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

STOCK DEFINITION AND GEOGRAPHIC RANGE

In the eastern North Pacific Ocean, the harbor porpoise ranges from Point Barrow, along the Alaskan coast, and down the west coast of North America to Point Conception, California (Gaskin 1984). Harbor porpoise primarily frequent coastal waters. Harbor porpoises are known to occur year-round in the inland trans-boundary area 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, suggests 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 (Barlow 1988, Dohl et al. 1983), harbor porpoise have also been conspicuously absent in offshore areas in late November (B. Taylor, pers. comm.) leaving a gap in the current understanding of their movements.

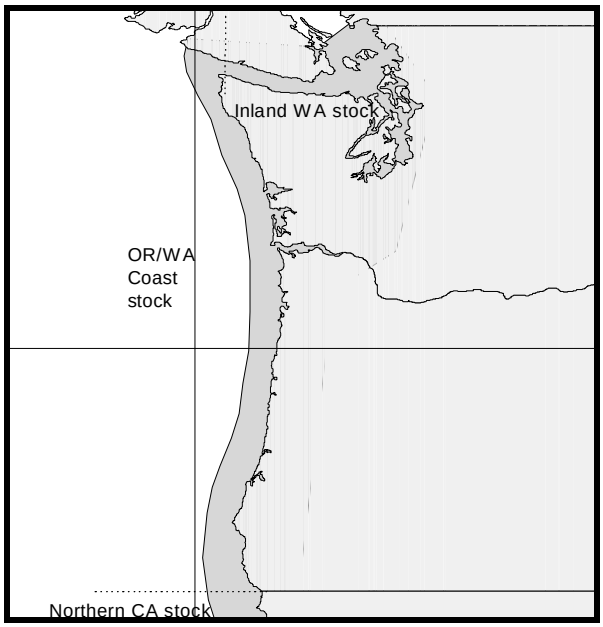

Figure 1. Approximate distribution of harbor porpoise in the U.S. Pacific Northwest (shaded area). Stock boundaries separating the stocks are shown.

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 porpoises along the west coast of North America. Investigation of pollutant loads in harbor porpoise ranging from California to the Canadian border also suggests restricted harbor porpoise movements (Calambokidis and Barlow 1991). Further genetic testing of the same data mentioned above along with additional samples found significant genetic differences for 4 of the 6 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 to evolve genetic differences. This is consistent with low movement suggested by genetic analysis of harbor porpoise specimen 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 1990-91 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 ($z=5.9$, $p<0.01$) between the waters of coastal Oregon/Washington and inland Washington/southern British Columbia, Canada (i.e., Strait of Juan de Fuca/San Juan Islands). Although differences in density exist between coastal Oregon/Washington and inland Washington, a specific stock boundary line cannot be identified based upon biological or genetic differences. However, because harbor porpoise movements and rates of intermixing within the northeast Pacific are restricted, there has been a significant decline in harbor porpoise sightings within southern Puget Sound since the 1940s, and following a risk averse management strategy, two stocks are recognized to occur in Oregon and Washington waters (the Oregon/Washington Coast stock and the Inland Washington stock), with the boundary at Cape Flattery. In the future, biological evidence for delineating stocks may come from the analysis of environmental pollutants in tissues, from seasonal movements of individual harbor porpoises, or new genetic analytical methods.

In their assessment of California harbor porpoise, Barlow and Hanan (1995) recommended two stocks be recognized in California, with the stock boundary at the Russian River. Based on the above information 4 separate

harbor porpoise stocks are recognized to occur along the west coast of the continental U. S. (see Fig. 1): 1) the Inland Washington stock, 2) the Oregon/Washington Coast stock, 3) the Northern California stock, and 4) the Central California stock. This report considers only the Inland Washington stock. Three harbor porpoise stocks are also recognized in the inland and coastal waters of Alaska, including the Southeast Alaska, Gulf of Alaska, and Bering Sea stocks and are considered separately in the Stock Assessment Reports for the Alaska Region. The harbor porpoise occurring in British Columbia have not been included in any stock assessment report from either the Alaska or Pacific (Oregon/Washington) Regions.

