Alaska Region Marine Mammal Stranding Network

Fall/Winter 2017 Newsletter

****Alaska Stranding Network Meeting UPDATE****

New Location: Anchorage
New Dates: February 12-14

NMFS Stranding Hotline: 1-877-925-7333

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In this issue:

Greetings from the Coordinator

by Mandy Migura, NMFS

It seems 2017 has virtually flown by. It was quite a busy stranding season this year, which really ramped up in April and didn't seem to slow down until well into November. As of December 4, we had 233 confirmed strandings statewide. Both the Bering Sea and Southcentral regions each documented over 60 confirmed stranding events, followed by the Arctic (49 events), the Gulf of Alaska (37 events), and Southeast (22 events). These numbers do not include 8 reports of large whale entanglements and over 30 reports of pinniped entanglements.

While I cannot mention everything, here are just a couple highlights from this year. A live stranded baby Cook Inlet beluga whale was rescued and is being rehabbed at ASLC. Several disentanglement of whales or pinnipeds were successfully accomplished. There were several times that our network members were conducting multiple necropsies in a day or two (e.g., 4 beaked whales in Adak; a humpback whale followed by 2 beluga whales near Anchorage), exemplifying the dedication and commitment of our network to this physically demanding work. Multiple carcass surveys were conducted across the state, notably in the Bering Strait and Copper River Delta regions, and involved significant support by the USCG. Many network members and partners participated in various training opportunities this year, ranging from large whale disentanglement training to necropsy training.

Thank you all for your efforts. It is our Stranding Network members that makes this program possible. Happy Holidays, and I hope to see many of you in February.

Alaska Stranding Network Meeting – Updates and Reminders

We are still planning a 3-day meeting in February, but in an effort to increase participation by the Stranding Network members, we have changed the location to **Anchorage** instead of Nome, and have shifted the dates one day earlier so the meeting will be held **Monday February 12 – Wednesday February 14, 2018**. The exact venue for the meeting is TBD, and we are working on reserving a block of hotel rooms for travelers. We will send email updates as we get closer to the meeting. We have some funds available to support travel-related expenses for non-Federal employees, and our goal is to try and get as broad representation of our entire AK stranding network as possible. Please **RSVP directly to Sadie Wright and me (Mandy Migura) no later than December 22, 2017**, and identify whether your participation is contingent upon travel funding.

What Are…?

 : This is a symbol to help easily recognize the end of a story or section.

Photo opp… : These are miscellaneous and interesting stranding photos received this year, but which do not necessarily accompany a specific story or topic in this newsletter.

Glacier Bay and Icy Strait Stranding Report

By Louise Taylor-Thomas, Christine Gabriele, and Janet Neilson, GBNP

As a member of the Alaska Stranding Network, Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve responds to and documents marine mammal strandings within the park and vicinity. Between 2007 and 2016, we fielded 10-38 (mean = 20) stranding reports per year. To date in 2017, we have received 12 (less than one standard deviation below the average of 2007-2016) stranding reports in our area, which is notably fewer but not a significant decrease compared to 2007-2016. We also track reports of dead sea otters for the US Fish and Wildlife Service and in 2017 there were only three reports, whereas in 2007-2016, we responded to 1-14 (mean = 5.4) stranded sea otters each year. We do not conduct regular patrols looking for stranded marine mammals; instead, we rely on incidental observations and reports from the public, commercial operators, and park staff. Therefore, it is challenging to determine whether the decreased activity in 2017 indicated a significant departure from the status quo.

Left: Steller sea lion carcass in Icy Strait colonized by sea urchins.

The majority (n = 8) of the strandings in our area in 2017 involved Steller sea lions. Two were dead (no known cause) and six were live entangled animals. We found one dead sea lion floating in Icy Strait on August 29 but it was too decomposed for a necropsy. Interestingly, when we rolled the carcass over to examine it, we were surprised to discover that a large number of sea urchins had taken up residence on the underside! The second dead sea lion washed up on the Gustavus beach on October 27. It was also too decomposed for a necropsy but samples were taken for genetics. On May 4 and October 12, two different adult sea lions hauled out on South Marble Island were documented with neck entanglements and deep lacerations. Three reports (July 10, 14, and 16) described an adult Steller sea lion hauled out on South Marble Island entangled at the mouth with a hook and flasher. Without photos indicating otherwise, these three reports may have involved the same individual. One report involved a branded Steller sea lion with a neck entanglement hauled out at Point Carolus on September 12. This individual, branded “36F”, is a 13-year-old male who was first observed entangled in 2011 (Lauri Jemison, pers. comm.).

Glacier Bay and Icy Strait Stranding Report - continued

In 2017, we had no reports of small cetacean strandings and one report of a lethargic (reportedly “sick”) gray whale (an uncommon species for our area) which may or may not have been actually sick. The oddest marine mammal we encountered was a freshly dead moose floating in the middle of Glacier Bay. It was not examined, but may have drowned trying to swim between islands or the mainland.

