

2015 Alaska Region Marine Mammal Stranding Summary

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A. Stranding report description and acknowledgement

Strandings of cetaceans (whales) and pinnipeds (seals and sea lions) that occurred in Alaskan waters and were reported to the National Marine Fisheries Service, Alaska Region (NMFS) in 2015 are summarized here. Stranding events cover animals found dead (floating and beached), and also reports of live stranded, mass stranded, abandoned, sick or injured animals. Strandings include all marine mammals under NMFS jurisdiction. Marine mammal species managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, including polar bear, sea otter and walrus, are not included. Reports are made by expert members of the marine mammal community as well as members of the general public with varying degrees of knowledge regarding marine mammal biology and ecology. The extent to which reported stranded animals have been examined is variable, from no examination to the performance of a full necropsy and study of pathology. Known subsistence takes are not included nor are fishery observer reports included unless the animal was observed outside of statistical reporting protocols (and thus would not be included by the observer program as part of their watch data set). All of the reports included have been confirmed, which means they are accompanied by some level of verification. Reports involving human interaction, such as ship strikes, fishery interactions/entanglements and firearm injury, are also included with a high level of confirmation.

Further stranding information and references are available at the NMFS Alaska Region webpage:

<http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/protectedresources/strandings.htm>

This summary is made possible by the efforts of the Alaska Marine Mammal Stranding Network, along with partner organizations, agencies, and members of the public who have reported stranding events to NMFS throughout the year.

B. Stranding reports by year and month.

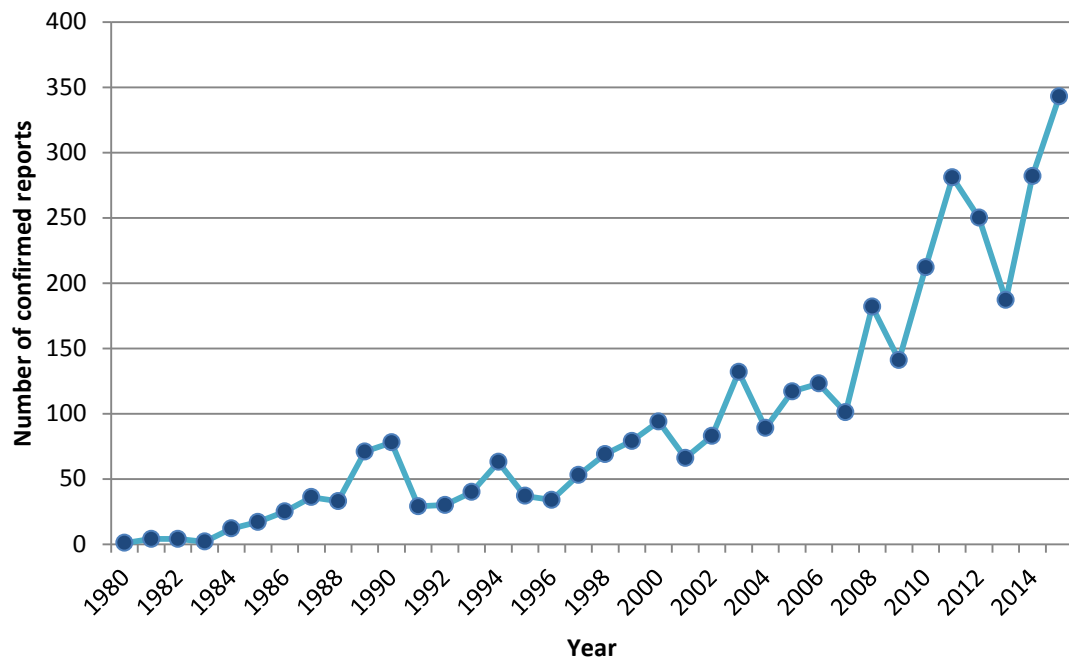


Figure 1. Number of confirmed stranding reports by year, 1980 – 2015.

