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Endangered Species Act Section 7 Biological Opinion on the Gulf of Alaska Groundfish FMP

April 2025

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NMFS Alaska Region
Protected Resources Division

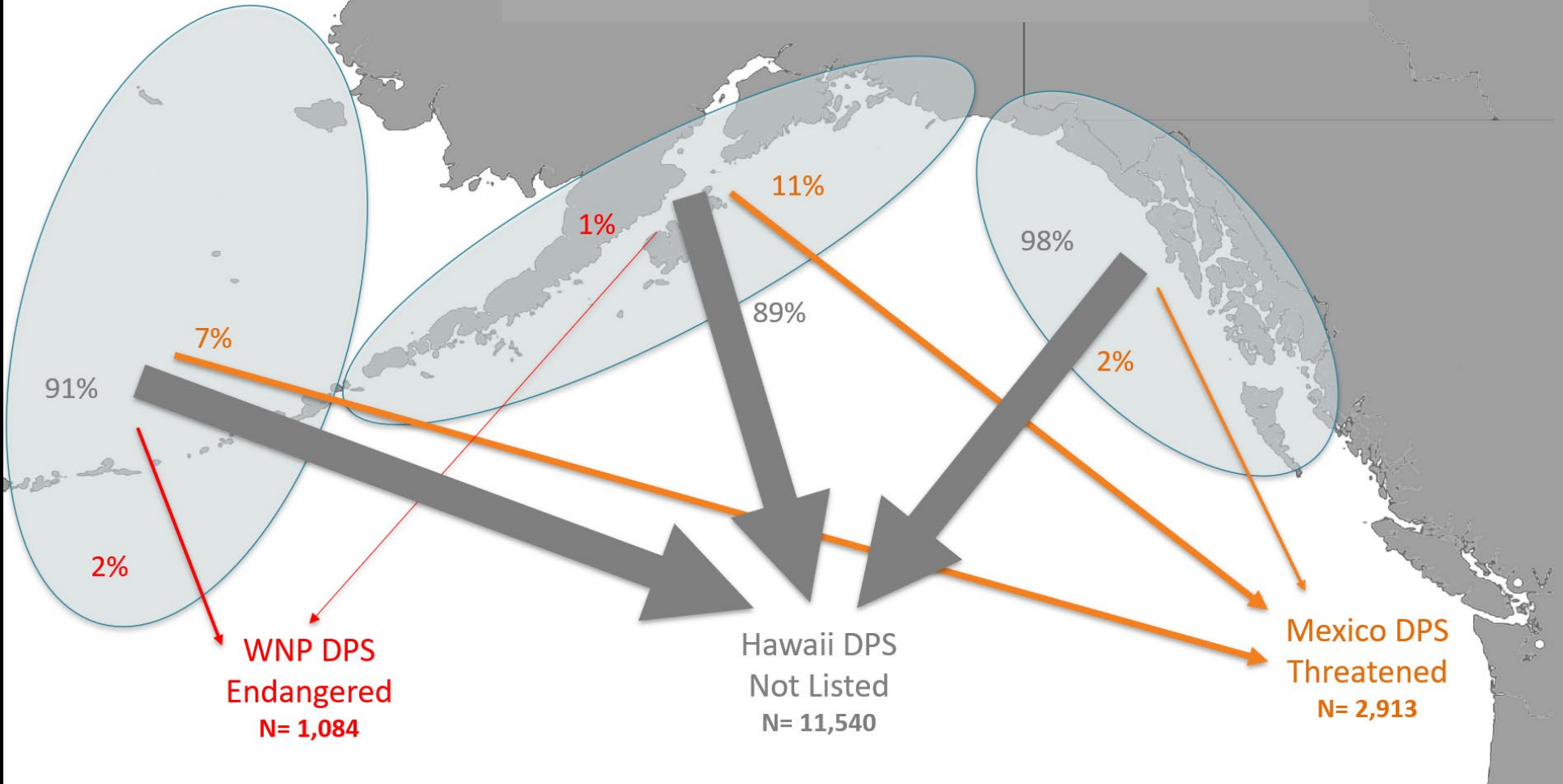
Reinitiation Triggers

- Humpback whales reclassified (2016)
 - 14 Distinct Population Segments (DPS)
 - 3 in the Gulf of Alaska



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Humpback Whale DPS



Reinitiation Triggers

- Humpback whales reclassified (2016)
 - 14 Distinct Population Segments (DPS)
 - 3 in the Gulf of Alaska
- Humpback whale critical habitat (2021)
- Authorized take limits exceeded
 - Steller sea lion
 - Sperm whale
- ~Additional Considerations~
 - Proposed sunflower sea star listing (threatened)
 - Other new information available
 - Separate GOA and BSAI opinions
 - Consolidate information



