

## **Marine Mammals Committee**

**Committee Members:** R. L. Brownell, Jr. (USA), C. M. Callahan (USA), J. P. Dines (USA, Chair), H. H. Edwards (USA), J. M. Lapsertis (USA), I. Martinez-Serrano (Mexico), S. L. McDonald (USA), T. J. McIntyre (USA), D. K. Odell (USA), T. J. O'Shea (USA), C. W. Potter (USA), S. Sheffield (USA), R. J. Small (USA), and J. A. Thomas (USA).

### **Mission:**

The marine mammals committee was formed in 1921 and Chaired by 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 continually watches matters related to marine mammals and their environment. As appropriate, the committee may draft comments for Presidential signature or resolutions on certain items. Many of this committee's information items are short-lived and time-critical. We are looking forward to future posting of information items on the ASM web page.

**(2)** The NOAA Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program sponsored the 2010 National Marine Animal Health and Stranding Network Conference, held 05 – 09 April 2010 at the National Conservation Training Center in West Virginia. More than 250 participants were in attendance at the conference, including representatives from marine mammal rehab facilities, museums, universities, NMFS and USFWS.

**(3)** The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is considering changes to the regulations implementing the permit provisions of the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) to clarify existing permitting procedures and to codify procedures being implemented through agency policy. These regulations govern issuance of scientific research and enhancement permits for marine mammals, including threatened and endangered species. These regulations also cover the General Authorization for Scientific Research, photography permits, and public display permits. NMFS has developed a [Scoping Document](#) describing the proposed revisions, additions, and restructuring of the marine mammal permit regulations. Public comments on this Scoping Document are due to NMFS by 10 June 2010. The Committee is reviewing the Scoping Document.

**(4) Summary of Actions by the NOAA/NMFS regarding the management of marine mammals**

Beluga Whale (*Delphinapterus leucas*) -- NMFS proposes to designate Critical Habitat for the Cook Inlet beluga whale distinct population segment under the Endangered Species Act. Two areas are proposed encompassing 7,809 km<sup>2</sup> of marine habitat. NMFS requested comments from the public between 2 December 2009 and 1 February 2010. It is not clear when a final ruling will be made.

False Killer Whale (*Pseudorca crassidens*) -- NOAA/NMFS is establishing a Take Reduction Team to address the incidental take of false killer whales in the Hawaii Pelagic and Insular and Palmyra stocks of this species. The goal is to reduce the number of false killer whales taken during longline fishing. Meetings were held in February of this year with the goal to reduce the incidental take to a level less than the Potential Biological Removal for each stock within 6 months of implementation of the plan.

False Killer Whale (*Pseudorca crassidens*) -- A petition was filed by the Natural Resources Defense Council to list the Insular Population of Hawaiian false killer whale. NOAA/NMFS conducted a 90-day review and found substantial scientific or commercial information indicating that the petition action may be warranted. Public comments were solicited through 4 February 2010. It is currently under review to see if the population is a Distinct Population Segment, which would meet the criteria for listing.

Humpback Whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) -- NOAA/NMFS proposes to issue a permit for a period of three years to authorize the incidental, but not intentional, taking of individuals from the Central North Pacific stock of humpback whales by Hawaii-based longline fisheries. Public comments were sought through 26 March 2010. Impacts are expected to be low as only one animal has been seriously injured since 1994 in this type of fishery.

Humpback Whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) -- NOAA/NMFS has announced the status review of the humpback whale to see if it still warrants 'Endangered' status. Public comments were solicited by 13 October 2009, but review comments will be taken after this date. Review of listed species must be done every 5 years.

Bowhead Whale (*Balaena mysticetus*) -- The International Whaling Commission is responsible for setting quotas for the aboriginal subsistence hunting of bowhead whales from the Bering-Chukchi-Beaufort Seas stock. NOAA/NMFS reported that the 2010 quota assigned to Alaska Eskimos is 75 bowhead whales, which will be divided among the 11 villages whose cultural and subsistence needs have been documented.

Killer Whales (*Orcinus orca*) -- NOAA/NMFS is initiating a 5-year review of the current status of the Southern Resident Killer Whale population in Washington State. Public comments are solicited by 6 July 2010, but will take comments after this date.

“Ice Seals”: Ribbon Seal (*Histiophoca fasciata*); Spotted seal (*Phoca larga*); Bearded seal (*Erignathus barbatus*), and ringed seal (*Phoca hispida*) -- Following the completion of a formal Status Review, NMFS announced on 30 December 2008 their 12-month finding on a petition to list ribbon seals under the ESA. Although ribbon seal abundance

is likely to decline gradually in the foreseeable future by changes in sea ice, NMFS found that the listing of ribbon seals was not warranted. A 60-Day Notice of Intent to Sue was filed 31 March 2009 by the Center for Biological Diversity relating to the ruling on the petition. In October 2009, the formal Status Review for spotted seals was completed and NMFS concluded that spotted seals exists as three (3) distinct population segments (DPS) within the North Pacific Ocean: the southern, Okhotsk, and Bering DPSs. On 20 October 2009 NMFS issued a proposed rule to list the southern DPS of spotted seals as a threatened species; Critical Habitat will not be designated for the southern DPS because it occurs outside the U.S. The Okhotsk and Bering Sea DPSs were found not to be in danger of extinction nor likely to become endangered. Status Reviews and findings on the petition to list bearded and ringed seals are expected later in 2010.

#### **(5) Summary of Actions by the USFWS regarding the management of marine mammals**

Polar Bear (*Ursus maritimus*) -- The USFWS is under court order to publish a final rule designating Critical Habitat for the Polar Bear no later than 30 June 2010. The USFWS took public comments from 28 September 2009 through 28 December 2009. There are three types of habitat within U.S. jurisdiction that are being considered for critical habitat; barrier islands, sea ice, and terrestrial denning habitats.

Manatee (*Trichechus manatus latirostris*) -- The 12-month finding on the petition to revise Critical Habitat for the Florida Manatee found that revisions are warranted; however, the USFWS lacks sufficient funding at this time due to higher priorities.

Northern Sea Otter (*Enhydra lutris kenyoni*) -- Final ruling was issued on the Designation of Critical Habitat for Southwest Alaska Distinct Population Segment of the Northern Sea Otter. The USFWS designated 15,164 km<sup>2</sup> of habitat as critical for the survival of the Northern Sea Otter.

Walrus (*Odobenus rosmarus*) -- A petition was filed with USFWS to list the Pacific Walrus (*O. r. divergens*) as threatened or endangered and to designate Critical Habitat. The USFWS sought public comments from 10 September 2009 through 9 November 2009. A 12-month finding must be published on or before 10 September 2010. A stock assessment was published on 1 January 2010 designating the stock status as "Strategic" with a minimum population size of 129,000 individuals.

**(6) Cold-related manatee deaths in Florida in 2010** -- As of April 9, biologists with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's (FWC) Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI) documented 486 manatee carcasses in state waters in 2010. Another 58 manatees were rescued. The cause of death for the majority of these animals was cold stress. In the first three months of the year, the number of manatee deaths exceeded the highest number on record for an entire calendar year (429 in 2009). The number of deaths so far this year is approximately 10% of the total number of Florida manatees counted in the 2010 statewide survey (5076).

**Action Items: None.**

**Respectfully submitted,**

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