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HARBOR PORPOISE (*Phocoena phocoena vomerina*): Washington Inland Waters Stock

STOCK DEFINITION AND GEOGRAPHIC RANGE

In the eastern North Pacific Ocean, harbor porpoise are found in coastal and inland waters from Point Barrow, along the Alaskan coast, and down the west coast of North America to Point Conception, California (Gaskin 1984). Harbor porpoise are known to occur year-round in the inland trans-boundary waters of Washington and British Columbia, Canada (Osborne et al. 1988), and along the Oregon/Washington coast (Barlow 1988, Barlow et al. 1988, Green et al. 1992). Aerial survey data from coastal Oregon and Washington, collected during all seasons, suggest that harbor porpoise distribution varies by depth (Green et al. 1992). Although distinct seasonal changes in abundance along the west coast have been noted, and attributed to possible shifts in distribution to deeper offshore waters during late winter (Dohl et al. 1983, Barlow 1988), seasonal movement patterns are not fully understood.

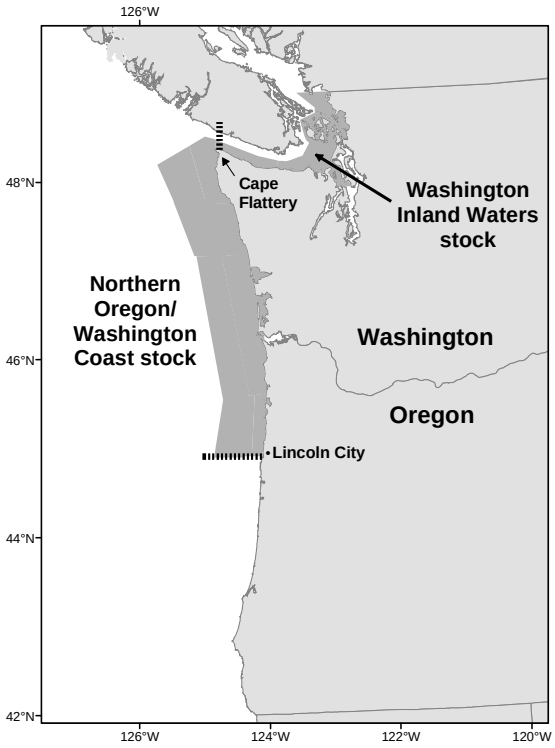

Figure 1. Stock boundaries (dashed lines) and approximate distribution (dark shaded areas) of harbor porpoise along the coasts of Washington and northern Oregon. The range of the Northern California/Southern Oregon stock of harbor porpoise (not shown), extends from Lincoln City. OR, south to Pt. Arena, CA.

Investigation of pollutant loads in harbor porpoise ranging from California to the Canadian border suggests restricted harbor porpoise movements (Calambokidis and Barlow 1991). Stock discreteness in the eastern North Pacific was analyzed using mitochondrial DNA from samples collected along the west coast (Rosel 1992) and is summarized in Osmek et al. (1994). Two distinct mtDNA groupings or clades exist. One clade is present in California, Washington, British Columbia, and Alaska (no samples were available from Oregon), while the other is found only in California and Washington. Although these two clades are not geographically distinct by latitude, the results may indicate a low mixing rate for harbor porpoise along the west coast of North America. Further genetic testing of the same data, along with additional samples, found significant genetic differences for four of the six pair-wise comparisons between the four areas investigated: California, Washington, British Columbia, and Alaska (Rosel et al. 1995). These results demonstrate that harbor porpoise along the west coast of North America are not panmictic or migratory and that movement is sufficiently restricted that genetic differences have evolved. Subsequent genetic analyses of samples ranging from Monterey Bay, California, to Vancouver Island, British Columbia, indicate that there is small-scale subdivision within the U.S. portion of this range (Chivers et al. 2002, 2007). This is consistent with low movement suggested by genetic analysis of harbor porpoise specimens from the North Atlantic, where numerous stocks have been delineated with clinal differences over areas as small as the waters surrounding the British Isles.

Using the 1990-1991 aerial survey data of Calambokidis et al. (1993) for water depths <50 fathoms, Osmek et al. (1996) found significant differences in harbor porpoise mean densities ($Z=6.9$, $P<0.001$) between the waters of coastal Oregon/Washington and inland Washington/southern British Columbia, Canada (i.e., Strait of Juan de Fuca/San Juan Islands). Following a risk averse management strategy, two stocks were recognized in the waters of Oregon and Washington, with a boundary at Cape Flattery, Washington. Based on more recent genetic evidence, which suggests that the population of eastern North Pacific harbor porpoise is more finely structured (Chivers et al. 2002, 2007), stock boundaries on the Oregon/Washington coast have been revised, resulting in three stocks in Oregon/Washington waters: a Northern California/Southern Oregon stock (Point Arena, CA, to Lincoln City, OR), a

Northern Oregon/Washington Coast stock (Lincoln City, OR, to Cape Flattery, WA), and the Washington Inland Waters stock (in waters east of Cape Flattery). Additional analyses are needed to determine whether to adjust the stock boundaries for harbor porpoise in Washington inland waters (Chivers et al. 2007).