Consultation Process

- NMFS Sustainable Fisheries Division prepared a Biological Assessment
- Initiated consultation July 2024
- NMFS Protected Resources Division evaluated the effects of the GOA groundfish fisheries to ESA species and prepared a Biological Opinion
- Consultation was on the status quo fisheries
- Conference opinion on sunflower sea stars
- Joint consultation with NMFS West Coast Region



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Species/Distinct Population Segments Considered

- 11 DPS marine mammals from 10 species
- 19 DPS fish from 5 species
- 5 DPS marine turtles from 4 species
- 1 invertebrate - Sunflower sea star (range-wide)
- Critical habitats present in the action area



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Likely to Be Adversely Affected

- Fin whale
- Sperm whale
- Mexico DPS humpback whale
- Western North Pacific DPS humpback
- Western DPS Steller sea lion
- Lower Columbia River Chinook salmon
- Upper Willamette River Chinook salmon
- Snake River fall-run Chinook salmon
- Sunflower sea star (range-wide)



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Fisheries Data

Self-Reports
(MMAP)

Stranding
Program



Observers



Human-Caused
Mortality & Injury
Report



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Alaska Fisheries Science Center
Marine Mammal Laboratory

Mortality and Injury Report

Human-caused Mortality and Injury of NMFS-managed Alaska Marine Mammal Stocks, 2018-2022

OCTOBER 2024

of NMFS-
Alaska Marine
Stocks, 2018-2022

				Elimination Details	Final Determination	Mechanism of Injury	Source of Injury	Fishery Name ¹	Fishery Type	Fishery Method ¹	SI Criteria	Suggested Value for PBR	Suggested Value for LOP		
				sea lion was caught and killed by gear.	DEAD	Entangled / entrapped	Fishery gear	AK BSAI pollock trawl	Commercial	Trawl	N/A	1	1		
				sea lions were caught in trawl gear. This record is of 2 - Male.	DEAD	Entangled / entrapped	Fishery gear	AK BSAI pollock trawl	Commercial	Trawl	N/A	1	1		
				sea lions were caught in trawl gear. This record is of 2 - Male.	DEAD	Entangled / entrapped	Fishery gear	AK BSAI pollock trawl	Commercial	Trawl	N/A	1	1		
				Steller sea lion was caught in trawl gear.	DEAD	Entangled / entrapped	Fishery gear	AK BSAI Pacific cod trawl	Commercial	Trawl	N/A	1	1		
				Steller sea lion was caught in trawl gear.	DEAD	Entangled / entrapped	Fishery gear	AK BSAI pollock trawl	Commercial	Trawl	N/A	1	1		
				Steller sea lion was killed by trawl gear.	DEAD	Entangled / entrapped	Fishery gear	AK BSAI Alaska maskarel trawl	Commercial	Trawl	N/A	1	1		
				Steller sea lion was caught in BSAI pollock trawl gear.	DEAD	Entangled / entrapped	Fishery gear	AK BSAI pollock trawl	Commercial	Trawl	N/A	1	1		
				Steller sea lion was caught in trawl gear.	DEAD	Entangled / entrapped	Fishery gear	AK BSAI flatfish trawl	Commercial	Trawl	N/A	1	1		
				Steller sea lion was caught and killed by trawl gear.	DEAD	Entangled / entrapped	Fishery gear	AK BSAI flatfish trawl	Commercial	Trawl	N/A	1	1		
NPPOP	8/16/2017	BS	Steller Sea Lion	Western US	DEAD	A male Steller sea lion was caught and killed by trawl gear.	DEAD	Entangled / entrapped	Fishery gear	AK BSAI flatfish trawl	Commercial	Trawl	N/A	1	1
NPPOP	8/18/2017	BS	Steller Sea Lion	Western US	DEAD	A male Steller sea lion was caught and killed by trawl gear.	DEAD	Entangled / entrapped	Fishery gear	AK BSAI flatfish trawl	Commercial	Trawl	N/A	1	1
NPPOP	8/21/2017	BS	Steller Sea Lion	Western US	DEAD	A male Steller sea lion was caught and killed by trawl gear.	DEAD	Entangled / entrapped	Fishery gear	AK BSAI flatfish trawl	Commercial	Trawl	N/A	1	1
NPPOP	8/27/2017	BS	Steller Sea Lion	Western US	DEAD	A male Steller sea lion was caught and killed by trawl gear.	DEAD	Entangled / entrapped	Fishery gear	AK BSAI flatfish trawl	Commercial	Trawl	N/A	1	1
NPPOP	8/30/2017	BS	Steller Sea Lion	Western US	DEAD	A male Steller sea lion was caught and killed by trawl gear.	DEAD	Entangled / entrapped	Fishery gear	AK BSAI flatfish trawl	Commercial	Trawl	N/A	1	1
NPPOP	8/14/2017	BS	Steller Sea Lion	Western US	DEAD	A Steller sea lion was caught and killed in AK BSAI Pacific cod longline gear.	DEAD	Hooked	Fishery gear	AK BSAI Pacific cod longline	Commercial	Longline	N/A	1	1
ADFO	7/10/2017	PWS	Steller Sea Lion	Western US	SI	A male Steller sea lion was observed with a circumferential neck entanglement caused by unidentified material.	SI	Constricting entanglement	Marine debris (unidentified)	N/A	N/A	N/A	P2a	1	0
ADFO	7/12/2017	SCAK	Steller Sea Lion	Western US	SI	An adult female Steller sea lion was observed with a circumferential neck entanglement caused by unidentified material.	SI	Constricting entanglement	Marine debris (unidentified)	N/A	N/A	N/A	P2a	1	0
NPPOP	7/15/2017	BS	Steller Sea Lion	Western US	DEAD	A male Steller sea lion was caught and killed by trawl gear.	DEAD	Entangled / entrapped	Fishery gear	AK BSAI flatfish trawl	Commercial	Trawl	N/A	1	1
ADFO	7/17/2017	Kodiak	Steller Sea Lion	Western US	SI	A male Steller sea lion was observed with a flasher at the edge of its mouth with 4 ft of trailing line.	SI	Hooked	Fishery gear	Salmon hook and line	Unknown	Hook and line	P2	1	0