POPULATION SIZE

Aerial surveys of the inside waters of Washington and southern British Columbia were conducted during August of 1996 (Calambokidis et al. 1997). These aerial surveys included the Strait of Juan de Fuca, San Juan Islands, Gulf Islands, and Strait of Georgia, which includes waters inhabited by harbor porpoise from British Columbia, as well as the Inland Washington stock. A total of 2,725 km of survey effort was completed within U. S. waters, resulting in an uncorrected abundance of 1,025 harbor porpoise in the inside waters of Washington (Calambokidis et al. 1997, Laake et al. 1997a). When corrected for availability and perception bias (g(0)=0.292, SE=0.107), the estimated abundance for the Inland Washington stock of harbor porpoise is 3,509 (CV=0.396) animals (Laake et al. 1997a, 1997b).

Minimum Population Estimate

The minimum population estimate (N_{MIN}) for this stock is calculated using Equation 1 from the PBR Guidelines (Wade and Angliss 1997): $N_{MIN} = N/\exp(0.842*[\ln(1+[CV(N)]^2)]^{½})$. Using the population estimate (N) of 3,509 and its associated CV(N) of 0.396, N_{MIN} for the Inland Washington stock of harbor porpoise is 2,545.

Current Population Trend

There are no reliable data on long-term population trends of harbor porpoises for most waters of Oregon, Washington or British Columbia. For comparability to the 1996 survey, a re-analysis of the 1991 aerial survey data was conducted (Calambokidis et al. 1997). The abundance of harbor porpoise in the Inland Washington stock in 1996 was not significantly different than in 1991 (Laake et al. 1997a).

A different situation exists in southern Puget Sound where harbor porpoises are now rarely observed, a sharp contrast to 1942 when they were considered common in those waters (Scheffer and Slipp 1948). Although quantitative data for this area are lacking, marine mammal survey effort (Everitt et al. 1980), stranding records since the early 1970s (Osmek et al. 1995) and the results of harbor porpoise surveys of 1991 (Calambokidis et al. 1992) and 1994 (Osmek et al. 1995) indicate that harbor porpoise abundance has 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 be related to fishery interactions, pollutants, vessel traffic or other activities that may affect harbor porpoise occurrence and distribution in this area (Osmek et al. 1995). Research to identify trends in harbor porpoise abundance is also needed for the other areas within inland Washington.

CURRENT AND MAXIMUM NET PRODUCTIVITY RATES

A reliable estimate of the maximum net productivity rate is not currently available for harbor porpoises. Hence, 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 Inland Washington harbor porpoise stock.

POTENTIAL BIOLOGICAL REMOVAL

Under the 1994 re-authorized Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), the potential biological removal (PBR) is defined as the product of the minimum population estimate, one-half the maximum theoretical net productivity rate, and a recovery factor: $PBR = N_{MIN} \times 0.5R_{MAX} \times F_R$. The recovery factor ($F_R$) for this stock is 0.4, the value for a cetacean stock with an unknown population status and with a CV of mortality estimates greater than 0.8 (Wade and Angliss 1997). Thus, for the Inland Washington stock of harbor porpoise, PBR = 20 animals (2,545 x 0.02 x 0.4).

HUMAN-CAUSED MORTALITY AND SERIOUS INJURY

Fisheries Information

With the exception of 1994, NMFS observers monitored the northern Washington marine set gillnet fishery during 1990-1996 (Gearin et al. 1994; P. Gearin, unpubl. data). For the entire area fished, observer coverage ranged from approximately 47-87% during those years. Fishing effort is conducted within the range of both harbor porpoise stocks (Oregon/Washington Coast and Inland Washington stocks) occurring in Washington State waters. Some of the animals taken in the inland waters portion of the fishery may have been animals from the coastal stock. Similarly, some of the animals taken in the coastal portion of the fishery (see stock assessment report for the Oregon/Washington Coast stock for details) may have been from the inland stock. For the purposes of this stock assessment report, the animals taken in the inland portion of the fishery are assumed to have belonged to the Inland Washington stock and the animals taken in the coastal portion of the fishery are assumed to have belonged to the Oregon/Washington Coast stock. 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. Accordingly, Table 1 includes data only from that portion of the northern Washington marine set gillnet fishery occurring within the range of the Inland Washington stock (those waters east of Cape Flattery). Data from 1990-96 are included in Table 1, although the mean estimated annual mortality is calculated using the most recent 5 years of available data. As noted above, there was no observer program in 1994. Little effort occurred in the inland portion of the fishery in 1995, the observer coverage was lower than usual (24%), and no mortalities were observed. Effort increased in the inland portion of the fishery in 1996 without a concurrent increase in observer coverage (leading to only 6% observer coverage in 1996). No mortalities were either observed or reported in 1996. The mean estimated mortality for this fishery is 0.4 (CV=1.0) harbor porpoise per year from this stock.

