

MAUI Whales & Ocean Tales

A VISUAL STORYTELLING PLATFORM OF MAUI'S WINTER SEASON - HUMPBACK
WHALES, BIG WAVE SURFING, AND THE MAGIC THAT TRANSFORMS THESE WATERS

*authentic ocean immersion / community/
connection / education / inspiration /
visual storytelling*

P R O J E C T P I T C H



THE MISSION

Connect. Educate. Inspire.

Imagine discovering Maui's winter season from above, on, and below the water

Humpback whales giving birth, mothers nursing their young, competitive mating pods,
breaching giants, and surfers riding legendary swells.

Moments so extraordinary they transform how you see the ocean.

How you understand connection.

How you protect it.



THE VISION



Every winter, Maui transforms. Humpback whales return from Alaska to raise their young.
Big wave surfers await massive swells; such as, Jaws.

For two seasons, I'm capturing it all, above the water, on the surface, and below, creating
Maui Whales & Ocean Tales, a visual storytelling project you can actually own and experience.













TABLE OF CONTENTS

Maui Whales & Ocean Tales Project Pitch

<i>The Mission</i>	2
<i>The Vision</i>	3
<i>Table of Contents</i>	10
<i>ABOVE / ON / UNDER For Extraordinary Results</i>	11
<i>Your Impact</i>	12
<i>Why NOAA Permit is Important</i>	13
<i>The Story</i>	14-15
<i>Beyond This Project</i>	16
<i>Who is Emily McCulliss</i>	17-19
<i>Why Care?</i>	20
<i>The Strategy</i>	27
<i>Project & Deliverable Timeline</i>	28
<i>Overview of Support</i>	30



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ABOVE / ON / UNDER FOR EXTRAORDINARY RESULTS



This two-year, NOAA-permitted project will create an annual 60-page digital magazine, coffee table book at the conclusion of the two years, weekly educational newsletters during whale season, an interactive website, and collectable photographic prints.

The collectable print editions will tell two stories of Maui's winter: humpback whales documented from aerial, underwater, and topside perspectives, and big wave surfing capturing the power and beauty of Maui's legendary breaks.

YOUR IMPACT



Your backing directly determines how many days I can be on the water capturing the behaviors that reveal why Maui's waters are irreplaceable—competitive pods moving through the channel, mothers nursing newborn calves, breaching juveniles, intimate communication. From drone footage showing how whales use the 'Au'au Channel, to surface photography capturing social interactions, to underwater documentation of rarely-witnessed moments, every image tells part of this extraordinary story.

Where the Funding Goes:

- Boat charters for whale season access
- Safety crew and marine protocols
- Professional magazine and book design/production
- Interactive website development
- Expert interview production
- The dedicated time to execute this two-year vision with the respect and professionalism these waters deserve

WHAT IS IMPORTANT ABOUT THE NOAA PERMIT?



Maui's waters are part of the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary, a federally protected breeding ground where approaching whales requires special authorization. I've earned a NOAA educational and commercial photography permit, a rigorous process that requires demonstrating marine mammal expertise, safety protocols, cultural respect, and commitment to conservation education. This permit allows closer access than recreational viewing permits, enabling the aerial, vessel-based, and underwater documentation needed to capture complete behavioral sequences. It's an honor to hold this authorization, and it comes with the responsibility to document these whales with the utmost respect, minimal disturbance, and a commitment to sharing what we learn in ways that inspire protection of these waters.

THE STORY



This project exists to bridge the gap between wonder and understanding - to transform the "wow" moment when you see a whale breach or a surfer drop into a massive wave into a deeper connection with why these waters matter, what these behaviors mean, and how we can protect the ocean we all share.

What We're hoping to accomplish: Visual storytelling that inspires connection and action . Most people experience humpback whales from a boat deck, catching glimpses of backs and tails. Winter swells activate breaks across the north and west shores, creating conditions that challenge even the most experienced watermen and keep the community in the water all season long.



Maui Whales & Ocean Tales' objective is to reveal the complete story what's happening underwater when mothers nurse their calves, how whales use the 'Au'au Channel's unique geography, why competitive pods form, and what the raw power of Maui's winter swells means to both the watermen who chase them and the whales who navigate them. By synchronizing aerial, surface, and underwater perspectives of the same moments, we create narratives that help you see the ocean not as scenery, but as a living, interconnected system where whales, waves, and humans coexist.