Right: Whale #118 with bleeding pectoral fin. Photo credit Tod Sebens.

While we did not record any humpback whale strandings in 2017, there are several indications that the population in our area has been challenged in recent years. Humpback whales in Glacier Bay and Icy Strait are the focus of more than 30 years of consistent population monitoring by park biologists. Beginning in 2014, we documented unusually low calving rates and multiple cases in which calves disappeared mid-summer. In addition, numerous adult whales with a long-term history of site fidelity to Glacier Bay and Icy Strait were not sighted and many whales appeared to be abnormally thin.

In 2017, several humpback whales with unusual skin conditions were also documented. For example, photographs of the pectoral flippers of SEAK ID #118 by a local whale-watch captain in mid-July show diffuse bleeding and what appear to be many small holes in the skin. We observed this adult male on several occasions and noted that the skin on his head and back appeared to be granular and blotchy but we did not observe any bleeding in these areas. While we do not know what caused this condition, consultation with experienced observers suggests that a severe infestation of whale lice may be responsible for this roughened appearance.

You can read more about results from the humpback whale monitoring program in our annual progress reports, which are available on the park’s web site at https://www.nps.gov/glba/learn/nature/whale_acoustic_reports.htm
We also hope to present some of our recent findings at the Alaska Marine Science Symposium in Anchorage in January 2018.

Ocean Dumping of Marine Mammal Carcasses

By Kate Savage, NOAA Affiliate

In Alaska, it's easy to feel like we are surrounded by unlimited open space. Most of us have completed necropsies and left the carcass where it was originally found without a second thought. While performing a necropsy on site is often the easiest strategy, a different set of rules may apply if a carcass is moved through the marine environment to a different location.

Left: On August 9, 2017 a humpback whale is reported on the bulbous bow of a cruise ship docked in Ketchikan. The decision is made to remove the whale and tow to a different location. A NMFS team will necropsy the animal once it is relocated. Photo courtesy of NMFS OLE.

In Dec. 2016, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) published a general permit issued under the Marine Protection, Research and Sanctuaries Act to authorize the transport and disposal of marine mammal carcasses in ocean waters under specified conditions. Historically, when a carcass required transport and disposal, the EPA issued permits on an emergency basis. The new regulations, also known as the Ocean Dumping Act , serve as a means for the EPA to streamline the permit process.

What this means is: if the intention is to transport and dispose of a marine mammal carcass in ocean waters, EPA concurrence and a permit authorizing the action is required. While Stranding Network members are part of a limited group eligible for EPA authorization, the simplest approach is to avoid triggering the permit process in the first place by recognizing and adhering to certain boundaries.

Right: The carcass is towed to a distant location. Photo courtesy of NMFS OLE.

Dumping of Carcasses– continued.

EPA jurisdiction is limited to “ocean waters”. Ocean waters are the open seas lying seaward of the “baseline” from which the “territorial seas” are measured. The baseline may generally be considered the mean lower low water line along the coast or “closing lines” that are drawn on maps across rivers mouths and openings of bays. Waters landward from baseline are considered inland or internal waters.

