

Trip Report
Drakes Estero
4/13/07
3:45-5:00 PM

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I conducted a field survey of Drakes Estero on Friday during the afternoon low tide to count harbor seals and to determine the distribution and number of oyster bags on the seal haul out sites.

I arrived at 3:40 PM and met a volunteer who surveys harbor seals who had been present since 1:45 PM. She stated that she had observed 2 people in a boat tending oyster bags at the OB sand bar (see map) at around 2:30 PM. There were no seals present on the OB sand bar and the number at UEN was 133 with 21 pups, and the total count for the estero was 525, including 46 pups when she counted the seals at 2:20-30 PM.

When I conducted the survey at 4 PM, there were 10 seals present and 2 pups at the OB sandbar and 117 seals and 54 pups on UEN sand bar, a 157% increase in seals on the UEN sandbar. These two sites have historically had the higher numbers of females with pups likely because the pups are more protected from strong currents and the water is warmer in the middle of the estero. The total count for the estero was 618 including 88 pups, a 120% increase in pups after the boat left, even though it was late in the day. Seal numbers are highest mid day to mid-afternoon, depending on the tide level. The tide was low enough for the seals to haul out at 1:00 PM. For comparison of numbers on OB, in 2005 on April 12, there were 105 seals and 62 pups, and in 2004 on April 11, there were 169 seals and 36 pups.

I observed several rows of bags on both the OB and UEN sandbars where the seals haul out. Because of distance, I could not get an accurate count of bags, but the number of rows was around 20. The bags were adjacent to and directly on the haul out sites where the seals historically have hauled out in the past at OB and UEN (see map).

Drake's Estero Aquaculture and Seal Habitat

