

## BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES FOR ACTIVITIES ON NIHOA

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### *Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument*

Special considerations must be taken while conducting permitted activities at Nihoa. The island is the easternmost and youngest of the islands within the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument. Nihoa features an array of Native Hawaiian wahi pana (sacred sites) which include housing structures, agricultural systems, and ceremonial sites unique in the Hawaiian archipelago, and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Along with its vast archaeological landscape, the island supports an intact coastal biological community that largely has not been subject to the anthropogenic disturbances (invasive species, resource mining, etc.) that have commonly occurred at other locations found throughout PMNM and the Hawaiian archipelago. The island and region are immensely special and significantly sacred from a Hawaiian perspective. In order to maintain this recognition, special care and proper protocols should be strictly adhered.

**This document provides guidelines for conducting activities and camping in the remote, sensitive environments on Nihoa. For packing, please view Best Management Practice 007 Special Conditions for Moving Between Islands and Packing for Field Camps.**

- I. Person-use days<sup>1</sup>, unless otherwise permitted:
  - a. Person-use days shall not exceed 100 days<sup>2</sup> per trip with the following conditions
    - i. No more than five (5) personnel authorized to camp for no more than one week. Specific night activities needing more personnel can be considered through the permitting process to ensure all regulatory permit criteria are met.
    - ii. No more than fourteen (14) personnel authorized to be on island at any one time.
  - b. Personnel working on land during the day in excess of the five (5) authorized to camp overnight must be off-island before sunset and sleep aboard a permitted vessel.
    - i. Example: Fourteen (14) personnel are permitted for a maximum trip duration of seven (7) days. Nine (9) personnel stay off-island overnight and five (5) may camp on-island overnight.
  - c. The total number of person-use days shall not exceed 300 per year for all activities<sup>3</sup>.
  - d. It is recommended that activities occur between August and October, when the fewest seabird eggs and small chicks are present; vegetation is at its annual minimum, making traversing the islands easier as well as cultural sites more visible;

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<sup>1</sup> Person-use days are a measure of use of one individual for one day at a site. Example: five (5) authorized personnel staying for three (3) nights = 15 total person-use days.

<sup>2</sup> The 100 person-use day limit will allow for recovery time for the ecological resources on Nihoa and allow multiple projects to occur on the island per year.

<sup>3</sup> The 300 person-use day annual limit is based on impacts observed in the past by researchers working for extended periods of time (120 person-use days) on Nihoa Island. Based on past observations, biological damage to the island becomes significant after 120 consecutive person-use days.

and it is not during the average peak monk seal breeding period.

## II. Landing and movement in intertidal zone

- a. Please refer to BMP #011 Disease and Introduced Species Prevention Protocol for Permitted Activities in the Marine Environment, for proper clothing and footwear protocols for intertidal activities.
- b. Personnel landing on the island shall attempt to land in an area that will minimize disturbing any resting seals. Due to safety concerns at Nihoa, landing locations may be limited, resulting in an unintended disturbance. If this occurs, the disturbance shall be noted and reported for recordkeeping with the Resource Monitor. For more information on wildlife interactions, please see BMP #010 Marine Wildlife Viewing Guidelines.
- c. Personnel traversing the shoreline shall do so only if it can be done without disturbance to monk seals, in particular mother-pup pairs. The most sensitive areas for seals are the only sandy beach on Nihoa, the rock platforms immediately adjacent to the beach – near Kapae (landing area near site 20), and the rock platforms on the west of Nihoa.

## III. Activities and movement on island

- a. Personnel shall remove all equipment, supplies, and solid human waste from the island at the conclusion of the trip.
- b. Access to areas of the island by personnel beyond the campsite and landing shall be limited to periods when surveys, other data collection, and refuge management activities are necessary.
- c. Personnel shall combine field activities whenever possible to minimize the number of times a specific area is visited.
- d. Unless otherwise determined by the Monument Management Board agencies, each access trip should include at least one Monument Management Board designated Resource Monitor and have a designated cultural liaison<sup>4</sup>. These roles may be assigned to the same individual.
- e. Personnel shall be encouraged to participate in Hawaiian protocol as deemed appropriate by the cultural liaison or other cultural experts.
- f. Personnel shall not displace, move, remove, dig, collect, or otherwise disturb cultural sites, rocks, artifacts, or other materials. If personnel observe a cultural resource that needs attention, they shall leave it in place, map its location, describe its appearance, photograph it, file a report with the FWS Superintendent for the Monument, and notify the Office of Hawaiian Affairs for discussion with the proper cultural experts.

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<sup>4</sup> A qualified cultural liaison is a person designated by Co-Managers based upon the recommendations of the Office of Hawaiian Affairs and the Papahānaumokuākea Native Hawaiian Cultural Working Group.