Connection. Education. Inspiration.
Connecting People to Place and Ocean



THE STORY



Inspiration Through Connection

The goal isn't just to document whales and waves—it's to help you feel what it's like to be part of the ocean. To understand the privilege of experiencing a place where 40-ton giants travel 3,000 miles to raise their young, where world-class surfers test themselves against nature's power, and where the ocean community lives by respect, awareness, and humility. When you understand the interconnection—between whales and waves, ocean health and human activity, protection and access, culture and conservation—you become invested in preserving it.



While *Maui Whales & Ocean Tales* focuses on this extraordinary winter season, it's the foundation for future visual narratives that connect people to the ocean through the eyes of those who truly know it. The whales are where we start. Big wave surfing shows the ocean's power and the humans who respect it. Future projects will continue this mission—documenting the ocean community, the wildlife, the culture, and the critical need for stewardship of our blue planet.



BEYOND THIS PROJECT



Creating Resources for Maui's Community: These two seasons of documentation will create a visual and educational archive designed to serve Maui's tourism and education sectors. The content will be made available for teachers to use in classrooms, tour operators to reference for responsible whale watching education, local businesses to display as authentic representations of Maui's winter, and conservation organizations to support their sanctuary protection work.

Beyond serving the local community, this project creates lasting connections worldwide. The coffee table book becomes a tangible reminder of what makes Maui's winter extraordinary. The prints become daily connections to the ocean in homes around the world. Together, these materials support education, responsible tourism, and ocean stewardship—giving back to Maui while inspiring people everywhere to protect the waters we all share.

The Ultimate Goal: Transform spectators into stewards. When people understand what's happening beneath Maui's waves - why mothers choose these waters, how the ocean ecosystem connects whales to waves to watermen - they don't just admire the beauty. They feel compelled to protect it.

Maui Whales & Ocean Tales isn't just about whales or waves. It's about connection, to place, to ocean, to the power of nature, and to the responsibility we all share when we're privileged enough to witness something extraordinary.



WHO IS EMILY MCCULLISS?

The Visionary Behind Maui Whales & Ocean Tales

I'm Emily McCulliss—not just the photographer behind this project, but the visionary, curator, filmmaker, interviewer, publisher, and storyteller bringing every piece together. This is a production built on expertise, passion, curiosity, and uncompromising commitment to creating something extraordinary. To connect you. Educate you. Inspire you.

THE COMPLETE CREATOR

I'm designing and executing every aspect of Maui Whales & Ocean Tales:

- ◆ Visionary - Conceptualizing the project's mission, scope, and impact
- ◆ Photographer & Filmmaker - Capturing aerial, surface, and underwater documentation
- ◆ Expedition Leader - Managing boat operations, safety protocols, and field logistics
- ◆ Interviewer - Conducting expert interviews with marine biologists, surfers, and ocean professionals
- ◆ Editor & Curator - Selecting and sequencing imagery to tell compelling stories
- ◆ Publisher - Producing the 60-page digital magazines and coffee table book
- ◆ Web Developer - Building the interactive educational website
- ◆ Newsletter Writer - Creating weekly educational content during whale season
- ◆ Project Manager - Coordinating timelines, deliverables, and community partnerships

EMILY MCCULLISS

***CURATOR OF TRANSFORMATIVE MOMENTS- PROFESSIONAL WILDERNESS SEEKER |
TRANSFORMATIONAL GUIDE | RELENTLESS CURIOSITY CULTIVATOR***



Every winter as a Maui resident, I feel the magic when the whales return. I'm full of questions about their lives here, and I've learned that the people who work with these whales—the ocean safety professionals, naturalists, researchers, ocean community—they have much of the same questions too. When you go out on a whale boat, don't you just want to know what they are doing underwater, or what a bird's eye view could tell you? My work puts me in a unique position to bring those voices together with imagery that few can access, creating something that connects you to this extraordinary season photographically, immersively, and educationally.

WILDLIFE EXPERTISE

For 4+ years, I've documented cetaceans across Mexico, French Polynesia, Antarctica, Hawaii, and the Arctic including Blue, Bryde's, Sei, Fin, False-Killer, Pilot, and Humpback Whales; Orca; and multiple dolphin species. Beyond marine mammals, my expedition portfolio spans polar bears in the Arctic, four snow leopard expeditions across India and Mongolia, African Big Five safaris, and pelagic species documentation across remote Pacific waters.

PROFESSIONAL FOUNDATION

As an internationally recognized nature photographer and expedition leader, I've built a career documenting wildlife encounters across all seven continents—from Arctic ice fields where I documented polar bears during a 2,700km expedition, to African savannas photographing the rare Super tusker elephants of Amboseli, to Mongolia's remote wilderness tracking snow leopards, to Hawaii's pristine waters documenting marine giants.