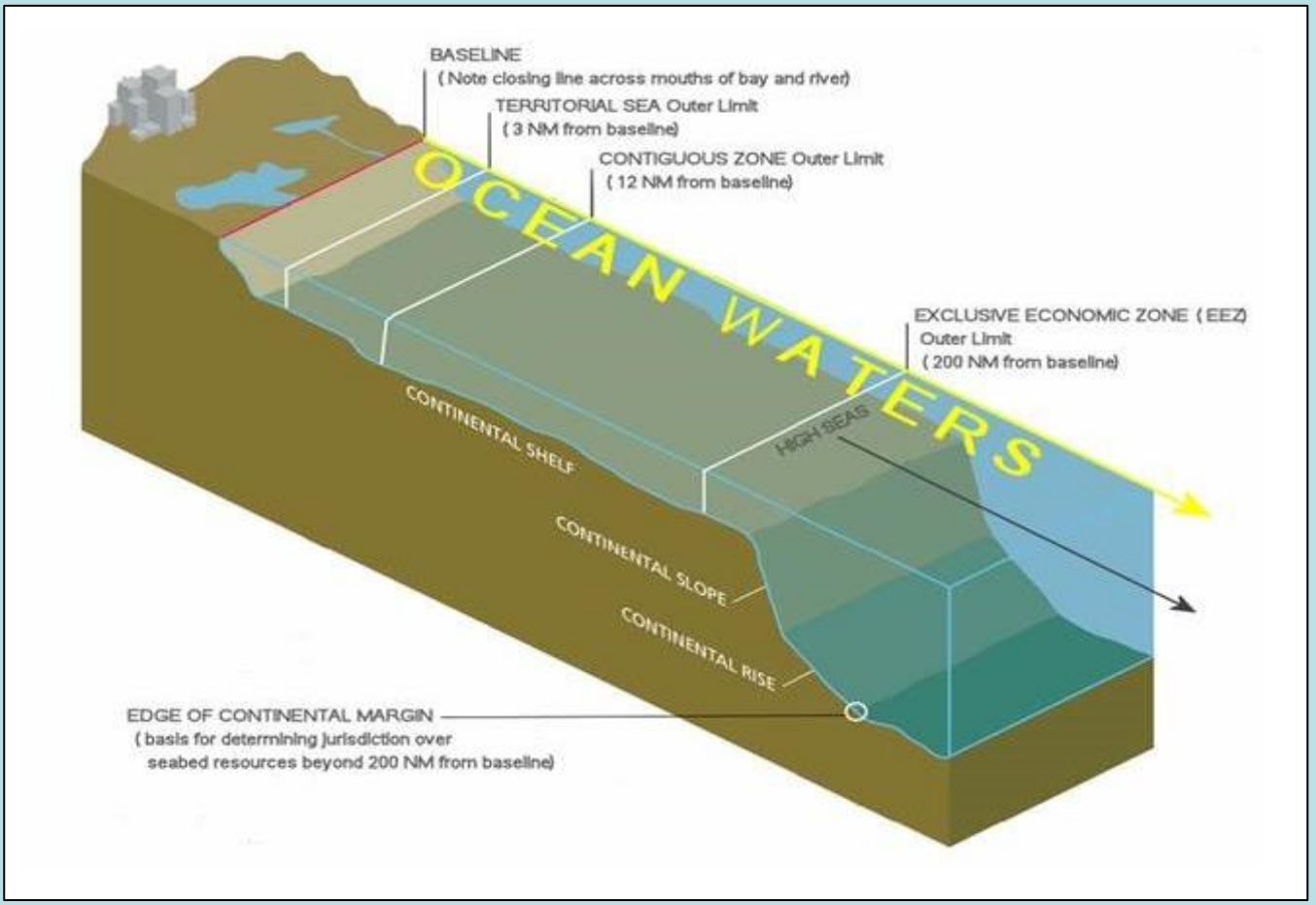


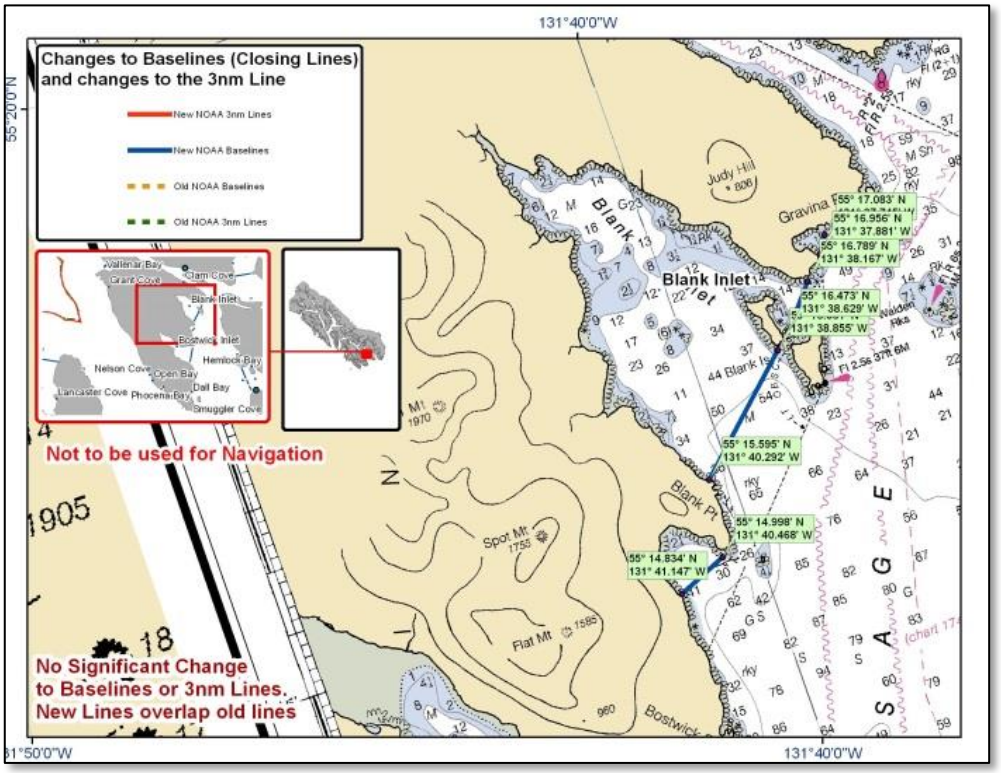
Illustration derived from: “An Ocean Blueprint for the 21st Century, Final Report of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy” (Figure P.1, Pg 71).

