



MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION

2026 Annual Meeting

A virtual meeting of the Marine Mammal
Commission and its Scientific Advisors



MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION

2026 Annual Meeting

Welcome and Introduction

Peter Thomas

Executive Director

A photograph of the ocean with several shark fins visible above the surface, creating a sense of movement and danger. The water is a deep blue-green color with white foam from the waves.

Notice to Participants

- The meeting will be open to the public in accordance with the provisions of the Government in the Sunshine Act (5 U.S.C. 552b), the Federal Advisory Committee Act and applicable regulations.
- Public participation will be allowed as time permits and as determined to be desirable by the Chair.
- This meeting is being recorded and will be posted to the website.



Recent Commission Meetings and Events

- 2025 Annual Meeting – San Diego, CA
 - Emerging technologies to improve efficiency and support innovation for marine mammal stock assessments
- Range-Wide Gray Whale Science Symposium – Newport, OR
 - Hosted by the Marine Mammal Institute at Oregon State University



A photograph of several shark fins cutting through the surface of the ocean, creating white spray and ripples in the blue water.

Fiscal Year 2026 Grant Program

Advancing Technologies and Methods to Improve Marine Mammal Stock Assessments and Mitigate Impacts

Eight projects selected for funding!



MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION

A photograph of the ocean surface with several shark fins visible above the water, creating splashes. The text 'Introducing New Faces' is overlaid in white on a semi-transparent blue rectangular background.

Introducing New Faces

- Pam Stanziani – Administrative Officer
- Amadi Afua Sefah-Twerefour – 2026 Knauss Fellow



A photograph of the ocean with several shark fins visible above the surface, creating white spray and splashes. The water is a deep blue-green color.

Meeting Goals

- Exchange information
- Inform future recommendations
- Facilitate discussion and collaboration



A photograph of several shark fins cutting through the surface of the ocean, creating white spray and ripples in the blue-green water.

Meeting Topics

- September 22nd
 - Debrief from the Range-Wide Gray Whale Science Symposium
 - Highlights from 2025 Grantees
- September 23rd
 - Future Actions in Furtherance of Commission Duties



Virtual Housekeeping

Break on Each Day

Commissioners, Scientific Advisors, Staff, and Panelists

- Video On, Mic Muted
- Raise Your "Hand"

Attendees

- Discussion question submission via Q/A

Technical Difficulties?

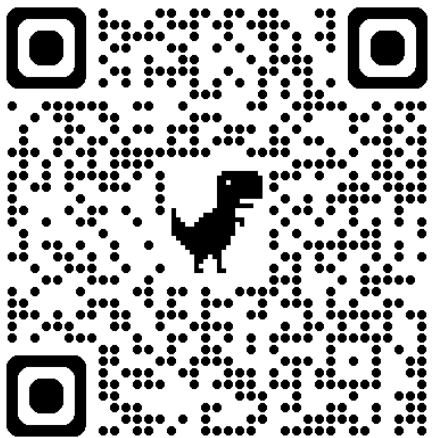
- Email bodonnell@mmc.gov



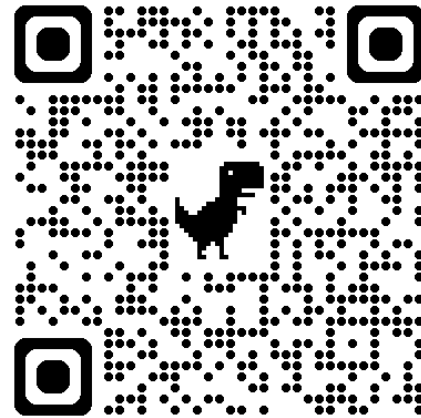
A photograph of the ocean with several shark fins visible above the surface, creating a sense of movement and danger.

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Debrief from the Range-Wide Gray Whale Science Symposium



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Range-Wide Gray Whale Science Symposium

Key Takeaways and Next Steps



Marine Mammal Commission

Symposium Purpose

Growing concern about the population status of gray whales

- Two North Pacific populations: ENP & WNP
- Recent population decline & low calf production
- Changing feeding ecosystems



Symposium Purpose

Population Dynamics | Ecosystem Change & Foraging Ecology | Health



Synthesize

Current understanding of gray whale population dynamics, ecology, and health



Identify

Key data gaps and priorities for future research and monitoring



Connect

Partners working across the gray whale range



Look Ahead

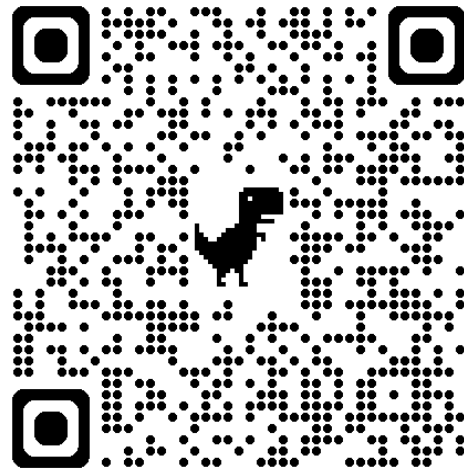
Develop recommendations for future research, monitoring, and coordination



