

Marine Mammals Committee

Committee Members: R. L. Brownell, Jr., C. M. Callahan, J. P. Dines (Chair), H. H. Edwards, T. J. McIntyre, D. K. Odell, T. J. O'Shea, C. W. Potter, S. Sheffield, and J. A. Thomas.

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) Members of the Committee have monitored and communicated with each other over the course of the year on issues pertinent to the conservation of marine mammals.
- (2) The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) are required to publish Stock Assessment Reports for all stocks of marine mammals within U.S. waters, reviewing new information annually for strategic stocks and every three years for non-strategic stocks. The Draft 2011 Marine Mammal Stock Assessments for species under NMFS jurisdiction is available at: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/sars/draft.htm>
- (3) In response to earlier petitions, NMFS issued a proposed rule in April 2012 to remove the eastern distinct population segment (DPS) of Steller sea lions from the List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife. The eastern DPS of Steller sea lion occurs east of 144° W. The eastern DPS has recovered in numbers and in recent years has increasingly been seen as a competitor to commercial fishery operations in the Pacific Northwest. If the proposed rule goes into effect, the western DPS of Steller sea lion (found west of 144° W) will retain protection under the Endangered Species Act, and the Marine Mammal Protection Act will still apply to all populations of the Steller sea lion.
- (4) In October 2011, the District Court of the District of Columbia found that the USFWS violated the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) when it issued a special rule—known as a 4(d) rule—at the same time it listed the polar bear as threatened under the Endangered Species Act in 2008. The special rule sharply reduced the full protections polar bears would have otherwise received when listed under the ESA. USFWS was faulted for not conducting proper NEPA analyses before issuing the rule. In April 2012, USFWS announced it was conducting NEPA analyses and proposed to issue essentially the same 4(d) special rule once the NEPA and environmental impact analyses are completed.
- (5) Since its inception in 2001, the John H. Prescott Marine Mammal Rescue Assistance Grant Program has awarded more than \$40 million in competitive grants to organizations that respond

on behalf of NMFS to live and dead marine mammal strandings. The Prescott Grant Program has contributed to unprecedented improvements to the primarily volunteer stranding networks along the U.S. coast. Along with countless other vital programs that rely on Federal support, funding for the Prescott Grant Program was eliminated from the proposed 2013 Federal Budget submitted by the Obama Administration. While the appropriations committees of both the House and Senate have thus far indicated some funding to NMFS may be restored, it is unclear at this time if the Prescott Grant Program will be funded.

(6) According to NOAA marine mammal biologists and their local, state, federal and other research partners, bottlenose dolphins in Barataria Bay, Louisiana, are showing signs of severe ill health. Physicals of 32 live dolphins conducted as part of the Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) process to study the effects of the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill show that many of the dolphins in the study are underweight, anemic, have low blood sugar and/or some symptoms of liver and lung disease. Nearly half of the dolphins also have abnormally low levels of the hormones that help with stress response, metabolism, and immune function. Researchers fear that some of the study dolphins are in such poor health that they will not survive. Since February 2010, more than 675 dolphins have stranded in the northern Gulf of Mexico (Franklin County, Florida, to the Louisiana/Texas border)—a much higher rate than the usual average of 74 dolphins per year, prompting NOAA to declare an Unusual Mortality Event (UME).

Action Items:

(1) The Committee will be requesting that the Informatics Committee add the following informational links to the Marine Mammals Committee's webpage:

- Link to the NMFS Protected Resources page (<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr>), which provides up-to-date information on marine mammal activities published in the Federal Register.
- Links to proposed legislation on marine mammal species found on www.thomas.loc.gov

Respectfully submitted,
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