Therefore, the best way to avoid triggering the EPA permit requirement is to avoid carcass disposal in ocean waters. Instead, the carcass can be moved inland of closing lines or placed above Mean lower low water (ordinary low water mark). There are over 1000 closing lines in Alaska and the best way to determine the location of these boundaries is to check NOAA nautical charts. The following site offers a fairly simple way to check for the presence and location of closing lines:

https://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/fisheries/3nm

Dumping of Carcasses – continued.

Right: A NOAA chart showing the location of the closing line (in blue) at the mouth of Blank Inlet near Ketchikan.



On a final note, if a carcass is free floating in ocean waters, samples and other data may be collected without triggering the permit as long as the carcass is not moved.

More information can be found at:

https://www.epa.gov/ocean-dumping

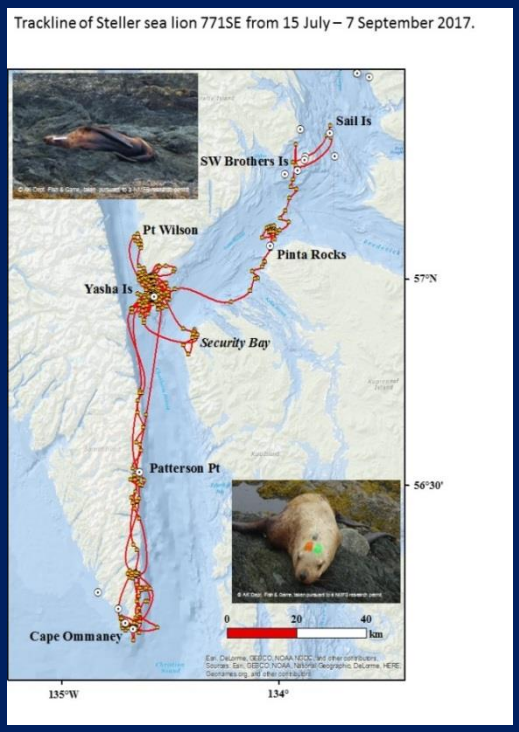
Left: The necropsy team begins work on the whale after it was towed to a site inside the closing line at the mouth of Blank Inlet. Photo courtesy of USFS.

The PEG Board
(Pinniped Entanglement Group)

By Kim Raum-Suryan, NMFS

Steller sea lion entanglement response

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game Steller sea lion research program again teamed up with the National Marine Fisheries Service Protected Resources Division to successfully respond to entangled Steller sea lions in Southeast Alaska this summer. Three subadult male Steller sea lions were darted and two were successfully sedated (the third individual did not receive the full dose and was not captured). We removed a fan belt from the first individual (*right*) that we disentangled from alongside our boat.



We removed a flasher (lure) from the second individual (771SE) and outfitted him with a satellite transmitter to monitor post-release survival. This was our longest satellite deployment on a subadult male Steller sea lion and this individual spent quite a bit of time traveling back and forth from haul-outs in central SE Alaska (*left*). To date, we have now successfully disentangled nine Steller sea lions and hope to respond to more entangled sea lions this winter and spring.

Pinniped Entanglement Group

The PEG continues to expand globally. In the past year, PEG's membership has increased by nearly 50%. We now have more than 70 PEG members in eight countries! Many PEG members recently had a chance to gather at the PEG workshop (hosted again by World Animal Protection) during the Society for Marine Mammalogy Conference in Halifax, Nova Scotia in October 2017. The workshop was a great success with many presentations and discussions about recent successful entanglement responses of sea lions and gray seals, important components of successful captures, lessons learned, database management, using the proper terminology when referring to the number of entangled animals observed, outreach, education, and new technology.

If you have not heard, the Sixth International Marine Debris Conference is coming up March 12-16, 2018 in San Diego, California. Kim Raum-Suryan (NMFS) and Elizabeth Hogan (World Animal Protection) are chairing a session entitled "Lose the loop: Global collaboration to reduce and prevent pinniped entanglement in marine debris". During this session will be presentations by speakers from Mexico, Germany, and the USA, as well as a panel discussion entitled "Pinniped Marine Debris Entanglement Response: Best Practices and Lessons Learned – A Panel Discussion". And of course there will be many other sessions and a lot more to learn during the week. We hope many of you will be able to attend the conference.