In 1993 as a pilot for future observer programs, NMFS in conjunction with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDF&W) monitored all non-treaty components of the Washington Puget Sound Region salmon gillnet fishery (Pierce et al. 1994). Observer coverage was 1.3% overall, ranging from 0.9% to 7.3% for the various components of the fishery. No harbor porpoise mortalities were reported (Table 1). Pierce et al. (1994) cautioned against extrapolating these mortalities to the entire Puget Sound fishery due to the low observer coverage and potential biases inherent in the data. The area 7/7A sockeye landings represented the majority of the non-treaty salmon landings in 1993, approximately 67%. Results of this pilot study were used to design the 1994 observer programs discussed below.

In 1994, NMFS in conjunction with WDF&W conducted an observer program during the Puget Sound non-treaty chum salmon gillnet fishery (areas 10/11 and 12/12B). A total of 230 sets were observed during 54 boat trips, representing approximately 11% observer coverage of the 500 fishing boat trips comprising the total effort in this fishery as estimated from fish ticket landings (Erstad et al. 1996). No harbor porpoise were reported within 100 meters of observed gillnets. The Puget Sound treaty chum salmon gillnet fishery in Hood Canal (areas 12, 12B, and 12C) and Puget Sound treaty sockeye/chum gillnet fishery in the Strait of Juan de Fuca (areas 4B, 5, and 6C) were also monitored in 1994 (NWIFC 1995). No harbor porpoise mortalities were reported in the observer programs covering these treaty salmon gillnet fisheries, where observer coverage was estimated at 2.2% (based on % of total catch observed) and approximately 7.5% (based on % of observed trips to total landings), respectively.

Also in 1994, NMFS in conjunction with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDF&W) and the Tribes conducted an observer program to examine seabird and marine mammal interactions with the Puget Sound treaty and non-treaty sockeye salmon gillnet fishery (areas 7 and 7A). During this fishery observers monitored 2,205 sets, representing approximately 7% of the estimated 33,086 sets occurring in the fishery (Pierce et al. 1996). There was one observed harbor porpoise mortality (one other was entangled and released alive with no indication the animal was injured), resulting in a mortality rate of 0.00045 harbor porpoise per set, which extrapolates to 15 mortalities (CV=1.0) for the entire fishery.

Combining the estimates from the 1994 observer programs (15) with the northern Washington marine set gillnet fishery (0.4) results in an estimated mean mortality rate in observed fisheries of 15.4 harbor porpoise per year from this stock. It should be noted that the 1994 observer programs did not sample all segments of the entire Washington Puget Sound Region salmon set/drift gillnet fishery, and further, the extrapolation of total kill did not include effort for the unobserved segments of this fishery. Therefore, 15 is an underestimate of the harbor porpoise mortality due to the entire fishery. Though it is not possible to quantify what percentage of the Washington Puget Sound Region salmon set/drift gillnet fishery was actually observed in 1994, the observer programs covered those segments of the fishery which had the highest salmon catches, the majority of vessel participation, and the highest likelihood of interaction with harbor porpoise (J. Scordino, pers. comm.). Accordingly, the estimated harbor porpoise

mortality (15) appears to be only a slight underestimate for the fishery. See Appendix 1 of Barlow et al. (1997) for additional information, including a map depicting fishing areas, regarding the Washington Puget Sound Region salmon set/drift gillnet fishery.

