

Aloha 'Āina

In Hawai'i, there is a saying: "Aloha 'Āina." This means to love and respect the land. Read on to learn more about The Marine Mammal Center's work in Hawai'i and what we can all do to help.



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Photo © NOAA / permit 16632

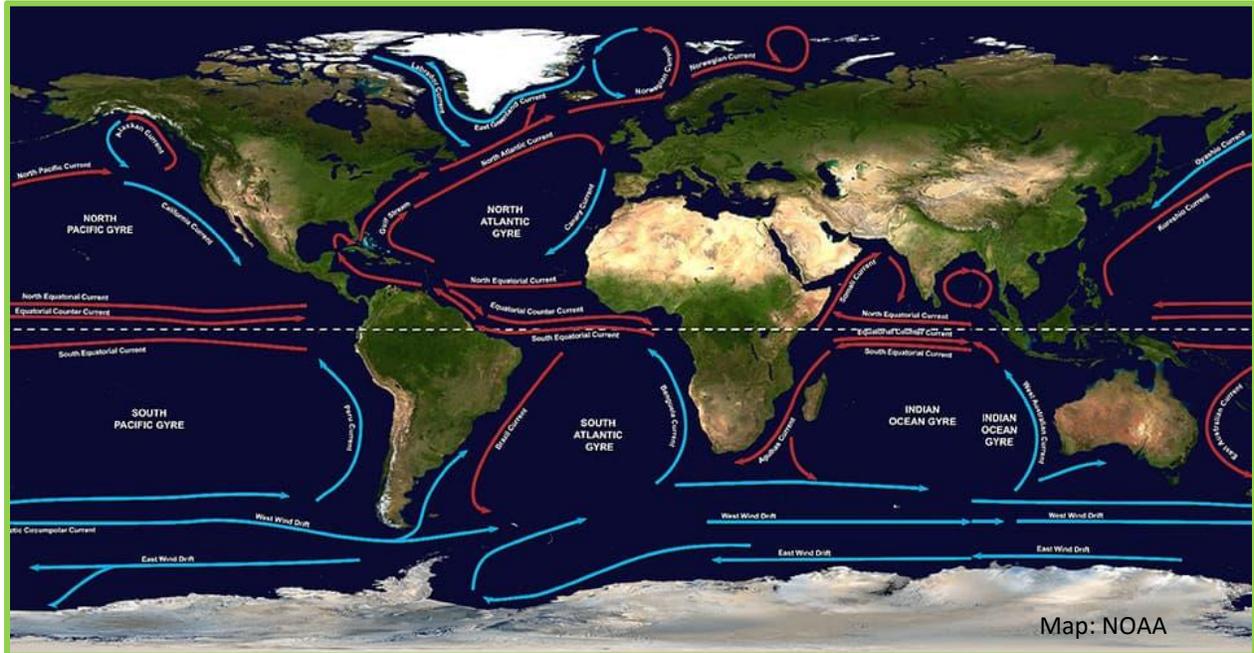
Trash: Not good for you, not good for monk seals

Everybody knows that littering is not good for the planet. Not only does it make our Earth dirty, it also makes it unsafe for animals. Animals do not know that trash is not food or a toy. One example of an animal that suffers greatly from trash in their natural habitat is the Hawaiian monk seal like past Ke Kai Ola patient Niho`ole pictured above. Monk seals often eat fishing hooks that get stuck in their mouths which make them unable to eat fish. They can also get twisted in fishing line, which can really hurt them. Monk seals are very curious creatures and will play with anything they can find, which includes any trash – even knives (keep reading for a specific example)! This is why it is important to pick up after yourself and pick up any trash you see even if it's not yours – every piece of trash you make sure to throw away, is another animal you could be saving! Ke Kai Ola (“the healing sea”), The Marine Mammal Center’s monk seal hospital in Kailua-Kona, Hawai'i, makes sure that monk seals are safe throughout all of the islands. Specialists and volunteers rush to different beaches every time a monk seal is spotted with an ailment, which includes being tangled in fishing nets or twine, having a hook in their mouth, or anything else that could cause the monk seal harm! By throwing away any trash you make or find, you are also helping the team at Ke Kai Ola save the endangered monk seals! Everything from nets to water bottles to toothbrushes wash up on beaches in Hawai'i, but if we look closely, a lot of it isn't even from Hawai'i.