New outreach materials

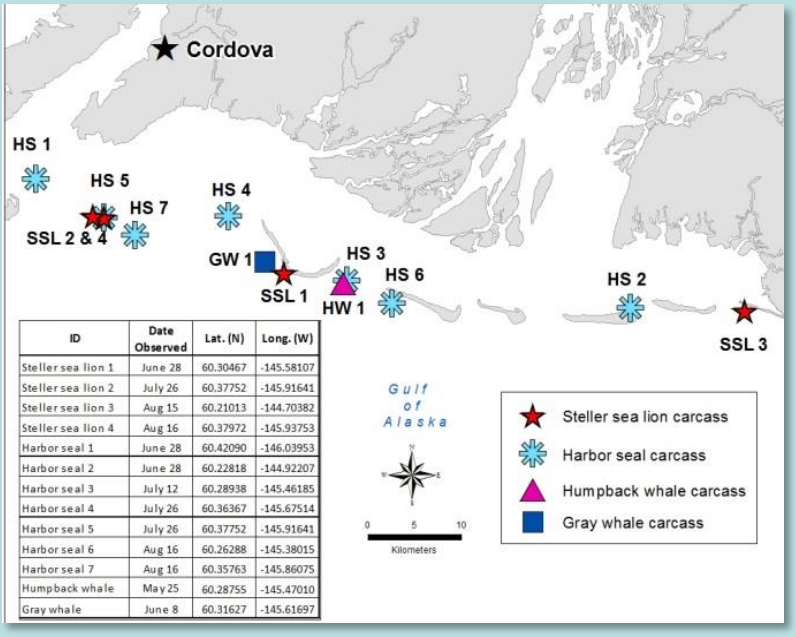
We recently came out with two new kiosk rack cards. The first – "Keep the Sea Entanglement Free" is a quick snapshot of three steps to take to reduce entangling marine debris. The second "Take the lead, do not feed" is an effort to deter people from feeding Steller sea lions in Alaska. If you would like hard copies of these brochures, please contact Kim at Kim.Raum-Suryan@noaa.gov. Thank you.

Copper River Delta Surveys

By Sadie Wright, NMFS

With assistance from the USCG, NMFS PRD biologists conducted a third year of marine mammal carcass surveys on the Copper River Delta this summer. The team was able to conduct all six of the scheduled surveys, and also take advantage of the time in Cordova to collect samples from carcasses in Prince William Sound and east of the Copper River Delta.

Right: Biologists Sadie Wright and Tammy Olson examine a carcass with the USCG standing by.



ID	Date Observed	Lat. (N)	Long. (W)
Steller sea lion 1	June 28	60.30467	-145.58107
Steller sea lion 2	July 26	60.37752	-145.91641
Steller sea lion 3	Aug 15	60.21013	-144.70382
Steller sea lion 4	Aug 16	60.37972	-145.93753
Harbor seal 1	June 28	60.42090	-146.03953
Harbor seal 2	June 28	60.22818	-144.92207
Harbor seal 3	July 12	60.28938	-145.46185
Harbor seal 4	July 26	60.36367	-145.67514
Harbor seal 5	July 26	60.37752	-145.91641
Harbor seal 6	Aug 16	60.26288	-145.38015
Harbor seal 7	Aug 16	60.35763	-145.86075
Humpback whale	May 25	60.28755	-145.47010
Gray whale	June 8	60.31627	-145.61697

Unfortunately, a number of the pinniped carcasses showed evidence of intentional killing by humans. Metal was detected in several carcasses using a wand style detector in the field, and in radiographs taken of skulls brought back to Juneau, suggesting they had been shot. We were not able to visit and sample all of the carcasses that we observed from the air, and some carcasses that we visited were too decomposed to establish a cause of death.

Above: Carcass locations along the Copper River Delta during the summer 2017 surveys.

NMFS is planning to finalize a report detailing the methods and results of the 2017 surveys this winter. The report will be posted at the NMFS Alaska Region Stranding Network webpage: https://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/pr/strandings The annual report from 2016 is currently available on that webpage. In general, the methods used in 2017 were similar to the methods described in the 2016 report.

A New Rarity

By Kate Savage, NOAA Affiliate

NMFS PRD recently received a report of a species possibly never before seen in Alaskan waters. The animal was sighted in western Prince William Sound in June and the report included the following footage (thanks to Nettie Wright) :

https://www.facebook.com/aaron.lang.180/videos/2158021940890174

Cetacean biologists Phil Clapham (AFSC) and Karin Forney (SWFSC) both agreed that it appeared to be a long-beaked common dolphin (*Delphinus capensis*). This species occurs regularly off the coast of California, but there have been recent sightings in Washington and southern British Columbia. It will be interesting to see if we receive more Alaskan reports of this species in the months or years ahead.

Above: a long-beaked common dolphin (Photo courtesy of SWFSC)

As might be expected, this is not the first report of a rarely or never before seen species in Alaskan waters. Historical literature include s sightings of species not observed in recent times. While the occasional appearance of narwhals in Alaskan waters has been recognized since 1874, the last published Alaskan narwhale strandings were two that occurred in 1957, one at the mouth of the Caribou River in the southern Bering Sea in April, the second on a beach of Kotzebue Sound in August (Geist 1960). Also described in literature, the body of a male Risso's dolphin (*Grampus grisseus*) was reported in Middleton Island in the central Gulf of Alaska in 1977 (Shults et al. 1982).

Other rare sightings or strandings come from NMFS database records. In 2003, NMFS received two unusual reports. The first was of a pygmy sperm whale (*Kogia breviceps*) that washed up near Yakutat.

