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The Marine Mammal Center’s Ke Kai Ola Announces New Middle-School Ocean Conservation Program on Hawai‘i Island

(KONA, Hawai‘i) – Filling a critical need for middle-school science education, The Marine Mammal Center is proud to announce Nā Kōkua o ke Kai, a new marine science program tailored to meet the unique needs of students in grades 6-8 and their teachers on Hawai‘i Island (the Big Island of Hawai‘i). Meaning “those who help the sea,” Nā Kōkua o ke Kai will highlight the extraordinary marine life and ecosystem of Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument, inspiring students and in turn their communities to become stewards of the monument, the ocean environment, and the endangered Hawaiian monk seal.

“Nā Kōkua o ke Kai will foster relationships with the ocean environment for middle-school students at a formative time in their lives,” says Rachel Bergren, Director of Education and Guest Experience at The Marine Mammal Center. “It is an important opportunity to ensure that they become the next generation of ocean stewards and scientific thinkers who will ensure the health of our ocean and environment.”

The Center's Hawaiian monk seal rehabilitation and education center, Ke Kai Ola (“The Healing Sea”), is located in Kona and will be one of the featured field trips, along with the Mokupāpapa Discovery Center in Hilo. Students will gain exposure to the vast array of science innovation happening on Hawai‘i Island and hone their scientific skills as they participate in hands-on experiences and activities that complement their classroom learning. The field trips are provided at no cost to schools or students.

Through direct participation, students immediately connect science to the real world. At the same time, by discussing how both humans and Hawaiian monk seals are impacted when our ocean endures challenges, students learn lifelong lessons about how they can make a difference as environmental stewards and more. For example, in one lesson plan, the Pono Project, students will have the opportunity to take what they’ve learned and answer a research question about a conservation issue that most inspires them.

As Hawai‘i moves to implement Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), teachers will benefit from the high-quality professional development opportunities and curricular resources included in the program that support their teaching goals in the classroom and help inspire
confidence in teaching science. Connecting classroom teachers with marine science experts supports student engagement in science fundamentals while considering real-life, contemporary challenges and opportunities.

Funding was provided in part by the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation through two Ernest F. Hollings Ocean Awareness Awards. The purpose of the Hollings Awards is to foster a better understanding of ocean and Great Lakes issues that leads to increased stewardship of natural and cultural marine resources, including the Hawaiian monk seal, one of eight endangered and protected species that are part of NOAA’s Species in the Spotlight campaign.

“Nā Kōkua o ke Kai means ‘those who help the sea’ in Hawaiian, and that truly gets to the spirit of what the Hollings Awards are all about,” said Kristen Sarri, President and CEO of the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation. “We’re pleased to provide funding for The Mammal Marine Center to connect students to the Pāpahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument through learning more about protecting monk seals.”

The Cooke Foundation provided additional support for the program, and many other individuals, foundations, and corporations are providing general support for The Marine Mammal Center’s work in Hawaii.

Nā Kōkua o ke Kai is currently piloting with two middle schools – Hilo Intermediate School and Kealakehe Intermediate School – on Hawai’i Island in spring 2017. If you are interested in learning more about the program and how your school might partner with Ke Kai Ola, email eduH!@tmmc.org.

Interviews
Please contact Laura Sherr at SherrL@tmmc.org to schedule an interview about the program.

Assets
Photos of Ke Kai Ola and monk seal patients are available for download here: https://www.dropbox.com/sh/oyeoxwqghw1366l/AAAljAKJ5pTb-sBhr-IxgRvTua?dl=0

Proper caption and credit information must be used, including NOAA permit numbers, and this information is all available in a document in the folder.

About The Marine Mammal Center
At The Marine Mammal Center, we are guided and inspired by a shared vision of a healthy ocean for marine mammals and humans alike. Our mission is to advance global ocean conservation through marine mammal rescue and rehabilitation, scientific research, and education. Since 1975, the Center has been headquartered in the Marin Headlands, Sausalito, Calif., within the Golden Gate National Parks and has rescued and treated more than 20,000 marine mammals. In 2014, the Center opened Ke Kai Ola, a hospital for the rehabilitation of the endangered Hawaiian monk seal, in Kailua-Kona, Hawaii. For more information, please visit www.KeKaiOla.org. Follow us on Facebook and Twitter.