, one member to capture video for MPP review
- b. Turtles that need supervision may be spaced in various areas on the beach
- c. Create added safety for our volunteers

Crew Requirements:

- Serve at least one (1) shift a month
- Attend a training session or get mentored on the job
- Be able to answer basic Honu and beach questions
- Present a positive and welcoming attitude and demeanor, have aloha
- Complete and sign daily log

Crew apparel: Each adult member will be issued the following MPP apparel:

One each of the following: Hat, Hooded Sweater, T-shirt

We highly recommend that when you are working a shift, please wear your MPP gear as it will provide a more professional appearance and give you more legitimacy when you make an approach.

Crew Equipment: We suggest you bring the following with you on your shift:

- a. Wear your MPP Gear
- b. Beach Chair for comfortable and mobile seating
- c. Cell phone
- d. Water

Data Collection Clipboard: Please find the Data Collection Clipboard and all other equipment on the back wall of the Punalu'u Lei Stands (ocean side)

1. Lock combination 8-29-4
2. Bag containing:
  - Data Collection Clip Board with daily log and pen
  - Red # counter
  - Blue # counter
  - Bull horn
  - 2 ropes
3. Other equipment:
  - Flashlight
  - Monthly Tide Chart app on your cell phone [tideschart.com](http://tideschart.com)
  - Plastic disposable gloves (picking up trash, dealing with blood injuries, etc)
  - Small kitchen garbage bags
  - Extra flashlight batteries
  - First Aid Kit - See Lei Stand Venders

Set Up: Depending upon where the turtles are located, select the best place to

set up your viewing station (chairs) with the following in mind:

Must be able to see and count all turtle visitors without double counting them. Keep in mind, tourist approach the beach from two (2) areas (Pavilion and Lei Stands) With multiple turtles on the beach, pick the location that most visitors will be attracted to and do your counting from there

The counter: Decide which partner is going to count the tourists and which partner is going to count the swimmers.

Do your best to be as accurate as possible knowing that total accuracy is unlikely.

Filling in Daily Log: Pick up daily log located in the locked box behind shops and record:

1. Date – fill in date you are on the beach
2. Start of Shift:
  - a. Indicate the Number of turtles and the location of turtles on the beach at start of shift
  - b. Weather Report – circle what applies
  - c. Tide level: High Low  
use [tideschart.com](http://tideschart.com) and record the time of the tides
  - d. Time of sunset – record time of sunset
3. Throughout Shift:
  - a. Record Number of turtles and the time of turtles climbing on shore or returning to water along with the location.  
Please note that should a turtle come onshore on the sandy beach in front of the lifeguard stand or on the sandy beach nearest the wharf, before or after the lifeguards leave, use the rope to mark off a 20-foot perimeter around the turtle. Collect the rope when you leave.
  - b. Using Red Counter: count/tally number of tourists viewing the turtles, include turtles Basking in the rocks in front of the lei stands. Keep in mind, visitors will come from both the pavilion and lei stand. *Tourists still need to be counted even in the event that there are no turtles on the beach.* Use your judgement.
  - c. Using Blue Counter: count/tally the number of swimmers that enter the water. If someone puts a toe in the water, that counts as a swimmer.

note: we realize there is no way to be precise, just make your best judgement when clicking the hand-held counters

- d. Make note of any approaches by YOU to a visitor
  - e. If there are no turtles on the beach or no tourists, you are welcome to roam the beach to pick up trash (use disposable gloves), remove large rocks from beach or mend the rock wall enclosure.
4. End of Shift:
- a. Record the total number of Honu, swimmers, and approaches **YOU** make.
  - b. Complete an incident report, if the situation extends beyond a normal interaction. When completing an incident report, explain the situation in brief as best as you can, use the back of the sheet.
  - d. Record name of monitor(s) on duty
  - e. Drop off daily log, along with bag containing other equipment, in locked box behind shops at end of shift.