Left: Pygmy sperm whale carcass first observed in July of 2003 (Photo courtesy of Bill Lucey)

Geist, O. W., J. L. Buckley, R. H. Manville. 1960. Alaskan records of the narwhal. Journal of Mammalogy, 41(2): 250-253.

Shults, L.M., F.H. Fay, J.D. Hall. 1982. Helminths from Stejneger's Beaked Whale *Mesoplodon stejnegeri* and Risso's Dolphin *Grampus griseus* in Alaska. Proceedings of the Helminthological Society of Washington 49(1): 146-147

A New Rarity – continued.

The second report was a live sighting of a solitary false killer whale (*Pseudorca crassidens*) trailing a boat in waters off of Juneau in May. At the time, some experts thought the animal was the same one seen following boats near Vancouver since 1990, observed frequently enough to earn nicknames such as “Willy”, “Foster” or “Rufus”. That animal had been absent at the same time that another false killer whale was seen following a boat near Prince Rupert, BC, and then presumably in Southeast Alaska.

Above left: False killer whale observed near Juneau. (Photo courtesy of Noel Cada).

Interestingly, another species uncommonly observed in Alaskan waters, the Pacific white-sided dolphin (*Lagenorhynchus obliquidens*), has not been reported since the 1990’s. Aside from a single female that was reported stranded on Prince of Wales Island in Southeast Alaska in 1984, the four confirmed reports of this species were all made between 1993 and 1998. The first was a live stranding of an otherwise healthy animal that beached as it was pursued by killer whales near Petersburg in April of 1993.

About two weeks later, a moderately decomposed animal was found stranded near Ketchikan. The cause of death was unknown.

Right: The 1993 Pacific white-sided dolphin that live stranded in Petersburg. Photo courtesy of NMFS.

In August of 1995, a single female live stranded near Ketchikan. During the necropsy, Gary Freitag and team found no teeth, an empty stomach, and a heavy parasite load in both blubber and stomach. The final report was of a live animal observed near Haines in April of 1998.

Since that time, NMFS has received no confirmed reports of Pacific white-sided dolphins in the region. However, a skull found on St. George Island in November of 2015 was thought to be that of a young delphinid, which would mean that it’s either the northernmost recorded stranding of an *L. obliquidens,* a *G. grisseus,* or a dolphin species never before recorded in Alaskan waters.

Left: Skull of young delphind from the Pribilof Islands. Photo courtesy of Dennis Lekanof.

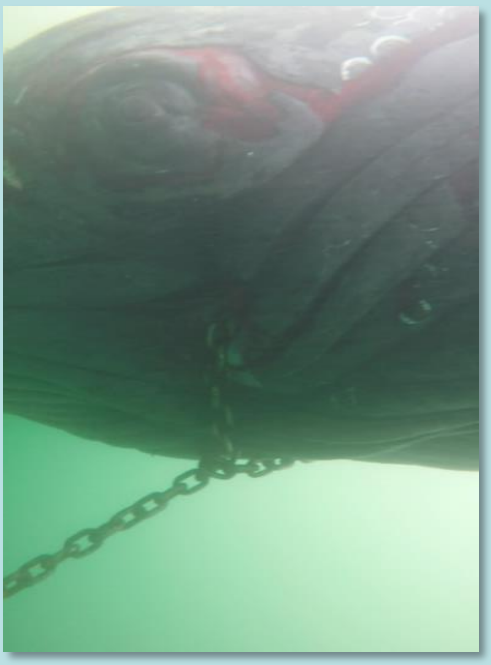
Wood Spit Entanglement

By Aleria Jensen and Kate Savage, NMFS

2017 was a fairly quiet year with respect to cetacean entanglements, with 11 reported entanglements compared to 21 in 2016 and an average of 15.5 over the last 10 years. Two of the entanglements during the year lead to a response. While all entanglements undoubtedly contain an element of drama, the entanglement, and subsequent response, that occurred on August 27 in Southeast Alaska, may have been even more dramatic than most.

In the early morning hours of August 27 , a subadult humpback whale became entangled in the anchor chain of the Uncruise M/V Wilderness Explorer while anchored near Wood Spit in Holkham Bay. The crew suspected the chain was wrapped around the right pectoral fin then around the jaw/head of whale. They called the NMFS Stranding Hotline, the USCG and the ASLC for assistance and, in the meantime, unsuccessfully tried to grapple the chain in hopes of dislodging the entanglement. Soon after receiving the call, NMFS requested the crew stand down from further disentanglement attempts, alerted local SEAK responders as well as NOAA's Regional Large Whale Entanglement Response Coordinator, Ed Lyman. Two teams of responders were sent to respond. One team., lead by Fred Sharpe (L4) mobilized from Baranof Warm Springs aboard their 28 ft vessel *Paula T*. John Moran (L4) from the AFSC also mobilized from Juneau on the NMFS Law Enforcement vessel *Aleutian Wind* driven by OLE officer, Bob Marvelle.