An additional source of information on the number of harbor porpoises killed or injured incidental to commercial fishery operations is the self-reported fisheries information required of vessel operators by the MMPA. Self-reported fishery data from 1990-96 for the Washington Puget Sound Region salmon set and drift gillnet fishery are shown in Table 1. Unlike the 1994 observer program data, the self-reported fisheries data cover the entire fishery. However, because logbook records (fisher self-reports required during 1990-94) are most likely negatively biased (Credle et al. 1994), these are considered to be minimum estimates of harbor porpoise mortality. Self-reported fisheries data are not available for 1994 and 1995, and considered unreliable for 1996 (see Appendix 4 in Hill and DeMaster, in press). Though the 1994 observer program data may underestimate the total fishery mortality for this stock, it is considered more reliable than the self-reported data. Thus, the self-reported fisheries data were not used in the mortality rate calculation.

Table 1. Summary of incidental mortality of harbor porpoise (Inland Washington stock) due to commercial fisheries from 1990 through 1996 and calculation of the mean annual mortality rate. Data from 1992 to 1996 (or the most recent 5 years of available data) are used in the mortality calculation when more than 5 years of data are provided for a particular fishery. n/a indicates that data are not available.

Fishery name	Years	Data type	Range of observer coverage	Observed mortality (in given yrs.)	Estimated mortality (in given yrs.)	Mean annual mortality
Northern WA marine set gillnet	90-96	obs data	24-74%	0, 1, 0, 0, n/a, 0, 0	0, 2, 0, 0, n/a, 0, 0	0.4 (CV=1.0)
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)	93	obs data	1.3%	0	0	see text
Puget Sound non-treaty chum salmon gillnet (areas 10/11 and 12/12B)	94	obs data	11%	0	0	0
Puget Sound treaty chum salmon gillnet (areas12,12B, and 12C)	94	obs data	2.2%	0	0	0
Puget Sound treaty chum and sockeye salmon gillnet (areas 4B, 5, and 6C)	94	obs data	7.5%	0	0	0
Puget Sound treaty and non-treaty sockeye salmon gill net (areas 7 and 7A)	94	obs data	7%	1	15	15 (CV=1.0)
Observer program total						15.4 (CV=.97)
				Reported mortalities		
WA Puget Sound Region salmon set/drift gillnet	90-96	self reports	n/a	6, 4, 6, 2, n/a, n/a, n/a	n/a	see text
Minimum total annual mortality						≥15.4 (CV=.97)

Strandings of harbor porpoise wrapped in fishing gear or with injuries caused by interactions with gear are a final source of fishery-related mortality information. During the period from 1990 to 1996 the only reported fishery-related strandings of harbor porpoise occurred in 1992 (1 animal) and 1993 (1 animal). The mortalities likely occurred

in the Washington Puget Sound Region salmon set and drift gillnet fishery. As the 1994 observer program already accounts for 15 harbor porpoise mortalities per year from this fishery, these strandings are not included in Table 1.

There are few data concerning the mortality of marine mammals incidental to commercial gillnet fisheries in Canadian waters, which have not been monitored but are known to have taken harbor porpoise in the past (Barlow et al. 1994, Stacey et al. 1997). As a result, the number of harbor porpoise from this stock currently taken in the waters of southern British Columbia is not known.

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 level of human-caused mortality and serious injury (16) is not known to exceed the PBR (20). Therefore, the Inland Washington harbor porpoise stock is not classified as strategic. The minimum total fishery mortality and serious injury for this stock (rounded up to 16) exceeds 10% of the calculated PBR and, therefore, cannot be considered to be insignificant and approaching zero mortality and serious injury rate. The status of this stock relative to OSP and population trends are unknown, although harbor porpoise sightings in the southern Puget Sound have declined since the 1940s.

Although this stock is not recognized as strategic at this time there is cause for concern due to the following issues: 1) the estimated take level is close to exceeding the PBR (i.e., one additional observed mortality or serious injury in the area 7/7A sockeye drift gillnet fishery would increase the estimated annual take level above the PBR), 2) the extent to which harbor porpoise from U. S. waters frequent the waters of British Columbia, and are therefore subject to fishery-related mortality, is unknown, and 3) the mortality rate is based on observer data from a subset of the Washington Puget Sound Region salmon set and gillnet fishery.

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