

# Weather cancels annual Molokai-to-Oahu channel race

By Kyle Galdeira

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The women of the Waikiki Beach Boys team entered the race as defending Na Wahine O Ke Kai champions and had also won the race in 2011.

For just the second time in Na Wahine O Ke Kai history, the prestigious Molokai-to-Oahu outrigger canoe paddling race has been canceled.

The decision to cancel the race was made at approximately 4 p.m. on Saturday after race director Hannie Anderson and the race committee determined that strong winds and treacherous surf throughout the Kaiwi Channel would have made today's 41-mile crossing too dangerous for paddlers, escort boat personnel and water officials to

endure. The race, which was supposed to be run today for the 37th time, was last canceled in 1980 due to 30-foot surf and strong winds.

"We were very concerned about having a safe race, and the swells were huge. ... We made the decision to cancel the race," Anderson said. "Paddlers came up to me after we made the decision and thanked us for keeping their safety in mind. It was a hard call to make.

"If we were to have raced and lost somebody, you can never bring a life back. Canceling the race was the best decision while keeping the safety of all those involved in mind."

According to the event's official website, the race committee will cancel the event in the event of adverse weather conditions, medical or health concerns (such as a sewage spill), darkness or other dangerous situations. Some adverse weather conditions detailed on the website include winds in excess of 25 mph, wave heights of 12 to 15 feet and/or current and tidal changes affecting the race course.

The race committee members consulted with the U.S. Coast Guard and race official boat captains and examined weather reports and forecasts before making the final call, Anderson said.

"It's for the safety of the women, safety of our boats -- two of our official escort boats couldn't even make it (to Molokai) because it was so windy and the waves were really bad," Anderson said.

While many paddlers and supporters were disappointed by the cancellation, numerous logistical and financial hurdles also arise with Na Wahine being halted. For instance, many paddlers had flown to Molokai via one-way tickets and now must either book flights back or coordinate rides on escort boats that made it to Molokai before the surf became too rough. There are also issues with lodging on the sparsely populated island, returning the canoes that were shipped to Molokai via barge, and many clubs will have lost thousands of dollars in travel expenses and monies that went to pay for race-related necessities, including escort boat captains and gasoline.

The majority of the commentary on the Na Wahine O Ke Kai Facebook page was positive, as users praised the officials for keeping safety top of mind. Many of those upset with the decision on social media asked why the race committee did not reschedule the event. Anderson noted that the weather conditions "were expected to get worse in the coming days" and that asking so many crews from around the world to make new travel and scheduling plans was not feasible.

"Some of the crews from far away, including Tahiti, came up and they hugged me. I thanked them for telling us that we made the right decision because I know so many people spent a lot of money to come here," Anderson said. "We had crews from all over the world here to participate, but their lives are just too important."