By 10:45 am both teams were on site. Over the next several hours, the teams continued risk and operational assessments and and gathered documentation with a polecam on a 28-foot long pole. By 13:10, their assessment was complete: a wrap around the lower jaw with only a half twist/ bite-loop around standing end from the right side of mouth.



Above: GoPro imagery of anchor chain wrapped around the body of the young humpback.

Woodspit Entanglement– continued.

The team weighed two response scenarios: grappling the chain below the animal in order to alleviate some of the load prior to cutting the chain vs cutting the chain without buoying the chain below the animal. Because the animal was very active at times and did not appear to be weighed down by the suspended chain, the decision was made to avoid sweeping for the underlying chain with a grapple. Instead, the team determined that cutting the chain in a controlled manner from the bow of the tour vessel, leaving a short run of chain, and a clean bitter end might allow the animal to self-release from what was assessed as a relatively simple entanglement.

Left: Schematic of likely entanglement configuration (E. Lyman).

By 14:00 the ship engineer had cut the chain using a grinder and the whale appeared to be free. The behavior and dorsal fin of a single animal moving away from the area suggested that it could be the disentangled whale. The OLE boat patrolled the area for another hour, and assessing and photo-documenting four additional whales in the area.

Above: crew members cut the anchor chain wrapped around the jaw of the young humpback whale. Photo courtesy of John Moran, NMFS.

During the debrief following the disentanglement, it was clear that many pieces contributed to the success of the disentanglement, including immediate reporting and rapid response, professional collaboration and communication between all parties, meticulous documentation, the patient and methodical assessment of the entanglement and group adherence to the action plan and attention to safety.

Photo opp...

Given the size of the state and the lack of roads to many areas, it is no wonder Alaska has one of the highest number of private pilots per capita in the country. Each year we receive a sizable number of stranding reports from both private and commercial pilots, including this one of a humpback whale in Bristol Bay. Photo courtesy of R. Kuzina.

Alaska SeaLife Center – 2017 Stranding and Rehabilitation

by Kathie Woodie, ASLC

The Alaska SeaLife Center's Stranding Hotline experienced higher than normal call volume this year, with animal cases occurring several weeks later than in a typical season. While the overall volume of admitted cases was average, our species diversity and distribution were remarkable with strong representation from northern and western Alaska. The ASLC admitted three harbor seals, two Northern sea otters pups, a Pacific walrus calf, a Cook Inlet beluga calf, and a Northern fur seal weanling. The ASLC reached out to their zoo and aquarium industry partners to collaborate in the animal care of multiple manpower-intensive animal cases. These institutions provided manpower, expertise, and support to our Rehab program during a particularly resource-draining season.

The Oiled Wildlife Response team developed and administered a first of its kind type of HAZWOPER training to more than fifty zoo and aquarium professionals at the ASLC this past spring, at the AZA meeting in Indianapolis, and by invitation to Detroit this year.

Above: Cook Inlet beluga calf rescued on Sept 30. The activities pictured are authorized by MMHSRP MMPA/ESA #18786-02

Below: Northern fur seal pup rescued from Unalaska Bay. The activities pictures here are authorized via an ASLC NOAA/NMFS Stranding Agreement.

Photo opp...

Each year, NMFS receives many stranding reports from biologists conducting aerial or marine based surveys. This photo was taken during a Steller sea lion survey near Dry Bay/Alsek River in March and includes an unusual perspective of scavenging on a partial sea lion carcass. Photo courtesy of Lauri Jemison.

Life in the Food Chain

by Janet Neilson, GBNP

On June 20th, Glacier Bay National Park whale biologist Janet Neilson documented four transient killer whales attacking a harbor porpoise in Icy Strait.

The killer whales breached on the unlucky porpoise, batted it around, and killed it.

After the whales had consumed their preferred body parts and moved on, Neilson pulled what remained of the porpoise onboard to collect a small tissue sample for genetic analysis, and marveled at how incredibly adept killer whales are at skinning their prey to access the parts, such as blubber, that they want to eat.

The tissue sample was contributed to NOAA's ongoing study of harbor porpoise stock structure in Southeast Alaska.

Neilson returned the carcass to the ocean to be consumed by scavengers, such as the many gulls who quickly gathered at the site. It was a lucky day for all, except for one unfortunate porpoise!

Announcements, Updates and FYIs

Completion of NMFS Arctic Marine Mammal Disaster Response Guidelines !

The NMFS Arctic Marine Mammal Disaster Response Guidelines have been completed and are available on the AKR Stranding Network webpage:

Arctic Guidelines: https://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/arctic-mm-response-guidelines1117.pdf
Appendices: https://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/arctic-mm-response-guidelines1117-appendices.pdf

The AMMDRG provides an overview of Arctic communities and detailed descriptions of NMFS decision-making strategies and communication protocols in emergency situations (e.g., oil spills or other man-made or natural disasters affecting marine mammals). The contact information in the Appendices was recently updated and will be a useful tool for anyone wanting to communicate with our partners and stakeholders in the Arctic.