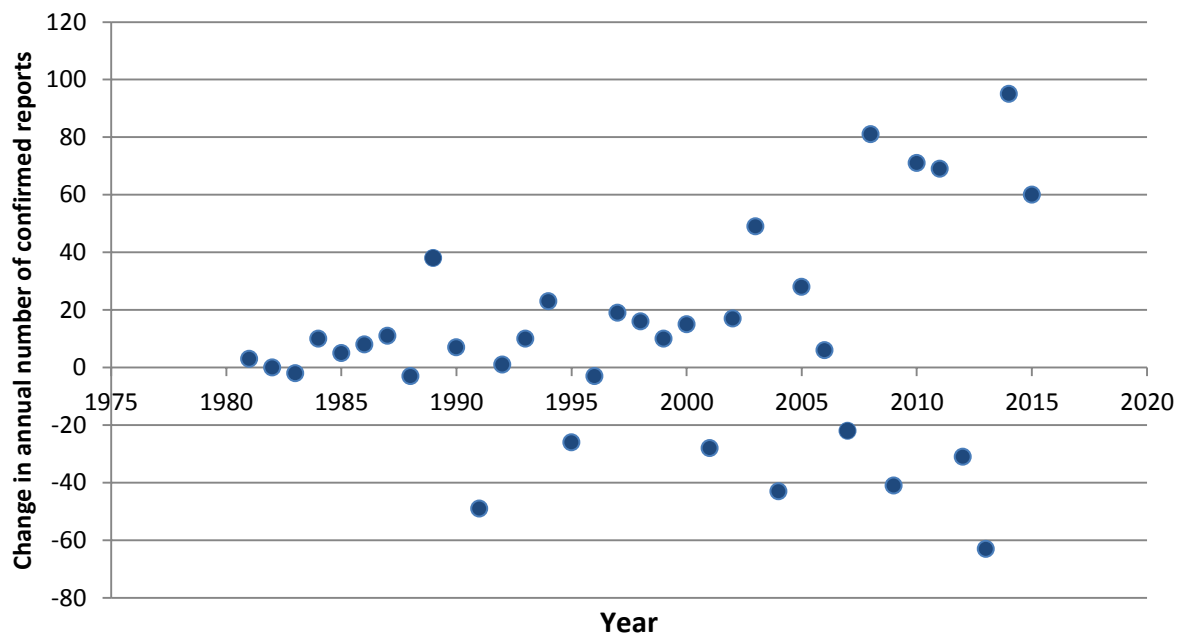


Figure 2. Change in annual number of confirmed stranding reports in Alaska, 1980-2015.

