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January 8, 2019

Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary Ocean Count will take place despite government shutdown

Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary's annual Ocean Count will take place January 26 despite the federal government shutdown. This year, the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation, the national non-profit partner for the National Marine Sanctuary System, will coordinate Ocean Count.

"Through the support of dedicated volunteers, Ocean Count has provided more than 20 years of data that supplements scientific research and helps monitor humpback whales during their annual migration to the Hawaiian Islands," said Kris Sarri, president and CEO of the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation. "Fewer humpback whales are being observed in the main Hawaiian Islands in recent years and we don't know why. Unfortunately, critical sanctuary research that could help us understand these changes is on hold indefinitely due to the government shutdown."

Ocean Count is a community citizen science project hosted every year during peak whale season by Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary. With the federal government shutdown, the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation is stepping in to make sure the count is not interrupted.

The count, conducted the last Saturdays in January, February and March, provides a snapshot of humpback whale sightings from the shoreline. Participants tally humpback whale sightings and document the animals' surface behavior during the survey.

Ocean Count promotes public awareness about humpback whales, the sanctuary, and shore-based whale watching opportunities on O'ahu, Kaua'i, and Hawai'i Island. The Great Whale Count takes place on the same dates on Maui, led by the Pacific Whale Foundation.

More than 300 volunteers are expected to participate in Ocean Count on Saturday, January 26. Other counts are scheduled for February 23 and March 30.

Ocean Count participants must be registered in advance. Registration can be completed online at oceancount.org. For information, contact oceancount@marinesanctuary.org.

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The National Marine Sanctuary Foundation, established in 2000, is the official non-profit partner of the National Marine Sanctuary System. The Foundation directly supports national marine sanctuaries by protecting species, conserving ecosystems and preserving America's maritime heritage through on-the-water conservation projects, public education and outreach programs and scientific research and exploration.

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