



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

News Release

Maui National Wildlife Refuge Complex

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Waters Surrounding Molokini to be Temporarily Closed for Unexploded Ordnance Disposal

A temporary closure of the waters within 1 nautical mile of Molokini Island is planned in the coming weeks to allow the U.S. Navy to dispose of three pieces of unexploded ordnance found during surface inspections. The actual closure will be for 10 hours or fewer, probably on January 30. A public meeting to provide information about the disposal process and the temporary closure will be held on January 23 from 5:00 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. at the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary office in Kihei.

Due to unpredictable weather conditions, the U.S. Coast Guard is establishing a safety zone from January 27 through February 8, but it will only be enforced during actual hours of disposal activity. Exact times of the closure will be announced over marine band VHF channel 16 prior to enforcement to ensure ample public notification.

The unexploded ordnance, consisting of a 250-pound bomb, 105mm projectile, and a 5-inch rocket, were found during surveys completed in December 2006 and March 2007 by the U.S. Navy, at the request of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The Service is proposing to establish Molokini Island as an "overlay unit" attached to Kealia Pond National Wildlife Refuge to protect the island's large colony of nesting seabirds and restore native plant populations. The island would remain under U.S. Coast Guard ownership, and the Service would continue to work with the State of Hawai'i's Department of Land and Natural Resources to monitor the seabird colony. The overlay refuge would only include the island itself, and the State will continue to manage the surrounding waters as a State Marine Life Conservation District. Disposal of the ordnance must take place before the overlay unit can be established.

"We have had overwhelming support from the U.S. Navy, U.S. Coast Guard, and Department of Land and Natural Resources in removing this unexploded ordnance," said Glynnis Nakai, refuge manager for the Maui National Wildlife Refuge Complex. "We recognize this will be a short-term inconvenience for residents and commercial entities who normally visit Molokini to snorkel and dive, but in the long term this action will ensure the safety of people involved in restoration efforts on the island, as well as the wildlife that inhabit it."

The island has large colony of as many as 3,200 adult wedge-tailed shearwaters that nest on the island from March to mid-December. A smaller population of Bulwer's petrels also nests on the island, and other seabirds such as great frigatebirds and noddies use the island for roosting. Disposal of the ordnance has been scheduled to avoid impacts to these birds.

Given the age and condition of the ordnance, the Navy team was not able to ascertain the exact internal composition of the items and is treating them as hazardous explosive items and, in the interest of everyone's safety, is treating them as hazardous explosive items. The team determined the safest and most effective approach involves burning the bomb in place and detonating the other two items within a crater on Molokini Island.

Due to the elevation of the sites (approximately 300 feet above sea level) and the hard substrate of the island, no impacts on humpback whales or other marine animals are anticipated, though underwater sound levels will be monitored. Officials from the U.S. Navy and Fish and Wildlife Service will provide additional information about the disposal activity and respond to questions during the public meeting on January 23. The Hawaiian Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary office is located at 726 South Kihei Road.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov.

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