Approaching and addressing an encroacher:

Approach with aloha.

Avoid as much as possible:

- Raising your voice – take a deep breath first
- Having an aggressive body posture
- Getting too close into their space

Approach with a positive demeanor and voice. Anytime **you** make an approach, record it on the daily log. Have your partner inconspicuously video the event. This can help us in create future training videos as well as provide evidence, in the event the situation becomes negative.

Approach examples;

Example #1: Excuse me...our turtles are on the endangered species list and federally protected, can you please stay at least 20 'away from them. Thank you.

Example #2: Excuse me...can you please stay out of the rock enclosure. It is reserved for our endangered turtles. Turtles can be expected at any time and we must reserve the space for them.

Note: even if there are no turtles in the enclosure it is a Keep Out zone.

If resistance continues;

Have partner record a video of the situation. If possible, without creating a physical confrontation, take their picture and a picture of their

vehicle license plate. If they are non-responsive, disrespectful and potentially combative...call the police.

Use the non-emergency number.

# 808 935-3311

Dial 911 for potential physical confrontations or threats

Incident Report of non-compliant visitor

DO NOT GET INTO A PHYSICAL CONFRONTATION – walk away and stay safe

Note the incident on your daily log sheet and if possible, write up the incident on the back of the daily report, and notify the coordinator of the incident.

It is important to know that taking pictures/videos of minors and/or adults on a public beach is within your First Amendment rights. Should the minor be naked – that will come into a gray area and should be avoided.

Phone numbers to report trouble;

Stranded/entangles marine mammals: 888-256-9840

Local number 808 286-4359

Hawai'i Monk Seal Hotline: 888-256-9840

Lauren 808-987-0765

NOAA Fisheries Enforcement Hotline: 800-853-1964

(available 24/7)

DOCARE: 808-974-6208 (Hilo)

808-323-3141 (Kona)

DLNR Hotline

808 643-3567

DLNR Local Enforcement – Hilo dispatch

808 961-3360

Vehicle lockouts - Ka'u Towing, John Masters

808-936-2272

## **Training**

Be prepared to answer the more common and basic questions presented by our Visitors:

### **Honu**

1. Are they alive?  
Yes, they are just resting.
2. What species of turtle are we looking at?  
Green Sea turtle: Honu
3. Are there more than one species that frequent this beach?

Yes, there are two (2) species that frequent this beach.

4. What is the name of the other species?  
Hawksbill turtle – Honu'ea.
5. How can you tell the difference?  
Hawksbill turtle has a beak like a hawk and the edges of the carapace (shell) are more jagged vs rounded.
6. Why do the turtles come on shore, are they sick or nesting?  
They are resting/sleeping which is called basking. The Honu are known to bask, a habit that is not shared by the Honu'ea (Hawksbill Turtle)
7. When do the turtles come out to bask?  
Turtles like to bask and prefer sunny days but we have been noticing that they are coming onshore later in the day – after 4:30PM until about sundown. The tide does have some effect on their choice of basking time as does the moon.
8. How long do they stay out?  
There is no pattern to the time spent basking on shore. However, if bothered by encroaching people, animals or loud noise, the turtles will leave.
9. Do these turtles nest here?  
No. The turtles you see are Honu (Green Sea Turtles). They usually nest on French Frigate Shoals, an island 250 miles north of the island of Kauai. They mature around 25 years of age and begin the trek north to nest.
10. When is nesting season?  
Green Sea Turtles nesting season is from mid-April to September  
The Hawksbill will nest from May to December.
11. Which species nest at Punalu'u?  
Hawksbill (Honu'ea)
12. How old are these turtles?  
The Honu that you see on the shoreline and beaches of Punalu'u are estimated to be about 5-20 years old, and range from 25-100 lbs. And can live up to a100 years old.
13. How big do these turtles get?  
The adults can get up to 550 pounds.
14. What do the honu eat?  
Hatchings eat fish and plants but switch when they get older to algae and seagrass.
15. Do green sea turtles bite?  
Yes.
16. How much can you be fined for turtle harassment?  
Up to \$25,000 by the federal government.
17. How long do the turtles stay underwater?  
From 4 to 7 hours.
18. How can I tell a male from a female?  
Short tail = female, long tail = male. This method can be used with older turtles only.



