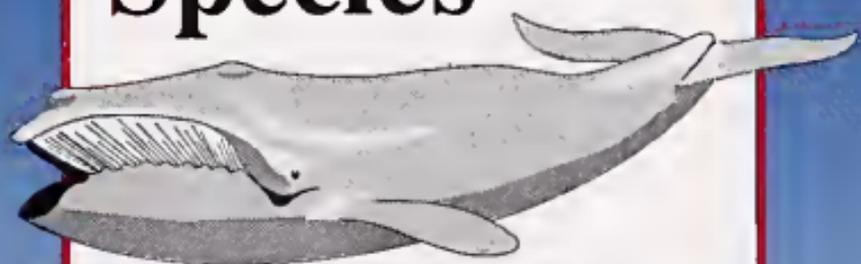




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Protecting the Nation's Marine Species



**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF
COMMERCE**

**National Oceanic and Atmospheric
Administration**

National Marine Fisheries Service

Office of Protected Resources

National Marine Fisheries Service

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) protects, conserves and restores populations of marine mammals and other endangered marine species. NMFS is a component of the Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

The agency's authority to carry out its important mission of protection and conservation comes from two pivotal environmental laws passed in the early 1970s: the Endangered Species Act and the Marine Mammal Protection Act. A brief explanation of these two laws appears at the end of this brochure.

Specialists in marine resources and ecology, fishery biology, and veterinary medicine protect endangered species and marine mammals; manage a marine mammal stranding network and a scientific tissue sample bank; monitor scientific research and enhancement of endangered species and marine mammals; monitor public display of marine mammals; and restore marine habitat.

These programs are administered by the Office of Protected Resources in Silver Spring, Maryland and by regional management offices and science centers located in coastal areas of the United States from New England to the Atlantic coastal states, the Gulf of Mexico, California, the Pacific Northwest, Alaska and Hawaii.

Endangered Species Protection:

Under the Endangered Species Act, if NMFS has information that a marine species may need protection, it must first determine whether the species qualifies for listing, and, if so, whether it should be listed as endangered or threatened. NMFS also determines the extent of critical habitat necessary to sustain the survival of each species and to provide for its recovery.

After a species is listed, NMFS coordinates the development and implementation of a plan to recover the species to sustainable population levels. A major portion of this recovery effort includes reviewing Federal activities to ensure that they do not have a significant impact on endangered or threatened species and their critical habitat.

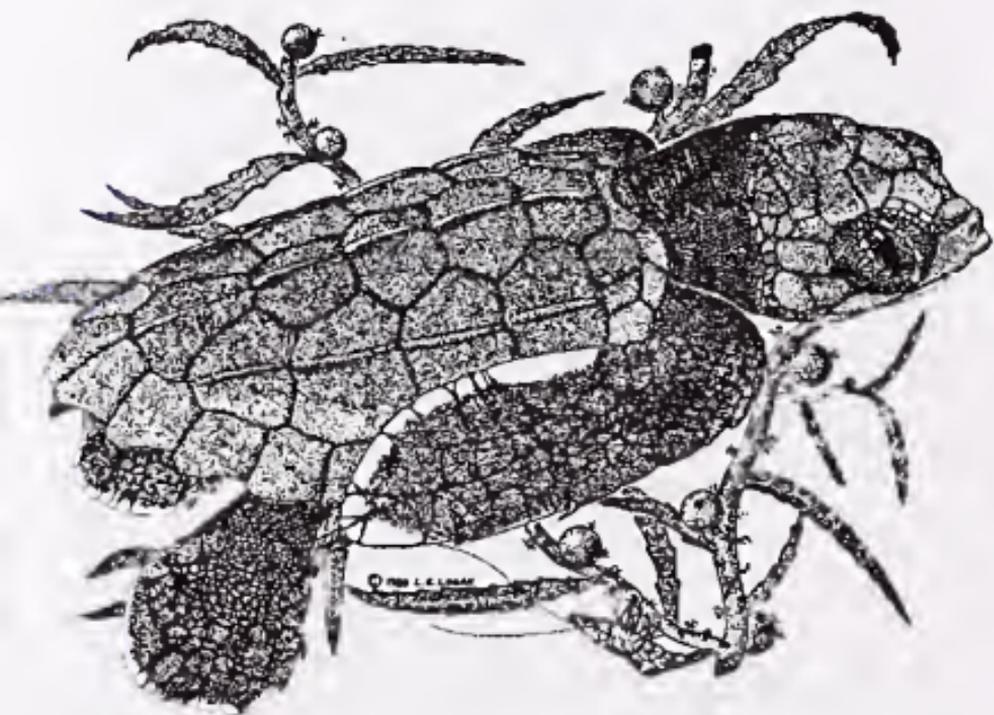
Sea Turtles - NMFS and the Department of the Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service share responsibility for endangered and threatened sea turtles. NMFS protects sea turtles through conservation regulations that reduce threats to sea turtles in the ocean (i.e. during activities such as dredging and commercial fishing).

