

Marine Mammals Committee

Committee Members: R. L. Brownell, Jr., C. Callahan, H. H. Edwards, J. E. Heyning (deceased), J. M. Lapsertis, C. D. Marshall, S. L. McDonald, T. J. McIntyre, J. Moore, D. K. Odell (Chair), T. J. O'Shea, C. W. Potter, R. J. Small, M. J. Smolen, and J. A. Thomas.

Mission:

The marine mammals committee was formed in 1921 under the Chairship of E. W. Nelson. It is the longest-standing active committee of the American Society of Mammalogists. Its mission is to maintain and encourage interest in marine mammals in the ASM, to provide the society membership with information about marine mammalogy, including conservation and legislative issues, to spearhead resolutions and legislation involving marine mammals, and to serve as a liaison between ASM and the Society for Marine Mammalogy (SMM). Members of the Marine Mammals Committee are frequently active in both ASM and SMM.

Information Items:

- (1) The committee notes the deaths of John E. Heyning and former committee member Karl W. Kenyon. Both individuals made significant contributions to mammalogy and to this committee and will be greatly missed.
- (2) 2006 Marine Mammal Symposium–Tom O'Shea continued to track the manuscripts resulting from the symposium as they move toward submission and publication.
- (3) The Committee reviewed and provided input on the Polar Bear letter developed by the Conservation Committee and signed by President Timm.
- (4) The Committee continues to monitor progress toward reauthorization of the Marine Mammal Protection Act and the Endangered Species Act.
- (5) The State of Florida is progressing toward final action on down-listing the Florida manatee under Florida endangered/threatened species criteria from endangered to threatened. The final action requires approval of a Management Plan and a vote by the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission before down-listing takes effect.
- (6) The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service has completed a review of the status of the Florida manatee and may recommend down-listing from endangered to threatened. No timetable has been set for this action.
- (7) The Committee continually watches matters related to underwater sound and the potential effects on marine mammals. For example, the National Marine Fisheries Service recently applied for a permit to test the behavioral responses of several species of cetaceans, including beaked whales, in Bahamian waters.

(8) The 2006 amendments to the Magnuson-Stevens Fisheries Act, which effectively amend the MMPA, are collectively termed the "United States–Russia Polar Bear Conservation and Management Act of 2006". In short, the new Act implements the 2000 Agreement on the Conservation and Management of the Alaska–Chukotka Polar Bear Population.

(9) NOAA Fisheries is proposing to list the Cook Inlet beluga whale population as endangered under the Endangered Species Act. The number of beluga whales in Cook Inlet waters near Anchorage has declined to an estimated 302 animals and is at risk of going extinct within 100 years. Hunting had already been significantly curtailed, with only five whales taken since 1999, yet the population is not recovering as anticipated. In light of the declining population, Alaska Native hunters from the Native Village of Tyonek have agreed to forgo their traditional subsistence hunt in 2007. Under the Endangered Species Act, NOAA Fisheries has one year to finalize the decision to list the Cook Inlet belugas. Comments on the proposed rule may be sent to CIB-ESA-Endangered@noaa.gov through 19 June 2007.

Action Items: None.

Respectfully submitted,

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