

Scientists, fisheries and fishermen unite to prevent whale entanglements

Whale entanglements off the West Coast and potential solutions to the escalating problem are the focus of a new report that includes the presentations and observations of fishermen, biologists, and fisheries managers. The three stakeholder groups gathered at a workshop on the topic sponsored by Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission.

In recent years, growing populations of humpback and gray whales, changing ocean conditions, prey movement and late crab season openings have led to more whales becoming entangled in fishing gear, such as the ropes and floats marking crab pots.

In 2017, there were 31 confirmed entanglements off the West Coast. While en-

tanglements are still rare, they sometimes lead to whale deaths, so both fishermen and fisheries managers want a solution.

To understand how and where rope and other gear entangles whales and to find ways to address the problem, the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission and NOAA Fisheries' West Coast Region convened a two-day workshop in California.

The "forensic workshop" also was supported by the Marine Mammal Commission, Oregon Sea Grant and the Aquarium of the Pacific.

The report provides the notes and presentations from the 31 California, Oregon, and Washington experts who attended. Participating were Dungeness crab fishermen; gear specialists; marine mammal biologists and disentanglement spe-



A whale entangled in cords from fishing gear will get some help, but not all whales are so lucky.

Courtesy NOAA Fisheries

cialists; conservation groups; and federal, tribal, and state agency representatives.

Participants reviewed the best practices documents each state has developed, discussed possible improvements in gear marking, and discussed potential gear modifications or research that might help reduce the number of entanglements.

"Though the workshop did not seek consensus from the participants, there were

a number of things that seemed to have broad participant support," the NOAA Fisheries' Dan Lawson said.

For example, there was strong support for establishing a repository where gear removed from entangled whales could be stored and evaluated.

"Fishermen really wanted to continue to engage with the whale experts on this forensic review work," he said. "They saw real value in this."

Hawkins: Beloved counter employee to retire

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"Working with Linda, side-by-side for the last seven months has been a joy," said acting Postmaster Cindy Ollis, one of the six postmasters Hawkins has worked with. "She is a hard worker and a terrific team member. She has always given superior customer service."

Hawkins has a soft spot for Al Arp, who worked beside her for 18 years and retired a couple years ago. All the other longtime employees are gone.

"I had some good times with him. He was funny," she said. "We were a really good team."

Some of Hawkins' best memories are of customers, including Mauri Seelig, who died in 2003.

"He made an impression on everybody he met – never had a mean or bad day," said Seelig's wife, Joanne. "He

always, when you talked to him, you knew you were the most important person on earth."

Joanne Seelig had a carrier route for a while and likes Hawkins because she's always helpful and courteous.

"The same with Al and he quit and now we're getting all new people. ... But I won't miss her because we're going to lunch."

But there have been trying times, too.

A woman had to be hauled out by police for screaming and making threats to the postmaster.

Another customer blamed her for prices going up, "Guess you guys need your raise," Hawkins said, quoting him.

Christmas season can test one's nerves.

"It would have been a lot easier this year if we'd had a

bigger building," she said.

Once those Amazon packages pour in, the back room feels squished and walking through becomes a maze because of all the carts.

Summers are difficult: "There's no air conditioning and this building absorbs heat," she said.

Does a postal employee know everyone's dirty little secrets?

"I don't know a lot of secrets," Hawkins said. "I just know everyday lives. Medical things. When someone has lost a loved one. I tell them I care."

"I'm going to miss my customers – the smiles and saying, 'how's your day' and trying to meet their needs. I like seeing people happy."

No one deserves a long and happy retirement more than Hawkins, Ollis said. "We will certainly miss her."

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