Revised 5/10/2024

Stock Assessment Reports (SARs)

STELLER SEA LION (*Eumetopias jubatus*): Western Stock

STOCK DEFINITION AND GEOGRAPHIC RANGE

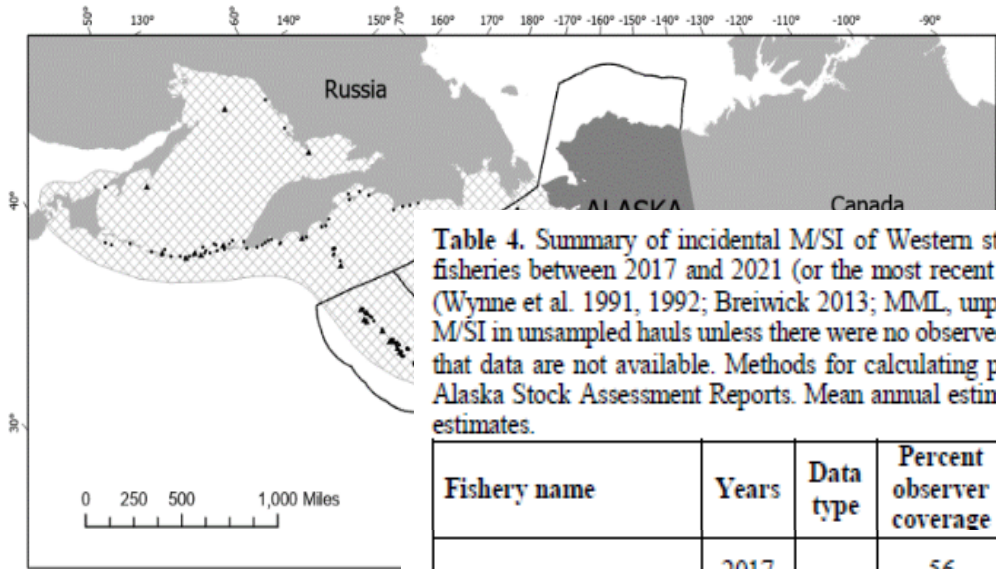


Figure 1. Generalized distribution (crosshatched and rookeries (50 CFR 226.202, 27 August 199 and rookeries (points: Burkanov and Loughlin 2 boundary (Loughlin 1997) and a black line deli

Table 4. Summary of incidental M/SI of Western stock Steller sea lions in U.S. waters due to U.S. commercial fisheries between 2017 and 2021 (or the most recent data available) and calculation of the mean annual M/SI rate (Wynne et al. 1991, 1992; Breiwick 2013; MML, unpubl. data). The “Observed mortality” column does not include M/SI in unsampled hauls unless there were no observed M/SI in sampled hauls in that fishery that year. N/A indicates that data are not available. Methods for calculating percent observer coverage are described in Appendix 3 of the Alaska Stock Assessment Reports. Mean annual estimates are rounded but the total estimate is based on unrounded estimates.

