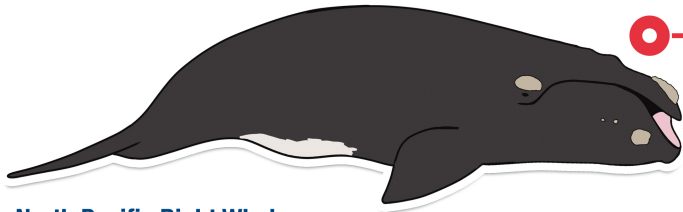


Looking Ahead: Marine Mammals & Alaska's Fisheries



Alaska is home to numerous marine mammal stocks throughout the Bering Sea, Aleutian Islands, and the Gulf of Alaska. Changing ocean conditions, such as increasing temperatures and declining sea ice, impact Alaska's marine mammals and may change the nature of fishery interactions in the future. The **North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC)**, **NOAA Fisheries**, and the **fishing industry** work together to monitor and manage marine mammal interactions with fisheries.

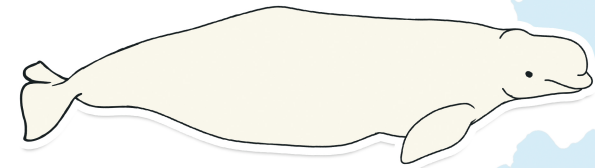


North Pacific Right Whale
(*Eubalaena japonica*) **Endangered (ESA)**

As of 2024, NOAA Fisheries is considering expanding the critical habitat of North Pacific Right Whales. If expanded, this may result in changes to fisheries management in the Bering Sea.

Changing climate in the Bering Sea may also result in right whales occurring in closer proximity to fishing activity, potentially increasing the chances of interactions.

Fisheries Interactions: No documented direct interactions as of 2024, but even single death or serious injury would be catastrophic for recovery.



Cook Inlet Beluga
(*Delphinapterus leucas*) **Endangered (ESA)**

Prey availability is listed as one of the main threats to Cook Inlet belugas. Management of Cook Inlet's salmon fisheries may influence how many salmon, such as coho, chum, and pink salmon, are available to the belugas in the summer months.

It will be important to consider prey availability for belugas when deciding timing and area restrictions for Cook Inlet's salmon fisheries.

Fisheries Interactions: Low level of direct interactions, but impacts may be especially strong in small populations.

Western Stellar Sea Lion
(*Eumetopias jubatus*) **Threatened (ESA)**

Declines in the western Stellar sea lion distinct population segment in the 1990s were linked to competition for prey with pollock fisheries.

Regulations such as no-fishing zones, approach restrictions near rookeries, and harvest limits have contributed to sea lion conservation efforts, though the population will require continued monitoring.

Fisheries Interactions: Level of direct and indirect interactions have been reduced since implementation of regulations, but may still occur at low levels.

Pacific Walrus
(*Odobenus rosmarus divergens*)

As sea ice declines, walrus are spending more time on haulouts, which makes them more susceptible to disturbance from commercial activities. Fisheries may also come into contact with walrus as fishing activities shift north, increasing the potential for interactions.

There are a number of established area-based conservation measures aimed at protecting Bering Sea habitats from fishing impacts, including Walrus Protection Areas.

Fisheries Interactions: Level of direct and indirect interactions are low, but may change in the future.

Species to Watch

Northern Fur Seal

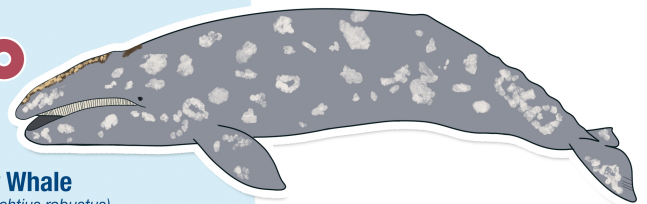
(*Callorhinus ursinus*) **Depleted (MMPA)**

Northern fur seals have been in decline since the 1990s. Lactating females are reliant upon pollock, a species also targeted by commercial fisheries.

There is a need to understand what, if any, impacts that commercial fishing may have on fur seal prey and habitat.



Fisheries Interactions: Few direct interactions, but indirect interactions such as competition may be detrimental.



Gray Whale

(*Eschrichtius robustus*)

Gray whales are benthic feeders and spend summers foraging in the Bering and Chukchi Seas.

From 2019-2023, eastern North Pacific gray whales underwent an Unusual Mortality Event (UME), linked to poor body condition and malnutrition, likely due to changes in prey availability.

There is a need to understand how bottom trawling impacts benthic feeders like gray whales.

Fisheries Interactions: Direct interactions are uncommon but populations may be sensitive to indirect interactions during UMEs.

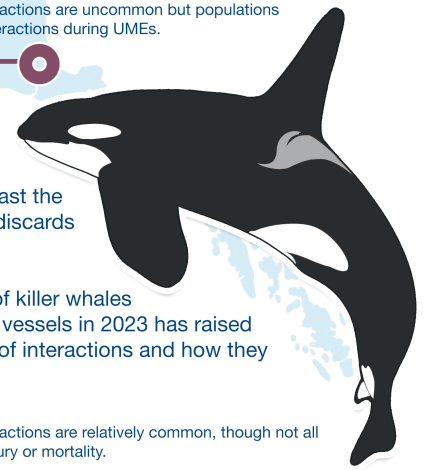
Killer Whale

(*Orcinus orca*)

Killer whales have been depredating from Alaska's longline fisheries since at least the 1960s and often forage on discards from trawl vessels.

An increase in the number of killer whales incidentally caught by trawl vessels in 2023 has raised questions about the nature of interactions and how they may change over time.

Fisheries Interactions: Direct interactions are relatively common, though not all interactions result in serious injury or mortality.



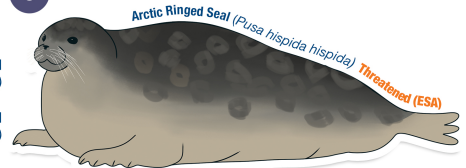
Ice Seals

Ringed Seal
(*Pusa hispida*)

Bearded Seal
(*Erignathus barbatus*)

Spotted Seal
(*Phoca largha*)

Ribbon Seal
(*Histiophoca fasciata*)



Ice seals—spotted seals, ribbon seals, spotted seals, and bearded seals—are occasionally taken as bycatch in Alaska fisheries but generally have few direct interactions with fisheries. However, as sea ice declines and seal habitat and foraging areas becomes less suitable, fisheries interactions could become more important to consider in the future.

Fisheries Interactions: Direct interactions are uncommon, but may increase with changes in habitat and foraging opportunities.

Species of Lesser Concern