My work has been featured in the Wall Street Journal Global Luxury Spring Edition and multiple editions of Luxe Magazine. I maintain international gallery representation spanning three countries and have exhibited at Red Dot Miami, Art Santa Fe, Chamoun Gallery, and D'art Gallery. In April 2025, I'll serve as Artist in Residence at The Ritz-Carlton Kapalua Bay.



EMILY MCCULLISS

TECHNICAL MASTERY

My multi-platform approach integrates aerial drone operations, vessel-based photography, and underwater freediving to capture complete visual narratives. I operate professional-grade camera systems including DJI Mavic 3 Pro Cine and Nikon Z9 with specialized underwater housings—coordinating multi-perspective documentation to reveal what's happening above, at the surface, and below the water.

But technical skill is only part of the equation. I know how to:

- Direct field operations while maintaining creative vision
- Conduct interviews that extract authentic expertise and passion
- Design publications that balance aesthetics with educational impact
- Build websites that engage and educate
- Write content that transforms wonder into understanding
- Manage timelines across a complex two-year production schedule

CREDENTIALS THAT ENABLE THIS VISION

- ✓ NOAA Educational and Commercial Photography Permit for marine mammal documentation
- ✓ Big Wave Risk Assessment Group Surf Responder (2025)
- ✓ Hawaii Boat and Ocean Safety Certified / Recreational and Tow-In Thrill Craft Operator (2025)
- ✓ FAA Part 107 Certified Remote Pilot for commercial drone operations
- ✓ Adult and Child CPR/AED Certified
- ✓ PADI Open Water Diver (pursuing Advanced Open Water/Rebreather)
- ✓ Nikon Professional Services member
- ✓ Ironman 70.3 finisher and Master's Swim Team athlete
- ✓ Bachelor of Science in Biology (minors in Chemistry and Psychology, emphasis in Human Biology and Neuroscience and Behavior)

WHY THIS MATTERS

Having one vision executed by one person ensures consistency, authenticity, and uncompromising quality across every deliverable. There's no creative compromise, no telephone game between photographer and editor, no disconnect between the person in the water and the person telling the story.

You're backing a complete creator—someone who sees the vision, captures the moments, conducts the interviews, curates the content, designs the publications, builds the website, and delivers the final product with absolute commitment to excellence.

MY MISSION

This work creates connection—between people and ocean, wonder and understanding, privilege and responsibility. When you understand what's at stake beneath Maui's waves, you don't just admire the beauty. You feel compelled to protect it.

and my commitment to excellence at every stage.

Emily McCulliss

Maui Whales & Ocean Tales Curator



WHY CARE?

As a global photographer specializing in underwater, topside, and aerial documentation, I've encountered whales from Antarctica to the Arctic, from every vantage point. But Maui's humpbacks remain profoundly special to me. The crystal-clear water, the significance of their 3,000-mile journey, the behaviors that unfold here, while not unique to Maui alone, come together in ways that exist nowhere else.

I've developed a deep love, respect, and passion for being near these whales and learning from them. I want to create imagery that makes you pause. To connect with people who truly know the ocean and share what they've learned—their wisdom, their stories, their reverence for this place. To transform wonder into understanding. To show you what's happening beneath the surface that most will never witness. To capture the moments that reveal why these waters are so critical, why this season matters, and why protecting this place is essential.

Every winter, humpback whales travel over three thousand miles from Alaska to give birth and raise strong young in Maui's waters. Big wave surfers await the winter swells - the season when legendary breaks like Jaws come alive. Both arrivals signal the same thing: winter in Maui is alive with power, beauty, and the privilege of sharing these protected waters.













THE STRATEGY

Making this project a reality requires careful planning, professional expertise, community collaboration, and a comprehensive two-year timeline.

The Authorization: I hold a NOAA educational and commercial photography and videography permit issued through the National Marine Fisheries Service, authorizing aerial drone operations, vessel-based photography, and underwater freediving to document humpback whales across two whale seasons (January-April 2026 and 2027). This permit allows closer access than recreational whale watching, enabling the synchronized documentation needed to capture complete behavioral sequences from multiple perspectives.

The Documentation Approach:

Aerial perspective: Drone footage revealing spatial relationships and behavioral patterns

Vessel-based photography: Surface interactions, breathing patterns, social dynamics

Underwater freediving: Rarely-witnessed nursing behaviors, communication, social interactions

The Team:

Emily McCulliss (Principal Investigator): Maui-based nature photographer and expedition guide with 3+ years documenting cetaceans across Mexico, French Polynesia, Antarctica, and Hawaii. Featured in the Wall Street Journal and Luxe Magazine, leading international expeditions across five countries.

