



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE-MARCH 7, 2022

Rob Kramer: rkramer@wildoceans.org

NEW HOPE FOR BILLFISH IN THE PACIFIC

A New Effort to Better Understand and Protect Depleted Billfish Stocks Launches in the Pacific

With nearly fifty years experience working to conserve large open-ocean predators, *Wild Oceans* (formerly the National Coalition for Marine Conservation) has just launched an exciting new effort to protect billfish in the Pacific Ocean. The *Wild Oceans Kona Project* is a multi-year, comprehensive undertaking to improve the understanding of billfish nursery grounds near the Hawaiian Islands and use this information to champion better protections. The Project has three distinct components consisting of efforts in research, management and education.

Documenting the Kona Nursery

The “Kona Gyre” is the eddy system created in the lee of the “Big Island” of Hawai’i when trade winds and the equatorial current get squeezed through the channel that separates Hawai’i and the island of Maui (known as the Alenuihaha Channel). In the lee of Hualalai and Mauna Loa volcanos, they form a dynamic eddy system. This “gyre” is the dominant eddy for more than 5,000 miles of open ocean, creating one of the most, if not THE most, important spawning grounds for a number of pelagic fish species in the Pacific. The research component of the *Kona Project* aims to advance our understanding of this crucial system and is being led by Oahu-based scientist Dr. Mike Musyl and his team. Dr. Musyl is owner and Principal Scientist at Pelagic Research Group LLC and is a recognized expert in pop-up satellite archival tagging (PSAT) studies and methods to quantify post-release mortality in billfishes, sharks and turtles.

“Understanding variability in spawning dynamics, larval habitat, and survival outcomes over space and time is necessary to manage populations and protect spawning habitat”, Musyl stated. “By investigating patterns of larval dispersal and connectivity in striped and blue marlin we can better understand factors shaping larval habitat in Kona and elsewhere so it can be protected”.

Improving Pacific Billfish Management

The management component of the *Kona Project* will expand on the work that *Wild Oceans* has been engaged in for years to push for more effective management of billfish stocks in the Pacific, starting with depleted north Pacific striped marlin. This will be accomplished by building new coalitions to advance domestic striped marlin management measures and to secure international support for a striped marlin rebuilding plan. It will then continue by monitoring the domestic and international rebuilding plans, identifying measures to further improve the plans, and pushing to extend similar protections as needed to other Pacific billfish stocks, such as blue marlin. Finally, it will apply the information learned from the research component on billfish nursery grounds to improve domestic and international management.

“North Pacific striped marlin are depleted oceanwide, and all species of Pacific marlin are in need of better protection”, said *Wild Oceans* Pacific Program Director Theresa Labriola. “Meaningful conservation is hampered in part by our lack of knowledge about billfish reproduction, spawning grounds and nursery habitat. Our hope is to improve and inform management by using evidence-

**P.O. BOX 272122 ♦ Tampa, FL 33688
(727) 677-8127**

based methods to better understand these biological processes, identify nursery habitat in need of additional conservation measures and advocate for better protection for marlin populations using this newfound information.”

Informing and Engaging our Community

The third component of the *Kona Project* is an outreach and education effort. The momentum needed to affect change can only be accomplished by engaging others and communicating the findings of the research and management efforts through a variety of media. A comprehensive web-based platform will be used to centralize information on Pacific billfish stock status, domestic management, conservation measures and threats, current research, and future research needs.

“By investigating and understanding gaps in our knowledge of billfish life history, we can advance more successful domestic and international management strategies to protect and rebuild marlins”, said *Wild Oceans* President Rob Kramer. “The *Kona Project* seeks to inform holistic conservation-based management strategies, including those that protect spawning stocks, with the ultimate goal of achieving healthier billfish populations and better fishing opportunities for small boat fishermen and anglers across the Pacific.”

Wild Oceans - Keeping the oceans wild for the future of fishing

To learn more about the *Wild Oceans Kona Project* visit:

https://wildoceans.org/kona_project