



NOAA FISHERIES

Protected Resources Division

West Coast Marine Mammal Stranding Network

Question and Answer: How is the Network changing?

What is the West Coast Marine Mammal Stranding Network?

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Marine Mammal Stranding Network was established in the early 1980's under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA). NOAA has jurisdiction over whales, dolphins, porpoises, seals, and sea lions. Members of the network respond to marine mammal stranding events along the California, Washington and Oregon coasts and are part of a nationwide team.

Why is the stranding network important?

Every year there are thousands of reports of stranded marine mammals throughout the West Coast Region. Each case can hold important information about the species and its environment which can contribute to scientific research or public education. Public education can reduce negative interactions between marine mammals and human activities and raise awareness of marine life in our communities. Data are collected systematically for inclusion in a national database, contributing to our baseline understanding of marine mammal communities and monitor the health of their populations. The data is also integral to NOAA Fisheries mandates under the MMPA and the Endangered Species Act (ESA), such as marine mammal populations, and contributing to recovery of endangered and threatened species.

How are stranding network responders funded? Has funding declined?

Public contributions help fund some of our network partners and some receive program funds from parent agencies or organizations. As network participants they are eligible to compete for federal funds through the Prescott grant program to support special studies or supplement basic operations. Many network partners have received grants in recent years, which require that they contribute non-federal matching funds from outside sources. In 2013 the Prescott grant program was cut by 75% and many of our responders no longer have sufficient funds to continue field response for every case. Many of the groups are still able to take calls from the public to collect basic data over the phone, but the ability to respond in the field, collect carcasses and conduct detailed examinations (necropsies) has dramatically decreased. The decision to respond to a stranding in the field is made on a case by case basis and depends on the situation and available resources.

There is a dead marine mammal on the beach, will the network respond?

Please report all dead marine mammals to the West Coast Marine Mammal Stranding Network hotline at **1-866-767-6114**. The operator will collect your contact information and the group that covers your area will get in touch with you if they need more information. Please take photos if possible; they are very helpful in determining species, condition, and to attach to our data forms. In some cases, a dead animal may be removed from the beach so we can conduct a necropsy. More than likely the animal will not be removed from your beach due to limited resources. Carcass disposal is not the responsibility of the stranding network. If the carcass is on private property the homeowner has several options for disposal, such as allowing natural decomposition at the site, burial above the high tide line, pushing or towing to below the high tide line for the tide to carry out, or by contacting your refuse disposal provider for other disposal options.

There is a live marine mammal on my beach, will the network respond?

Please report injured or sick animals to the West Coast Marine Mammal Stranding Network hotline at **1-866-767-6114**. The operator will collect your contact information and the group that covers your area will get in touch with you if they need more information. Please keep in mind seals and sea lions use shoreline habitat on a daily basis to rest and regulate their body temperature. Seals and sea lions are often monitored to see if the animal is injured or in need of medical assistance before a field response will be considered. Our overall goal is to provide an appropriate response to ensure that animals have the best chance to survive on their own in the wild. Please give the animal space and do not attempt to push the animal back in the water, touch, or feed it. All marine mammals are protected by law and any unauthorized activity will be reported to NOAA's Office of Law Enforcement. In some cases, at risk species or animals with known human caused injuries are considered as candidates to be taken for medical treatment. The decision to place an animal in a rehabilitation facility is complex and is made by Federal, state, local authorities, or network members authorized by NOAA Fisheries to conduct live animal first response and triage. In some areas rehabilitation facilities are limited and very few spaces are available.

I'm upset by the lack of response by the stranding network. Who should I talk to or what can I do?

Due to limited outside funding opportunities and federal grant program cuts the Stranding Network is reprioritizing stranding response nationwide. Many of our responders and network partners are no longer getting financial assistance to respond to marine mammal strandings and have to select which cases they can afford to investigate. We understand that the public may be disappointed or frustrated when the network is not able to respond to every reported case. We continue to seek new ways to support the stranding network so this vital and important work can take place. You can make a difference; contact your local stranding network to see how you can help.