19. Are the turtles tagged?  
14 of our turtles are tagged with the numbers HA178 to HA192.
20. What types of tags are used?  
There are 3 types used
- a) Microchips like the ones for dogs and cats.
  - b) A metal tag that is attached under the shell – can only be seen up close when snorkeling.
  - c) Carapace Etching that lasts about 6 months and is easy to see.
21. Are there any new technologies been developed to identify turtles?  
Yes. Facial recognition but the program right now is too complex to use by the general public. It's still is a work in progress.

## **Monk Seals**

1. Do you ever see monk seals on this beach.  
Yes, but rarely. The last monk seal was reported on July 15, 2023 and then again on December 3, 2023. The time before was about 4 years prior.
2. Are monk seals endangered?  
Yes! And they are federally protected. They are estimated to be about 1600 individuals in the entire state and Hawaiian archipelago.
3. How far away do you have to stay from a monk seal.  
It is recommended to stay at least 50 feet from a monk seal. If the monk seal has a pup, it is recommended to stay at least 150 feet from both.
4. What is the fine for harassing a Hawaiian monk seal  
\$50,000.
5. When do the monk seal rest?  
They rest during the day on sandy beaches or on lava rocks, they will forage at night.
6. What do the seals eat?  
Fish, octopus, squid, eels and crustaceans.
7. Is there any time of year when the monk seal is more irritable?  
Yes. When the monk seal is molting it is more irritable – Stay Away
8. What is involved in molting?  
The seal will shed its' top layer of skin and fur.
9. When do they molt?  
Once a year  
Females molt usually 2 to 3 months after weaning their pup.  
Other seals will molt 2 to 3 months after their birthday.
10. Why do they molt?  
Because they can grow algae on their fur.
11. Where do monk seals pup?  
On land.
12. When do monk seal pup?  
March through August

13. How large are the pups at birth?  
They are born black at about 25 to 30 lbs
14. How big is a weaning pup?  
About 110 to 175 lbs.
15. How big is the adult seal?  
They are about 400 to 600 lbs and about 6 to 7 feet long.

## **Punalu'u Beach**

1. What does the name Punalu'u mean?  
Immersed in springs, diving into spring water
2. Where can I see the springs?  
Look along the rocks and tide pools and you will find fresh water gushing out of the sand and rocks.
3. Can I find the springs in the bay?  
Yes, you can feel the change in water temperature while swimming in the bay. Your mask will have a tendency to fog frequently due to the change of water temperature.
4. Where do the springs come from?  
Rain water filters down the mountain through tiny cracks in the rock and aquifers then finds its way down to Punalu'u.
5. Is spring water drinkable?  
Yes, best drank right at the source where water comes out of the ground. Hawaiian Village sights were chosen on the availability of spring water for drinking.
6. Is the pond fresh or salt water?  
Brackish Water - a combination of both salt and fresh water.
  
7. How is the black sand made?  
Black sand is formed by the explosion of hot lava entering the ocean.
8. Can I take the sand and rocks?  
NO!!  
There is a fine of upwards of \$100,000 assessed by the county.

## **Pele's Curse**

The Hawaiians's have a legend that says the rocks and sand are Pele's keiki (children) and if you take them off the island you are abducting her keiki. Bad luck will follow until the sand/rocks are returned.

Beware the wrath of Pele!

**FYI** Other cultures have similar stories

In India if you take a flower from the mountain shrine to Shiva, it will bring death.

In Pompeii, Italy, taking rocks will bring bad luck.

In Ireland if you take rocks from “fairy mounds” you will have years of bad luck.

“Leave only footprints, take away only memories”