Congratulations and thanks to Sadie Wright and all collaborators, including Stranding Networks members, who participated in the creation of the guidelines. A huge and successful group effort!

UME Updates

Ice Seal UME: The UME Core team is finalizing the Closure package this month with the hope to submit it to the UME Working Group in January.

Large Whale UME: The AK Large Whale UME Closure memos are in Clearance and should be signed soon. The Summary Report has been posted at: https://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/node/154.

An important reminder…

You will notice that the top row on the Level A form includes the possibility of three separate numbers assigned to each carcass. The Field # to the left might be the number you assign in the field and is optional. **The NMFS Regional # in the middle is assigned from the NMFS Regional database. Whenever you respond to a stranding, send us an email or call the Hotline and we will assign a number that stays with all paperwork and samples associated with that animal. Make sure you include the NMFS number on all samples you send for testing!** Finally, the National Database # is assigned once all the stranding data is entered into the national database by NMFS personnel.

Announcements, Updates and FYIs - continued

Welcome to New KODIAK Stranding Network 109(h) Partners!

Kelly Krueger is the Tribal Biologist for Sun'aq Tribe of Kodiak. She has a background in biology and fisheries. As the Tribal Biologist, she focuses on issues important to the Sun'aq Tribal Council, such as: invasive species, salmon habitat, water quality, migratory birds, and engaging Tribal youth. Previously, she worked on remote salmon monitoring projects for Kodiak Regional Aquaculture Association. She is helping start up a community-owned grocery store (Kodiak Harvest Food Co-op) and volunteers as a COASST beached bird participant.

Thomas (Tom) Lance has assisted Sun'aq Tribe of Kodiak for about 5 years as the Tribal Biologist or Natural Resources Department Director (current). Tom strives to safeguard the Tribe's traditional/subsistence resources as well as collaborate with other entities researching or educating about sustainable use practices. He was raised on a small mid-west farm and for over the last 30 yrs. has worked primarily in the PNW and Alaska, in private and government sectors as helitak firefighter, biologist, watershed planner, soil conservationist, natural resources consultant, Bering Sea Fisheries Observer, and as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Honduras ('85-'87). His experience and education have focused on an ecosystem-view (BS Wildlife & BS Range, MS Range; Univ. of Idaho). Tom enjoys adventure from the high desert to the high seas!

Photo opp...

Marine debris moves inland.

While conducting an emperor goose survey on the Alaska peninsula, USFWS wildlife biologist Dennis Marks took this photo of a caribou with a net entangled in antlers and dragging underfoot.

Announcements, Updates and FYIs - continued

NOAA Fisheries is accepting comments through December 15, 2017

Action: A draft procedural directive that would require applicants who want to obtain a releasable rehabilitated marine mammal for public display purposes to first apply for a permit to take (i.e., collect) animals from the wild under the Marine Mammal Protection Act. In the event NMFS would decide to grant such a permit, the NMFS Office of Protected Resources Director may then, at his or her discretion, require that a releasable rehabilitated marine mammal be substituted for capturing an animal from the wild, in accordance with 50 CFR 216.27. As members of the stranding network, we are interested in your comments on this draft procedural directive. More information regarding the draft procedural directive and how to submit comments is available on our NOAA Fisheries website: http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/permits/publicdisplay_permit.htm

Curious about the National Stranding Database?

If so, consider participating in the "National Database 101" webinar on Thursday January 11th at 11:30am or Friday January 19th at 10:00am (AST). This webinar is designed to be an introduction to the database and will cover topics such as how to create, edit, and query data in the national stranding database. If you currently do not add your Level A data directly to the national database, and are tired of filling out paper forms, then this webinar is for you! (Call-in information will be provided at a later date).

Large Whale Disentanglement Activities

As a result of a human casualty in Canada during a large whale disentanglement effort earlier this year, there have been some modifications to that program. Until further notice, large whale disentanglement activities are authorized on a case-by-case basis and only under the supervision of a Level 5 responder. Updates can be found here: http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/health/update-ent2017.html.

Stay Tuned…

Some of you may have heard about efforts to develop a national Marine Mammal Health MAP and are wondering what's going on with that project. It is a big undertaking, but progress is being made, including working on developing consistent definitions for various health fields, updating the database design and architecture, and figuring out a way to visualize Level A stranding data from the National database into Regional IOOS portals. We'll keep you posted as this project nears finalization.

Once again THANK YOU for your hard work during the 2017 stranding season. Many calls come in to NMFS from all over the state, demonstrating a true team effort to respond to stranded animals in Alaska. Thank you for your help! A reminder to please submit any level As, photos, and necropsy reports within 30 days to: **Kate.Savage@noaa.gov**
Your reports allow us to track marine mammal health in Alaska and beyond.