Barlow and Hanan (1995) recommended two stocks of harbor porpoise be recognized in California, with the stock boundary at the Russian River. Based on more recent genetic findings (Chivers et al. 2002, 2007), California coast stocks were re-evaluated and significant genetic differences were found among four identified sampling sites. Revised stock boundaries, based on these genetic data and density discontinuities identified from aerial surveys, resulted in six California/Oregon/Washington stocks where previously there had been four (e.g., Carretta et al. 2001): 1) the Washington Inland Waters stock, 2) the Northern Oregon/Washington Coast stock, 3) the Northern California/Southern Oregon stock, 4) the San Francisco-Russian River stock, 5) the Monterey Bay stock, and 6) the Morro Bay stock. The stock boundaries for animals that occur in northern Oregon/Washington waters are shown in Figure 1. This report considers only the Washington Inland Waters stock. Stock assessment reports for Northern Oregon/Washington Coast, Northern California/Southern Oregon, San Francisco-Russian River, Monterey Bay, and Morro Bay harbor porpoise also appear in this volume. Stock assessment reports for the three harbor porpoise stocks in the inland and coastal waters of Alaska, including 1) the Southeast Alaska stock, 2) the Gulf of Alaska stock, and 3) the Bering Sea stock, are reported separately in the Stock Assessment Reports for the Alaska Region. The harbor porpoise occurring in British Columbia have not been included in any of the U.S. stock assessment reports.

POPULATION SIZE

Aerial surveys of the inside waters of Washington and southern British Columbia were conducted from 2013 to 2015 (Smultea *et al.* 2015a, 2015b). These aerial surveys included the Strait of Juan de Fuca, San Juan Islands, Gulf Islands, Strait of Georgia, Puget Sound, and Hood Canal. These are the waters inhabited by the Washington Inland Waters stock of harbor porpoise as well as harbor porpoise from British Columbia. Harbor porpoise abundance estimates were corrected for trackline animals missed by aerial observers using *g(0)* from prior studies in the same area and using similar methods (Laake *et al*. 1997). For U.S. waters, the current estimate of abundance is 11,233 porpoise (CV=0.37) (Smultea *et al*. 2015a).

Minimum Population Estimate

The minimum population estimate for the Washington Inland Waters stock of harbor porpoise is calculated as the lower 20th percentile of the log-normal distribution (Wade and Angliss 1997) of the 2015 population estimate of 11,233 harbor porpoise, or 8,308 animals.

Current Population Trend

Estimates of population size for Washington Inland waters from 1990-1991 aerial surveys were 3,298 (CV=0.26) animals, corrected for diving animals not seen by observers (Calambokidis *et al*. 1993). Estimates of harbor porpoise abundance for the same region from 2013-2015 surveys (11,233; CV=0.37, Smultea *et al.* 2015a), are considerably higher, however a formal trend analysis has not been performed for this stock.

In southern Puget Sound, harbor porpoise were common in the 1940s (Scheffer and Slipp 1948), but marine mammal surveys (Everitt et al. 1980), stranding records since the early 1970s (Osmek et al. 1995), and harbor porpoise surveys in 1991 (Calambokidis et al. 1992) and 1994 (Osmek et al. 1995) indicated that harbor porpoise abundance had declined in southern Puget Sound. In 1994, a total of 769 km of vessel survey effort and 492 km of aerial survey effort conducted during favorable sighting conditions produced no sightings of harbor porpoise in southern Puget Sound. Reasons for the apparent decline are unknown, but it may have been related to fishery interactions, pollutants, vessel traffic, or other factors (Osmek et al. 1995). Annual winter aerial surveys conducted by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife from 1995 to 2015 revealed an increasing trend in harbor porpoise in Washington inland waters, including the return of harbor porpoise to Puget Sound. The data suggest that harbor porpoise were already present in Juan de Fuca, Georgia Straits, and the San Juan Islands from the mid-1990s to mid-2000s, and then expanded into Puget Sound and Hood Canal from the mid-2000s to 2015, areas they had used historically but abandoned. Changes in fishery-related entanglement was suspected as the cause of their previous decline and more recent recovery, including a return to Puget Sound (Evenson *et al*. 2016). Seasonal surveys conducted in spring, summer, and fall 2013-2015 in Puget Sound and Hood Canal documented substantial numbers of harbor porpoise in Puget Sound. Observed porpoise numbers were twice as high in spring as in fall or summer, indicating a seasonal shift in distribution of harbor porpoise (Smultea 2015b). The reasons for the seasonal shift and for the increase in sightings is unknown.