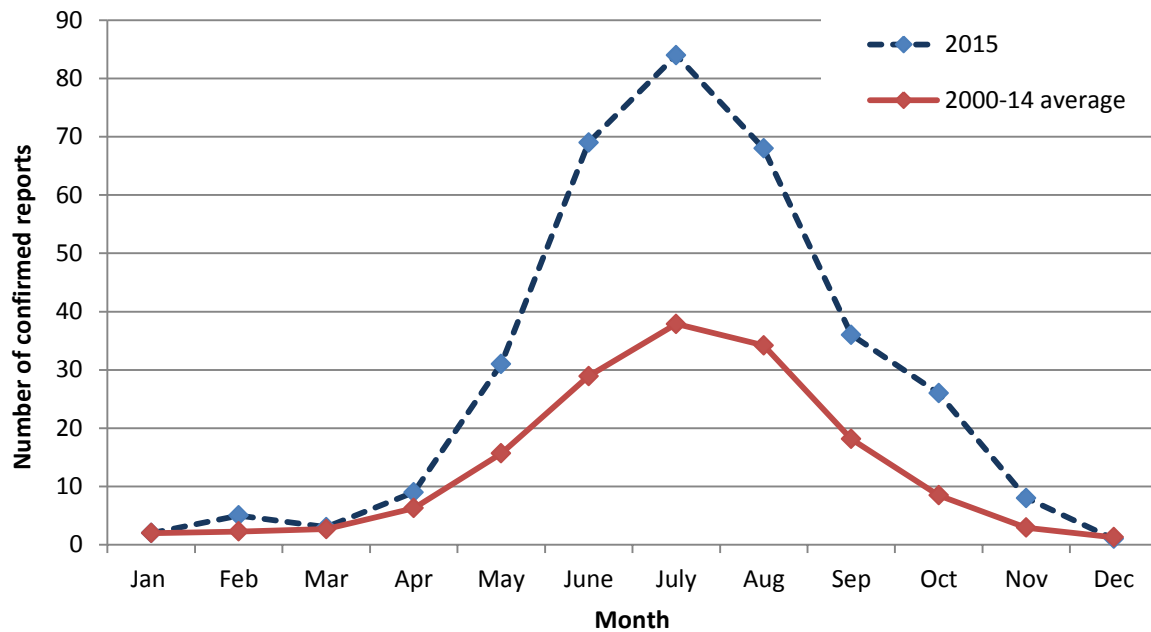


Figure 3. Number of confirmed stranding reports by month, 2015 compared to the 2000-2014 average.

C. Stranding reports by order and species.

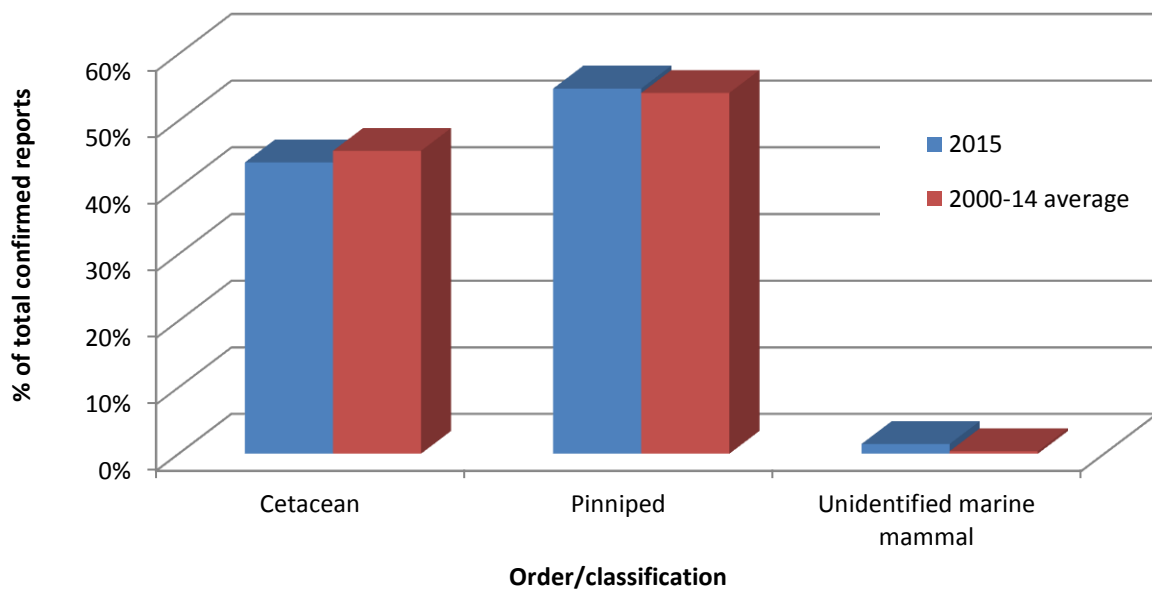


Figure 4. Contribution of confirmed cetacean, pinniped and unidentified marine mammal reports to total reports, 2015 compared to the 2000-2014 average.

