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### **Ocean Count Promotes Awareness about Humpback Whales**

*Volunteers with Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary Staff Sites on Kaua'i, O'ahu, and Hawai'i islands*

More than 403 volunteers gathered data from the shores of O'ahu, Kaua'i and Hawai'i islands during the third and final event of the 2016 Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary Ocean Count.

Ocean Count serves to promote public awareness about humpback whales, the sanctuary, and shore-based whale watching opportunities. The count is conducted three times per year during peak whale season and provides a snapshot of humpback whale sightings from the shoreline. Participants tally humpback whale sightings and document the animals' surface behavior during the survey.

Volunteers collected data from 50 sites statewide on March 26, 2016. A total of 94 whale sightings were seen during the 9:00 am – 9:15 am time period, the most of any time period throughout the day's count. Weather conditions were ideal for viewing humpback whales—clear skies, minimal vog, calm seas, light breeze but however there were very few whales sighted on all three islands. Other marine life observed included large pods of dolphins, green sea turtles, and several Hawaiian monk seals.

“We are so appreciative of the dedication and enthusiasm that the volunteers give to this project each year, and the support of the landowners and land managers who allow us to use their properties. Besides generating the count, behavior, and mapped data sheets, the volunteers were able to educate over 2200 members of the public who stopped by for more information during the three counts this whale season,” said Jean Souza, Kauai coordinator.

Preliminary data detailing whale sightings by site location are available at: <http://www.sanctuaryoceancount.org/resources/>. Additional information is available on the sanctuary's website at <http://hawaiihumpbackwhale.noaa.gov>.

The sanctuary, which is administered by a partnership of NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries and the State of Hawai'i through the Department of Land and Natural Resources, protects humpback whales and their habitat in Hawaiian waters where they migrate each winter to mate, calve and nurse their young.

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On the Web:

Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary:

<http://hawaiihumpbackwhale.noaa.gov>

NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries: <http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov>

State of Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources: <http://hawaii.gov/dlnr/>

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