CURRENT AND MAXIMUM NET PRODUCTIVITY RATES

A reliable estimate of the maximum net productivity rate is not available for harbor porpoise. Therefore, until additional data become available, it is recommended that the cetacean maximum theoretical net productivity rate (R_{MAX}) of 4% (Wade and Angliss 1997) be employed for the Washington Inland Waters harbor porpoise stock.

POTENTIAL BIOLOGICAL REMOVAL

The potential biological removal (PBR) for this stock is calculated as the minimum population size (8,308) times one-half the default maximum net growth rate for cetaceans (1/2 of 4%) times a recovery factor of 0.4 (for a stock of unknown status and high uncertainty in the mortality and injury estimate), resulting in a PBR of 66 harbor porpoise per year. Although no CV is available for the mortality and serious injury estimate, there is large uncertainty because the available data are limited to stranding information, which is known to have a substantial downward bias (Carretta *et al*. 2016a, Williams *et al*. 2014). For this reason, the recovery factor was set equal to the value for a stock of unknown status with mortality and serious injury CV > 0.80 (Wade and Angliss 1997).

HUMAN-CAUSED MORTALITY AND SERIOUS INJURY

Fisheries Information

Fishing effort in the northern Washington marine gillnet tribal fishery is conducted within the range of both harbor porpoise stocks (Northern Oregon/Washington Coast and Washington Inland Waters) occurring in Washington State waters (Gearin et al. 1994). Some movement of harbor porpoise between Washington's coastal and inland waters is likely, but it is currently not possible to quantify the extent of such movements. For the purposes of this stock assessment report, animals taken in waters east of Cape Flattery, WA, are assumed to have belonged to the Washington Inland Waters stock. Between 2010 and 2014, no harbor porpoise deaths or serious injuries were reported in this fishery (Makah Fisheries Management, unpublished data).

Table 1. Summary of incidental mortality and serious injury of harbor porpoise (Washington Inland Waters stock) in commercial and tribal fisheries that might take this species and calculation of the mean annual mortality rate; n/a indicates that data are not available. Mean annual takes are based on 2010-2014 data unless noted otherwise.

Fishery name	Years	Data type	Percent observer coverage	Observed mortality	Estimated mortality	Mean annual takes (CV in parentheses)
WA Puget Sound Region salmon set/drift gillnet (observer programs listed below covered segments of this fishery):						
Puget Sound non-treaty salmon gillnet (all areas and species)	1993	observer data	1.3%	0	0	see text[1]
Puget Sound non-treaty chum salmon gillnet (areas 10/11 and 12/12B)	1994	observer data	11%	0	0	see text[1]
Puget Sound treaty chum salmon gillnet (areas 12, 12B, and 12C)	1994	observer data	2.2%	0	0	see text[1]
Puget Sound treaty chum and sockeye salmon gillnet (areas 4B, 5, and 6C)	1994	observer data	7.5%	0	0	see text[1]
Puget Sound treaty and non-treaty sockeye salmon gillnet (areas 7 and 7A)	1994	observer data	7%	1	15	see text[1]
Unknown Puget Sound Region fishery	2010-2014	stranding data		2, 0, 7, 1, 2	n/a	≥ 2.4 (n/a)
Minimum total annual takes						≥2.4 (n/a)

[1]This fishery has not been observed since 1994 (see text); these data are not included in the calculation of recent minimum total annual takes.

Commercial salmon drift gillnet fisheries in Washington inland waters were last observed in 1993 and 1994, with observer coverage levels typically <10% (Pierce et al. 1994, 1996; NWIFC 1995; Erstad et al. 1996). Drift gillnet fishing effort in the inland waters has declined considerably since 1994 because far fewer vessels participate today (NMFS WC Region, unpublished data), but entanglements of harbor porpoise likely continue to occur. The most recent data on harbor porpoise mortality from commercial gillnet fisheries is included in Table 1.

