

Conservation group urges more whale protection

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Two West Coast conservation groups are pressing the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife to take stronger action to protect whales that migrate along the Oregon Coast.

Oceana has released the following statement:

On Friday, August 4, the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission will consider taking action to reduce the risk of whale and sea turtle entanglements in the Oregon Dungeness crab fishery. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) has proposed a set of risk reduction measures for the state's commercial crab fishery; however, the proposed measures are insufficient to meaningfully reduce entanglements.

According to federal records, between 2012 and 2022 there were 333 confirmed whale entanglements in West Coast fisheries, including in Oregon Dungeness crab gear. Once entangled, whales experience significant physical trauma, starvation, severe tissue damage, infection, and death. According to the National Marine Fisheries Service, about 75 percent of all reported whale entanglements are fatal. NMFS also states that

most entanglements are never documented – and that reported entanglements are estimated to be only 10% of the actual number of whales entangled.

After a two-year evaluation period (2021-2022) ODFW is now proposing to make temporary risk reduction measures for the Oregon commercial Dungeness crab fishery permanent. This is despite humpback whale entanglements not declining during that period, indicating that the measures have not been effective. Two humpback whale populations migrate to and feed off the Oregon coast. The population that breeds off Mexico is listed as threatened and the Central American population is endangered with extinction under the federal Endangered Species Act.

Oceana, along with a coalition of partners, is urging the Commission to adopt stronger protection measures to ensure endangered whales and sea turtles can safely feed and migrate off Oregon's coast.

The attached fact sheet describes the risk reduction measures as proposed by ODFW and an explanation of why each measure does not go far enough to meaningfully reduce entanglement threats to whales and sea turtles. We are happy to speak further if you want more information for a story as well.

Cape Perpetua Collaborative and Whale and Dolphin Conservation (WDC) is also concerned about Oregon's endangered whales, and the regulations meant to protect them.

"We're concerned that the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's efforts to mitigate whale entanglement in the crab fishery just aren't cutting it," Cape Perpetua Collaborative Assistant Coordinator Ava Owens.

Despite regulations implemented in 2020, the number of entanglements has not decreased, according to the Collaborative.

"Even worse, since 2020, six whales, including four endangered humpbacks, have been caught up in Dungeness crab gear," Owens said. "We're urging for more action. Stronger regulations, based on solid scientific data, are the need of the hour. The state must consider preventative measures sooner in the spring, reducing pot numbers even further, and keeping fishing activities closer to shore during warmer months."

The following is a release from the Cape Perpetua Collaborative:

Oregon proposal for whale entanglement mitigation falls short.

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) has proposed to extend regulations to extend regulations intended to reduce the entanglement risk to endangered whales and sea turtles in the Oregon Dungeness crab fishery. In 2020, ODFW adopted temporary regulatory changes to address marine life entanglement, reducing pot numbers and restricting fishing beyond a 40-fathom depth after May 1st. These management measures were weakened from ODFW's original proposal, and in the three fishing seasons they have been in place, have not reduced entanglement risk. In fact, six whales, including four endangered humpback whales, have been entangled in Oregon Dungeness crab gear since 2020.

Conservation groups are asking the state of Oregon to take meaningful action and implement stronger regulations, including immediate impactful changes. Oregon must use the best available science on whale

and sea turtle presence in the waters off Oregon to improve these regulations and give these endangered species a chance at recovery.

To effectively reduce the risk of marine life entanglement in Dungeness crab fishing gear, the state must implement stronger measures, including starting measures earlier in the spring when whales begin to return to the Oregon coast, further reducing pot numbers, and shifting fishing closer to shore in the spring and summer. While ODFW conducts the necessary analyses to develop more meaningful protection for endangered whales and sea turtles, we urge the department to enact stronger temporary measures for the upcoming 2023/2024 season.

More information is available at:

- The impacts of entanglement on large whales.
- The impacts of entanglement on sea turtles.
- Reducing risk in Oregon.

Cape Perpetua Mission Statement

In 2017, conservationists, NGOs, government agencies, and a local tribe came together to form The Cape Perpetua Collaborative, a partnership dedicated to fostering conservation through scientific research and educational stewardship within the local community.

Working together, the Collaborative aims to accelerate the pace at which Oregonians are made aware of and support in and around the Cape Perpetua Marine Reserve through our events, citizen scientist initiatives, and community education.

The Locations

The Cape Perpetua area, on the central coastal of Oregon, includes:

Cape Perpetua Marine Reserve (Oregon's largest) and Protected Areas

Numerous state parks

Audubon's Ten Mile Creek Sanctuary

Siuslaw National Forest

Cape Perpetua Scenic Area

Rock Creek and Cummins Creek Wilderness Areas

A Globally Significant Important Bird Area for the Marbled Murrelet, recently uplisted in endangered on the Endangered Species Act (ESA)

The Oregon Islands National Wildlife Refuge

Oregon's Ocean Shore State Recreation Area

Natural resources that provide habitats for migratory and resident seabirds, marine mammals, native fish and wildlife

Cultural resources

Places for people to recreate

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