

**Trip Report**  
**Drakes Estero**  
**4/26/07**  
**3:45-5:00 PM**

**Sarah Allen, Science Advisor**

I conducted a field survey of Drakes Estero on Thursday during the afternoon low tide to count harbor seals for the peak pupping season count.

I arrived at 3:45 PM and began counting the seals at A and A1 sandbars. At 3:50 PM I noted a white boat (@20 ft long) with outboard motor and two people aboard in the east end of the OB seal haul out site. The boat was fowled in eelgrass and the operators were poling through the eelgrass bed. Once half way along the channel going west, they used the engine again. I did not see the number of seals present before the boat was there; however there were only 5 (2 pups) when I began surveying and I saw seal heads in the water. There were seal drag marks on the sand bar indicating other seals may have been present and several fresh wet seals were hauling out on UEN, an adjacent sand bar. Also on previous day 4/25, a volunteer counted 21 (8 pups) on the OB haul out. When the boat went by the seals at 3:55 PM, all flushed into the water except one lone seal. Seals on UEN raised their heads but I did not see any enter the water. The boat continued west along the channel and flushed around 120 Black Brant that were in the eelgrass beds in the channel.

The boat then landed at around 4:10 PM about 2/3 of the way along the channel going west on the OB channel on the north west side where many oyster bags are located. Two men got off the boat, one taller in a green slicker and another in yellow slicker pants. They remained on the site until around 4:38 PM. During this time, they checked bags and added around 30 more bags onto the sandbar on the north west side of the sand bar and closer to the seals. During the interim time, 6 (2) seals hauled out at OB. When the boat proceeded back down the channel going east towards the seals at 4:55 PM, 5 seals flushed into the water included 2 mother-pup pairs at OB, another 3 mother pup pairs flushed at UEN sand bar, and around 75 seals alerted at UEN but did not enter the water. Additionally, around 200 black brant were flushed that were in the eelgrass beds in the channel after previously being flushed by the boat. At 4:58 PM, the boat then proceeded up into Home Bay. I terminated the survey at 5:00 PM.

A total of around 90 seals including around 50 pups were disturbed by the boat, and of these, I observed 14 seals including 7 pups directly flushed into the water. From previous research, we know that females with pups are more disturbed than adult males or immature seals. Additionally, around 320 black brant were flushed while in eelgrass beds.

During surveys of the estero, I again observed several rows of bags on both the OB and UEN sandbars where the seals haul out. Because this is the peak pupping season, mothers with pups are hauling out all over UEN, including near where the oyster bags are

located. There also appeared to be more bags on UEN, in addition to the bags added to OB today. Again, the bags were adjacent to and directly on the haul out sites where the seals historically hauled out in the past three decades of surveys that I have conducted.

Map of Drakes Estero – red circle indicates where seals and Black Brant were disturbed.