- g. Personnel shall be informed of known locations of iwi kūpuna (burial sites), prior to access for Monument personnel and other sensitive cultural sites, and provided with maps so that these sites can be reasonably avoided to the extent possible during fieldwork (some activities may require access to such sites, proper cultural protocols are highly recommended in this instance).
- h. As of September 2020, there continues to be an outbreak of the invasive plant *Cenchrus echinatus* on Nihoa. The designated Resource Monitor and all participating personnel shall understand the locations of known *Cenchrus* on island. Due to certain patches located near the current base camp, all clothing and gear must be thoroughly inspected and seeds removed before accessing the rest of island.
- i. If *Cenchrus* is found on island, personnel shall remove any plant material and fallen seeds (if feasible) as advised by the Resource Monitor or USFWS staff, and mark its location with GPS or other method.
- j. Personnel moving across the islands shall do their best to avoid the disturbance of native vegetation, sensitive wahi kūpuna (ancestral sites), and nesting birds. Individuals are advised to use areas where these resources are not present (e.g. streambeds, ridgelines, and other exposed bedrock surfaces), to the extent possible. The intertidal bench of Nihoa can be utilized for access to the different valleys on the island. However, please remain cautious with resting monk seals, steep rock faces, high tides, and rising surf. Traveling with a guide is highly recommended. Additionally, access to West Palm Valley via the beach is highly discouraged due to monk seals and terrain.
- k. Where travel through vegetation is required, personnel shall walk single file and strive to step where the ground surface is visible, and not obscured by vegetation to ensure it is not occupied by a nest.
- l. Nihoa is an extremely steep island and many areas are subject to rock fall. Tents and sleeping areas should never be sited directly adjacent to cliffs. The rock is ancient, extremely fragile, and breakable, so all footholds and handholds should be tested before weight is placed on any rock.
- m. Unexploded ordinance (UXO) is a concern for Nihoa. Past military practices have caused damage including the documented destruction of several wahi kūpuna. Remnants from this portion of the islands' history may still be found and it is recommended that they be avoided. If any evidence of UXOs are found, any personnel shall leave it in place, map its location (GPS if applicable), describe its appearance, photograph it, and file a report with the Permit Coordinator or the FWS Superintendent for the Monument. **IF YOU CANNOT IDENTIFY WHAT IT IS OR DID NOT DROP IT, DO NOT PICK IT UP.**

#### IV. Camping on Nihoa

- a. Camping on Nihoa shall occur near site Nh-20 only, or as indicated by the designated Resource Monitor. Endangered plants in the area should be noted and avoided to the best extent possible. Personnel shall photograph the tent area before, during, and after

tent set up. Personnel shall avoid bird nests when erecting tents. All nest failures that can be attributed to human disturbance shall be documented and included in the final trip report.

- b. Due to past land use practices and expeditions, site Nh-20, which is categorized as a heiau, or religious platform, has been heavily impacted and remains in disarray. Additional features potentially relating to Nh-20 extend upland to where the wash area splits. Proper care and respect should be taken while utilizing that area for current camping use. The south edge of site Nh-20 is characterized by a stone retaining wall on a rocky cliff that drops into the ocean. The wall features fallen upright (manamana) stones, associated coral offerings, and other rock indicators of its use. All personnel shall avoid disturbing the wall and other rocks within the area. All tenting, cots, and any other activities shall stay back two (2) meters from the south edge of site Nh-20 and avoid the wall, upright, and associated elements.
- c. Personnel shall not move, shape, or alter the surface of site Nh-20. Tent stakes shall only be used where they can be inserted into the ground without digging up the soil. DO NOT move rocks.
- a. Only sleeping and management of personal effects shall occur at site Nh-20. Other campsite activities including cooking, eating, and personal hygiene shall occur in the lower Miller Valley wash, outside of the boundaries of Nh-20. No fire, flames, use of lighters, matches, etc. shall occur outside of this wash area.
- d. The main camp area in the Miller Valley wash runs full of water during heavy rainfall and can easily wash away equipment and supplies with little warning; therefore, camping gear should be stowed above the level of the creek bottom, if possible.
- e. The area and associated buckets for human waste shall be in the wash area upland of the main camp area or down below in the intertidal bench. DO NOT use the area above or on the ledge of the freshwater seep. See next bullet. If away from camp doing field activities, all human waste shall be relieved of away from any wahi kūpuna. Additionally, wag bags should be used for solid human waste and subsequently removed off island at the end of the camp.
- f. A freshwater seep, site Nh-67, occurs on the ledge below Nh-20 and has features created by kūpuna (ancestral Hawaiians) for the collection of water. Be respectful in the area. Discuss with the Resource Monitor, cultural liaison, or the Office of Hawaiian Affairs for use of the water prior to arrival at island. No food waste, contaminants, or human waste should be kept or relieved within the area on the ledge or above the seep.