Nick Moran (Aerial Operations): FAA-certified commercial drone pilot, owner and chief pilot at Go Fly Maui, specializing in marine wildlife aerial documentation.

The Expert Integration:

A key component of this project is connecting with people who truly know these waters and these whales. My goal is to conduct interviews with:

Marine mammal rescue and entanglement response professionals

Hawaiian Lifeguard Association, ocean safety specialists, watermen

Big Wave Risk Assessment Group members and big wave surfing community

Hawaiian ocean experts and traditional navigators

NOAA sanctuary researchers and population scientists

Marine wildlife cinematographers and conservation specialists

Sustainable tourism experts and conservation education specialists

These interviews will be woven throughout the magazines, newsletters, and educational content—sharing the passion, wisdom, and expertise of Maui's ocean community alongside the visual documentation of the whales themselves.

PRODUCT & DELIVERABLE TIMELINE

Season One (January-April 2026):

- Whale season filming documenting individual encounters and behavioral sequences
- Weekly newsletters during whale season
- Community engagement events
- Expert interviews with ocean professionals

Post-Season One (May-August 2026):

- First annual 60-page digital magazine production
- Website development and interactive content creation
- Data compilation and behavioral analysis

Inter-Season (September-December 2026):

- Additional expert interviews with researchers and ocean professionals
- Community partnerships and educational curriculum development
- Season Two preparation and protocol refinement

Season Two (January-April 2027):

- Advanced whale season filming for comparative analysis
- Behavioral documentation building on Season One insights
- Deepened cultural integration and community collaboration

Final Production (May-August 2027):

- Second annual magazine with two-year comparative analysis
- Coffee table book production
- Comprehensive educational resource packages

Your Support Makes This Possible:

Funding covers boat charters for whale season access, safety crew and protocols, professional magazine and book design/production, website development, expert interview production, educational content creation, and the dedicated time required to execute this two-year vision with the respect and professionalism these waters deserve.



OVERVIEW OF SUPPORT

This project raises funds to build, pursue, and accomplish an educational, inspirational, and ocean community-focused initiative with the power to inspire ocean stewardship and create meaningful connection to Maui's extraordinary winter season—a time of renewal, life, energy, and raw power.

Maui Whales & Ocean Tales documents the complete story of what happens when humpback whales travel 3,000 miles to give birth in protected waters and big wave surfers await legendary swells. Through aerial, surface, and underwater perspectives, this two-year visual storytelling project creates educational resources, inspiring imagery, and authentic narratives that transform how people see the ocean and their role in protecting it.

What Your Support Accomplishes:

Education - Creating freely accessible content for Maui's teachers, tour operators, and conservation organizations - magazines, newsletters, and interactive resources that answer real questions about whale behaviors, ocean ecosystems, and respectful coexistence.

Inspiration - Producing visual narratives that capture the magic of Maui's winter transformation—imagery so compelling it makes people pause, wonder, and feel connected to forces greater than themselves.

Ocean Community Connection - Amplifying the voices of marine biologists, big wave surfers, watermen, Hawaiian ocean experts, and conservation professionals who truly know these waters—sharing their wisdom, passion, and reverence for this place.

Ocean Stewardship - Transforming spectators into stewards by helping people understand what's at stake beneath Maui's waves. When you witness births, nursing, intimate communication, and the privilege of sharing sanctuary waters, you don't just admire the beauty—you feel compelled to protect it.

This Life-Giving Season - Celebrating winter in Maui as a season of renewal, when ocean giants return to create new life, when legendary swells awaken, when the entire ecosystem pulses with energy and power. This project honors that transformation and invites you to be part of preserving it.

Where Funding Goes:

Your support makes possible the boat charters, safety protocols, expert interviews, magazine production, website development, and dedicated time required to execute this vision with the respect and professionalism these waters deserve—creating legacy content that serves Maui's community and inspires ocean protection worldwide.

How You Can Help:

✓ **Financial Support** - Back this project at any tier to directly fund documentation days, production costs, and educational content creation

✓ **Spread the Word** - Share this campaign with your network—ocean lovers, educators, conservation advocates, anyone who cares about protecting our blue planet

✓ **Generate Interest** - Help build momentum by engaging with updates, sharing on social media, and connecting us with organizations, schools, or businesses that align with this mission

Every contribution - whether financial backing, network connection, or helping spread awareness—brings us closer to making Maui Whales & Ocean Tales a reality.

MAUI

Whales

& Ocean Tales

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