How do you think trash from other countries gets to such an isolated place in the middle of the Pacific Ocean?

Gyres in Hawai'i

A **gyre** is a large system of rotating ocean currents. Currents are created by wind, tides, and differences in temperature and salinity and there are many types of currents like eddies, whirlpools, or deep ocean currents. Together, these larger and consistent currents make up the systems known as gyres. And they don't just move water. They move people and goods, and in this case, also pollution and debris.



While there are five major ocean gyres, there is one in particular that greatly affects Hawai'i. This whirlwind of ocean currents collects trash in the ocean and carries it from far and wide to the Hawaiian Islands that are near the center of the gyre. This means that the Hawaiian Islands are covered in trash that is not even from Hawai'i!

Do you have any ideas on what *you* could do to help stop this?

Northwestern Hawaiian Islands: Not a dumpster!

Trash from other places is brought to the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands by gyres due to their location. These islands are also home to the largest (and only) population of tropical seals in the world. The Hawaiian Monk Seal is endangered with only 1,400 seals alive today. They are only found in Hawai'i and mostly reside on the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, although many also live on the main Hawaiian Islands, too (check out our [other activities](#) for more on what it means to be endangered or endemic). Monk seals are very curious creatures who are always interested in new items that wash up on the shore. This has led to many issues with trash like old fishing hooks, twine, water bottles, and even knives!

Why it's important

When someone forgot their knife at the beach, a Hawaiian monk seal named Manu`iwa found it for them! Not only could she not return it, but this was very dangerous for her. If we do not pick up our trash, it doesn't just harm our earth, but also those who live on it. Although beach cleanups are very important, it is also important to keep our living space free of trash. Waterways all connect to the ocean. Collecting trash before it gets the chance to come up on the beach is a great, proactive way to help our environment! Try it out in our activity.



Photo courtesy DLNR

Aloha 'Āina Activity

In Hawai'i, there is a saying: "aloha 'āina." This means to love and respect the land. This is a very important belief in Hawai'i. Aloha 'āina advocates for everyone to contribute to keeping the land clean and safe for everyone who lives on it. Through reducing the waste you create, making sure your trash is always properly disposed of and making an effort to clean up if you see trash that has not been properly disposed of, you are contributing to aloha 'āina! Now it is your job to help your 'āina (land) by doing this activity! Not only are you helping the people and animals in your area, but you are also helping the people and animals in other places, like in Hawai'i, where your trash could wash ashore!

Materials:

- ★ Gloves
- ★ A trash bag
- ★ Good shoes for walking!
- ★ Notebook and pen

Instructions:

For our activity, go outside! Make sure to put on your gloves after exiting your home and remember to take them off before coming back in to avoid contamination. See how much trash you can collect in your neighborhood, your backyard, or your local beach. For people collecting in groups, have a contest to see who can fill their trash bag first! Then see what different art you can make using the different colors, textures, and shapes you find. For inspiration, check out [this exhibit](#) previously hosted at The Marine Mammal Center or our current exhibit, the Ghost Net Monster pictured here. There are lots of great ideas out there and we're excited to see what you create!

Use your notebook and pen to document the different things you find. Write down how you think each item could negatively affect a seal – could he swallow it? Get tangled up in it? In the case of the Ghost Net Monster, fishing nets that get lost at sea continue to catch marine life and cause damage to the environment even if they aren't collected usually after being lost in a storm or cut because they were caught and unable to be otherwise freed. Notice how everything you find is different and could have traveled across the entire world to reach you. This is why it is so important to make sure we pick up our trash – it doesn't just affect us, but other parts of the world as well. Every piece of trash you pick up, whether it's yours or not, brings us closer and closer to a clean ocean!