| Species | Number of annual reports | | Percent of total annual reports | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| | 2015 | 2000-14 average | 2015 | 2000-14 average | Range, 2000-14 |
| Humpback whale | 58 | 20.1 | 16.9% | 12.7% | 3.2-27.4% |
| Unidentified cetacean | 24 | 8.9 | 7.0% | 5.6% | 1.5-9.9% |
| Gray whale | 17 | 11.4 | 5.0% | 7.2% | 0-39% |
| Bowhead whale | 13 | 1.5 | 3.8% | 0.9% | 0-3.7% |
| Fin whale | 14 | 0.7 | 4.1% | 0.4% | 0-1.5% |
| Harbor porpoise | 8 | 4.7 | 2.3% | 3.0% | 0-7.8% |
| Minke whale | 5 | 1.1 | 1.5% | 0.7% | 0-3.6% |
| Cook Inlet beluga whale | 5 | 9.8 | 1.5% | 6.2% | 1.4-15.2% |
| Killer whale | 2 | 3.3 | 0.6% | 2.1% | 0.7-6.1% |
| Dall's porpoise | 2 | 1.1 | 0.6% | 0.7% | 0-2.4% |
| Beluga whale - other | 1 | 6.3 | 0.3% | 4.0% | 1.1-15.4% |
| Baird's beaked whale | 1 | 0.3 | 0.3% | 0.2% | 0-2.4% |

Table 1. Contribution of cetacean species to total confirmed reports, 2015 compared to the 2000-2014 average.

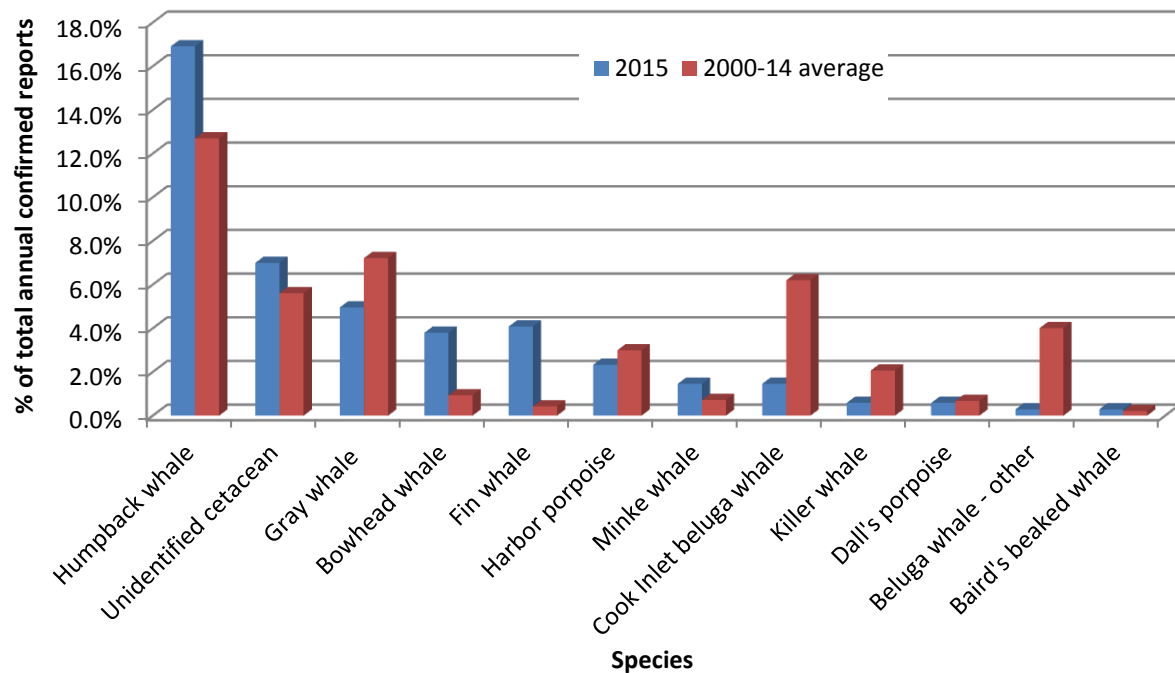


Figure 5. Contribution of cetacean species to total confirmed reports, 2015 compared to the 2000-2014 average.