Fishery name	Years	Data type	Percent observer coverage	Observed M/SI	Estimated M/SI (CV)	Mean estimated annual M/SI
Gulf of Alaska flatfish trawl	2017	obs data	56	0	0	0.40 (CV = N/A)
	2018		35	0	0	
	2019		39	2 ^a	2	
	2020		38	0	0	
	2021		82	0	0	
Gulf of Alaska pollock trawl	2017	obs data	19	0	0	0.20 (CV = N/A)
	2018		21	0	0	
	2019		23	0	0	
	2020		10	1 ^b	1	
	2021		13	0	0	
Gulf of Alaska sablefish longline	2017	obs data	10	0	0	1.9 (CV = 0.79)
	2018		9	0	0	
	2019		12	2	9.4 (0.79)	
	2020		7	0	0	
	2021		11	0	0	

Take Estimation Method: wDPS Steller sea lions

FISHERY	SAR Year	M/SI			
		Est.	CV	SD	Est. +1SD
AK Gulf of Alaska Pacific cod longline	2020/2019	0.3	0.5	0.15	0.45
AK Gulf of Alaska Pacific cod trawl	2020/2019	2	0.9	1.8	3.80
AK Gulf of Alaska sablefish longline	2023	1.9	0.79	1.501	3.40
AK Gulf of Alaska flatfish trawl	2020	0.4	NA	NA	0.40
AK Gulf of Alaska rockfish trawl	2020/2019	0.2	NA	NA	0.20
AK Gulf of Alaska pollock trawl (sampled hauls)	2020/2019	1	0.89	0.89	1.89
AK Gulf of Alaska pollock trawl (unsampled hauls)	2020/2019	1	NA	NA	1.00
Total GOA Groundfish fisheries	-	6.8	-	-	11.14
Take Estimate (rounded up)	12				

Western DPS Steller Sea Lion



- Takes have occurred in longline and trawl fisheries
- Authorized 12 annual takes



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Humpback Whale

Mexico DPS

Western North Pacific DPS

- No takes attributed to GOA groundfish fisheries in recent SARs or M/SI reports
- Potential exists, observed in BSAI pot fishery and unidentified GOA fisheries
- Considered a rare event
- Authorized 1 take every 5 years (summed for both listed DPS)



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Fin Whale

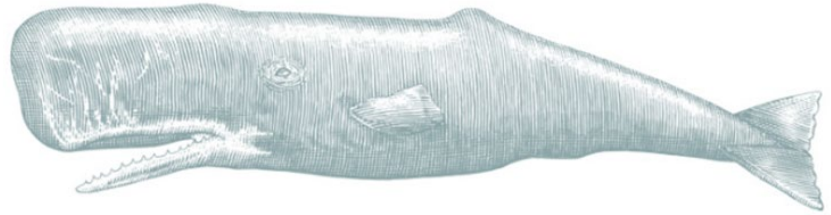


- No reports of mortality or serious injury in GOA groundfish fisheries
- 1 report in BSAI trawl gear, 1 unconfirmed report in GOA jig gear
- Considered a rare event
- Authorized 1 take every 5 years



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Sperm Whale



- Older SARs had higher levels of take
- Transition to pot gear in 2017 has reduced takes
- Used average annual take + 1SD from 2020 SAR
- Authorized 3 takes annually



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Take Estimation/Authorization (other species)

- Chinook Salmon: 40,000 limit from all stocks (not just listed)
 - PSC limit = 32,500 fish, buffer to close fishery before exceeding take
 - Annual reports to West Coast Region on Chinook bycatch and coded-wire tag recoveries
- Sunflower Sea Stars:
 - Total sea star bycatch, used as surrogate
 - 5 yr average + 1 SD = 51 mt/yr



Conclusions

- Authorized levels of take are not likely to result in jeopardy to any listed species
- Critical habitats are not likely to be adversely affected by the action
- Updated with most recent scientific information
- Marine mammal take will be tracked through the SARs



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Next Steps- BSAI FMP Consultation

- Sustainable Fisheries currently preparing Biological Assessment
- Expect to initiate consultation summer 2025
- Consistent methods with GOA process
- Completion of Biological Opinion in late 2025



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QUESTIONS?

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Biological Opinion available at:
<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/resource/document/biological-opinion-national-marine-fisheries-service-alaska-region-sustainable>



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