Strandings of dead or seriously injured harbor porpoise entangled in fishing gear are another source of fishery-related mortality. There were 12 fishery-related strandings of harbor porpoise from this stock in 2010-2014 (2 in 2010, 7 in 2012, 1 in 2013, and 2 in 2014), resulting in an average annual mortality and serious injury rate of 2.4 harbor porpoise per year (Carretta *et al.* 2016b). Evidence of fishery interactions included observed entanglements, net marks, and line marks. Since these deaths could not be attributed to a particular fishery, and were the only confirmed fishery-related deaths in this area in 2010-2014, they are listed in Table 1 as occurring in an unknown Puget Sound Region fishery. There are no observed fisheries in Washington inland waters, and the estimate of human-caused mortality of harbor porpoise (2.4/yr) is based solely on stranding data, which are uncorrected for negative biases in cetacean carcass recovery (Williams *et al.* 2014). The only published carcass recovery rate for harbor porpoise (<0.01) is from an oceanic-coast habitat in the NE United States (Moore and Read 2008), but due to the confined nature of inland waterways, recovery rates in Washington State inland waters are likely higher than that estimated by Moore and Read (2008). Wells *et al*. (2015) reported a carcass recovery rate (0.33) for bottlenose dolphins that inhabit the densely populated Sarasota Bay area. If this recovery rate of 0.33 is applied to Washington Inland Waters harbor porpoise fishery-related strandings for the period 2010-2014, annual mortality would be estimated at 7.2 (12 documented fishery-related strandings, times a correction factor of 3, divided by 5 years), which is less than the PBR of 66. In the absence of a carcass recovery correction factor for Washington inland waters harbor porpoise, a minimum correction factor of 3 from the Wells *et al.* (2015) coastal bottlenose dolphin study is applied to fishery-related strandings here, resulting in an estimate of 7.2 porpoise annually. Additional data are required to estimate a carcass recovery rate for harbor porpoise in Washington inland waters.

Although commercial gillnet fisheries in Canadian waters are known to have taken harbor porpoise in the past (Barlow et al. 1994, Stacey et al. 1997), few data are available because the fisheries were not monitored. In 2001, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Canada, conducted a federal fisheries observer program and a survey of license holders to estimate the incidental mortality of harbor porpoise in selected salmon fisheries in southern British Columbia (Hall et al. 2002). Based on the observed bycatch of porpoise (2 harbor porpoise deaths) in the 2001 fishing season, the estimated mortality for southern British Columbia in 2001 was 20 porpoise per 810 boat days fished or a total of 80 harbor porpoise. However, it is not known how many harbor porpoise from the Washington Inland Waters stock are currently taken in the waters of southern British Columbia.

Other Mortality

A significant increase in harbor porpoise strandings reported throughout Oregon and Washington in 2006 prompted the Working Group on Marine Mammal Unusual Mortality Events to declare an Unusual Mortality Event (UME) on 3 November 2006 (Huggins 2008). A total of 114 harbor porpoise strandings were reported and confirmed along the Oregon and Washington outer coasts and Washington inland waters in 2006 and 2007 (Huggins 2008). A more recent analysis of strandings before and after the suspected UME indicates that no UME occurred (Huggins *et al*. 2015). The perceived increase in mortality was the result of multiple factors: an increase in the population of harbor porpoise, a shift of the population into Washington inland waters, and a well-established stranding network with improved response and reporting (Huggins *et al*. 2015).

STATUS OF STOCK

Harbor porpoise are not listed as "depleted" under the MMPA or listed as "threatened" or "endangered" under the Endangered Species Act. Based on currently available data, the minimum annual level of total human-caused mortality and serious injury (7.2) harbor porpoise per year (corrected for undetected strandings) does not exceed the PBR of 66 animals. Therefore, the Washington Inland Waters harbor porpoise stock is not classified as "strategic." The minimum annual fishery mortality and serious injury for this stock (7.2 harbor porpoise per year) exceeds 10% of PBR (6.6) and, therefore, cannot be considered to be insignificant and approaching zero mortality and serious injury rate. The status of this stock relative to its Optimum Sustainable Population (OSP) and population trends is unknown. Although harbor porpoise sightings in southern Puget Sound declined from the 1940s through the 1990s, harbor porpoise sightings have increased seasonally in this area in the last 10 years.

This stock is not recognized as "strategic," however, the current mortality rate is based on stranding data, since the Washington Puget Sound Region salmon set/drift gillnet fishery has not been observed since 1994.

Evaluation of the estimated take level is complicated by a lack of knowledge about the extent to which harbor porpoise from U.S. waters frequent the waters of British Columbia and are, therefore, subject to fishery-related mortality. It is appropriate to consider whether the current take level is different from the take level in 1994, when the fishery was last observed. No new information is available about mortality per set, but 1) fishing effort has decreased since 1994. Based on surveys conducted in between 1991/1992 and 2015 (Calambokidis *et al.* 1993, Smultea *et al.* 2015a, 2015b), the population appears to have increased, but a statistical trend analysis has not been performed with existing data. However, an increase in harbor porpoise use of southern Puget Sound in recent years is apparent (Evenson *et al*. 2016).

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