Symposium at a Glance

Day 1: Oral Presentations

- 1) Population Overview
- 2) Changing Ecology
- 3) Ecosystem Changes
- 4) Lethal and Sublethal Threats



RANGE-WIDE GRAY WHALE SCIENCE SYMPOSIUM



Day 1: Oral presentations and poster session*

Day 2: Panel discussions

*Poster session sponsored by:
Marine Mammal Institute · Animal Welfare
Institute · Natural Resources Defense Council



Oregon State University
Marine Mammal
Institute

September 9-10,
2026

Hatfield Marine
Science Center
Newport, Oregon

Symposium
Program:



mmc.gov/gray-whale-symposium



Marine Mammal Commission

Symposium at a Glance

Day 2: Panel Discussions

- 1) Gray Whale Population Dynamics
- 2) Ecosystem Change and Gray Whale Foraging Ecology
- 3) Gray Whale Health
- 4) Cross-cutting Themes and Emerging Priorities

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Gray Whale Population Dynamics

- Understanding variation in migration and foraging strategies
- Improving range-wide abundance and demographic information
- Adapting population models to account for changing environmental conditions and carrying capacity (K)



Gray Whale Ecosystem Change and Foraging Ecology

- Improve understanding of prey availability and quality
- Linking whale movements to prey and environmental conditions
- Continue building regional understanding of ecosystem change
- Integrating disciplines strengthens our understanding of gray whale and ecosystem connections



Gray Whale Health

- Develop long-term, integrated health profiles and establish clear baselines for what is considered healthy
- Improve understanding of nutritional condition and causes of poor health
- Expand disease, contaminant, and biotoxin surveillance
- Increase use of non-invasive and emerging health-monitoring technologies



Cross-cutting Themes and Emerging Priorities

- Develop a range-wide gray whale photo-ID and data-integration program
- Improve understanding and monitoring of gray whales in the Arctic
- Link disparate datasets to understand individual variability and population-level processes
- Build collaboration, trust, and effective science communication



Break



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Updates from Fiscal Year 2025 Grantees



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Updates from FY2025 Grantees

Tuesday, 22 September 2026



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MMPA Title II

- “conduct a continuing review of the condition of the stocks of marine mammals... [and] of research programs conducted or proposed to be conducted under the authority of [the] Act”.
- “undertake or cause to be undertaken such other studies as it deems necessary or desirable in connection with its assigned duties as to the protection and conservation of marine mammals”.



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FY2025 Grants:

***Development of new tools or methods to
improve marine mammal stock assessments***



MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION

FY2025 Grants - Development of new tools or methods to improve marine mammal stock assessments

New Methods/ Approaches

**Novel spatial mark-recapture models for assessing open and moving whale populations,
New England Aquarium (PI: John Durban)**

**Improving US marine mammal stock assessments with close-kin mark-recapture, University
of St Andrews (PI: Eiren Kate Jacobson)**



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FY2025 Grants - Development of new tools or methods to improve marine mammal stock assessments

*Use of UAS to collect data needed for elements of stock assessment reports
(e.g., injury assessment, abundance)*

Testing the utilization of unoccupied aircraft systems to assess serious injury in marine mammals, Hubbs-SeaWorld Research Institute (PI: Wendy Noke Durden)

Improving gray seal serious injury qualification and quantification for NOAA stock assessment reports through coordinated entanglement surveys in the Northeastern US and development of remote entanglement assessment techniques, International Fund for Animal Welfare (PI: Sarah Sharp)

Computer vision tool for estimation of pinniped abundance, demographics, and body condition using UAV-collected imagery, North Pacific Wildlife Consulting LLC (PI: Irina S. Trukhanova)



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FY2025 Grants - Development of new tools or methods to improve marine mammal stock assessments

Use of satellites to detect marine mammals

**Advancing satellite-based whale detection for remote population monitoring in the Pacific,
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (PI: Lars Bejder)**

**Can we detect delphinids via satellite images? A proof-of-concept case study with well-studied
bottlenose dolphin stocks in the southeastern United States, National Marine Mammal
Foundation (PI: Gina Himes Boor)**

Thank You



The Marine Mammal Center



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 - Debrief from the Range-Wide Gray Whale Science Symposium
 - Highlights from 2025 Grantees
- September 23rd
 - Follow-Up from Day 1 (~30min)
 - Future Actions in Furtherance of Commission Duties (~1hr 15min)
 - Ideas for 2027 Annual Meeting (~15min)



Follow-Up from Day 1



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Future Actions in Furtherance of Commission Duties



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Break until 3:10 ET



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Thank you!



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