

## Sleuthing leads to new findings about peculiar ocean fish

### New species of opah

By PHUONG LE  
Associated Press

SEATTLE — The fish buyer noticed something different about the large, colorful disc-shaped opah waiting to be sold at the auction house in Honolulu. Among the differences: one fish had a bigger eye than the other.

His curiosity set in motion DNA testing and more sleuthing that led to the identification of three new species of opah — a peculiar deep-diving fish recently found to be the first fully warm-blooded fish.

“The more we looked, the more differences we could pull out,” said Karen Underkoffler, lead author of a recently published paper in the peer-reviewed journal *Zootaxa* that describes the anatomical characteristics of the different spe-

cies of opah, including one marked by its big eyes and a purple tongue.

In all, the team of scientists with NOAA Fisheries identified five distinct species of opah, revealing that there isn't a single global species. Three are newly identified, one was already named and researchers better identified another that had been previously described.

“We have known for quite some time that opahs in different parts of the world look different,” said Misty Paig-Tran, assistant professor of marine biology and biomechanics at Cal State Fullerton, who was not involved in the paper.

People were calling them all the same thing, and the paper clearly shows their differences, she said, adding that it's great to finally have anatomical descriptions and DNA to back those descriptions.

The researchers say knowing the population of opah — which has a silvery gray body,

red fins and mouths, and white spots — is important to make sure they don't get overfished.

While opah isn't harvested by commercial fisheries, the fish is often caught incidentally in commercial fishing for high-value tuna or swordfish off the coasts of Hawaii and California.

Sport anglers also frequently catch the colorful fish, which on average weighs about 100 pounds and can be bigger than an automobile tire.

Opah is becoming popular at restaurants in Hawaii and elsewhere. The value of U.S. commercial landings of opah has increased from just a few thousand dollars before 2000 to nearly \$3.2 million in 2016. The Hawaii-based long-line fishing industry reported the catching of nearly 30,000 opahs by vessels targeting tuna and swordfish in 2015.

Most opah landed by those vessels arrive at the United Fishing Agency auction in



James Poulson/  
The Daily Sitka Sentinel

**John Petraborg holds up a 35-pound moonfish, also known as opah and normally found in the deep waters near Hawaii, on board his troller Roulette at ANB Harbor in Sitka, Alaska, in 2005.**

Honolulu, where Underkoffler was working several years ago when Garrett Kitazaki flagged the big-eyed opah for her and her colleague Megan Luers, another study co-author.

## Yellowstone boss says Trump administration is forcing him out

By MATTHEW BROWN  
Associated Press

BILLINGS, Mont. — Yellowstone National Park's superintendent said Thursday that he's being forced out as a “punitive action” following disagreements with the Trump administration over how many bison the park can sustain, a longstanding source of conflict between park officials and ranchers in neighboring Montana.

Superintendent Dan Wenk announced last week that he intended to retire March 30, 2019, after being offered a transfer he didn't want. He said he was informed this week by National Park Service Acting Director Paul “Dan” Smith that a new superintendent will be in place in

August and that Wenk will be gone by then.

“I feel this is a punitive action, but I don't know for sure,” Wenk told The Associated Press.

He wasn't given a reason and said the only dispute he's had with U.S. Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke, who oversees the park service, was over bison.

Ranchers in neighboring Montana have long sought reductions in Yellowstone's bison numbers because of worries that they could spread the disease brucellosis to cattle and compete with livestock for grazing space outside the park. Brucellosis causes animals to prematurely abort their young and can be transmitted through birthing material. It also can infect people.

## Sobering report teases out factors leading to suicides

### Rates up in nearly every state

By CARLA K. JOHNSON  
Associated Press

SEATTLE — Suicide rates inched up in nearly every U.S. state from 1999 through 2016, according to a new government report released Thursday.

More than half of suicides in 2015 in a subgroup of 27 states were among people with no known mental health condition, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found. Suicide is rarely caused by any single factor, health officials said, but information from coroners' reports suggest many of the deaths followed relationship problems, substance use and financial crises.

Prevention efforts, often focused on mental health,

could be broadened to focus on people undergoing life stresses like job losses or divorces, the CDC's Dr. Anne Schuchat said in a media briefing.

“Suicide is more than a mental health issue,” Schuchat said. “We don't think we can just leave this to the mental health system to manage.”

Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death and one of just three leading causes that are on the rise. The others are Alzheimer's disease and drug overdoses.

There were nearly 45,000 suicides in 2016. Middle-aged adults — ages 45 to 64 — had the largest rate increase, rising to 19.2 per 100,000 in 2016 from 13.2 per 100,000 in 1999.

The report said people without known mental health problems were more likely to die by firearms than those with known

mental health problems.

Family members or friends concerned about someone who is struggling can ask directly about suicide and remove firearms or any other means the person is considering from the home, said Jennifer Stuber, director of Forefront Suicide Prevention at the University of Washington in Seattle.

Prevention efforts are best done when “people can get help solving the underlying drivers of the problems causing them to feel hopeless and despair,” Stuber said.

The CDC report comes at a time of heightened attention to the issue with the suicide this week of designer Kate Spade. The designer's husband, Andy Spade, has said she suffered from depression and anxiety for many years.

Overall, the rate rose to 15.4 per 100,000 in 2014-2016

from 12.3 per 100,000 in 1999-2001. Rates ranged from 6.9 per 100,000 in the District of Columbia to 29.2 per 100,000 in Montana.

Twenty-five states saw percentage rate increases of more than 30 percent over the 17 years.

The overall data came from coded death certificate records. The information on contributing factors reflect what family and friends told coroners and police in a subgroup of states participating in the CDC's National Violent Death Reporting System. In the one-year analysis of 27 states, opioids were found in 31 percent of the 3,003 suicides involving drug overdoses.

The CDC said the 27 states represent nearly half the U.S. population but cannot be considered nationally representative.

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