Fish - NMFS is responsible for the recovery of salmon and sturgeon species that are listed under the ESA. Hydroelectric power operations, commercial fishing, fish hatchery operations, water diversions and other habitat management programs have been modified as a result of actions taken by NMFS to conserve and recover these species.

Marine Mammal Protection:

Under the Marine Mammal Protection Act, NMFS protects and conserves all whales, dolphins, porpoises, seals and sea lions. NMFS scientists monitor these species to make sure their populations stay at optimum levels. If a population falls below this optimum level, it is designated as "depleted," and a conservation plan is developed to guide research and management actions to restore the population to healthy levels. If a marine mammal population is endangered or threatened, it also receives protection under the Endangered Species Act. Currently, 11 species of marine mammals that occur in U.S. waters, including most of the large whales, are listed as threatened or endangered under the ESA.

NMFS also manages the interaction between marine mammals and commercial fishing, the taking of marine mammals incidental to other activities and the taking of marine mammals for subsistence needs by Alaskan natives.



Research/Public Display Permit Program:

NMFS issues permits for scientific research and enhancement of endangered marine species and for public display of marine mammals in marine parks and aquariums. Before issuing a permit, NMFS requests public comment through publication of a notice in the Federal Register. Also, NMFS maintains an inventory of marine mammals held for public display and scientific research/enhancement.

Habitat Restoration:

NMFS's Restoration Center is the focal point for marine and estuarine habitat restoration in NOAA. Its main objectives are to restore degraded coastal and estuarine habitats, advance the science of coastal habitat restoration, develop technology for successful restoration, and transfer this technology to the private sector and other government agencies.



Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program:

The Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program generates information on factors that may affect the health of marine mammal populations. The program incorporates the Marine Mammal Stranding Networks, the National Marine Mammal Tissue Bank, and responses to unusual mortality events.

Volunteer Stranding Networks in each coastal state respond to both live and dead strandings. Sick and injured animals are rescued and rehabilitated. Dead animals provide basic biological information to assist in managing populations and identifying potential problems such as disease and human interactions.

The National Marine Mammal Tissue Bank preserves tissue in liquid nitrogen for future contaminant analysis. As a first step, contaminant levels are monitored to determine whether they are having an impact on marine mammals.

For additional information about protected species programs conducted by NMFS, write to:

Office of Protected Resources (F/PR)
National Marine Fisheries Service
1335 East-West Highway, 6th Floor
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910-3226

Laws Protecting Marine Species:

Endangered Species Act of 1973: The ESA protects plants and animals whose survival is in jeopardy by prohibiting the taking (harassment, injury or death) of endangered or threatened species or commerce of such species. The act requires the designation of critical habitat and the development and implementation of recovery plans. Also, Federal agencies must ensure that their actions are not likely to jeopardize listed species or adversely modify their critical habitat.



Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972: The MMPA prohibits the taking and importing of any marine mammal, or marine mammal product, unless an exception has been made. It establishes policy, sets guidelines for marine mammal protection, and provides for the long-term conservation and management of marine mammals.



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