| Species | Number of annual reports | | Percent of total annual reports | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| | 2015 | 2000-14 average | 2015 | 2000-14 average | Range, 2000-14 |
| Steller sea lion | 64 | 30 | 18.7% | 19.2% | 10.3-28.4% |
| Harbor seal | 58 | 21 | 17.0% | 13.5% | 8.1-20.7% |
| Northern fur seal | 18 | 7 | 5.3% | 4.7% | 0-25.8% |
| Ringed seal | 18 | 11 | 5.3% | 7.0% | 0.8-33.1% |
| Unidentified pinniped | 16 | 8 | 4.7% | 5.2% | 0-13.5% |
| Spotted seal | 5 | 2 | 1.5% | 1.2% | 0-3.2% |
| Bearded seal | 5 | 4 | 1.5% | 2.5% | 0-4.8% |
| Ribbon seal | 3 | 0 | 0.9% | 0.1% | 0-0.7% |

Table 2. Contribution of pinniped species to total confirmed reports, 2015 compared to the 2000-2014 average.

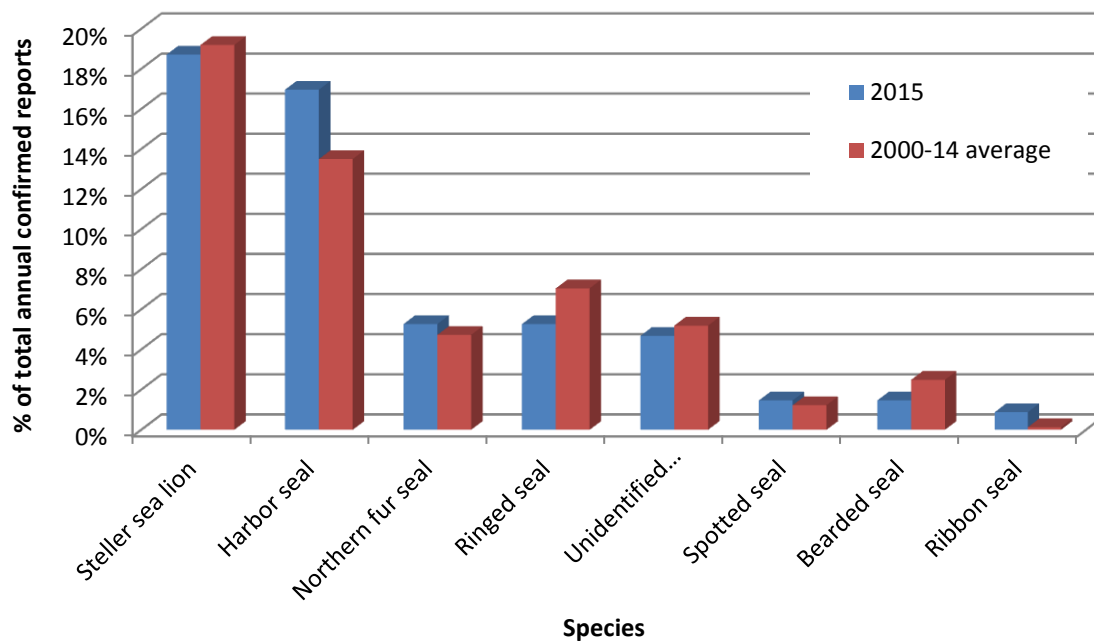


Figure 6. Contribution of pinniped species to total confirmed reports, 2015 compared to the 2000-2014 average.

D. Stranding reports by initial presentation

| Month | Events | Animals |
|--------------|------------|------------|
| Jan | 2 | 2 |
| Feb | 5 | 5 |
| Mar | 3 | 3 |
| Apr | 9 | 9 |
| May | 31 | 33 |
| Jun | 69 | 71 |
| Jul | 84 | 84 |
| Aug | 68 | 69 |
| Sep | 36 | 36 |
| Oct | 26 | 26 |
| Nov | 8 | 8 |
| Dec | 1 | 1 |
| Total | 342 | 347 |

Table 3. Number of confirmed stranding reports in 2015 by month of initial sighting, number of events, and number of animals.

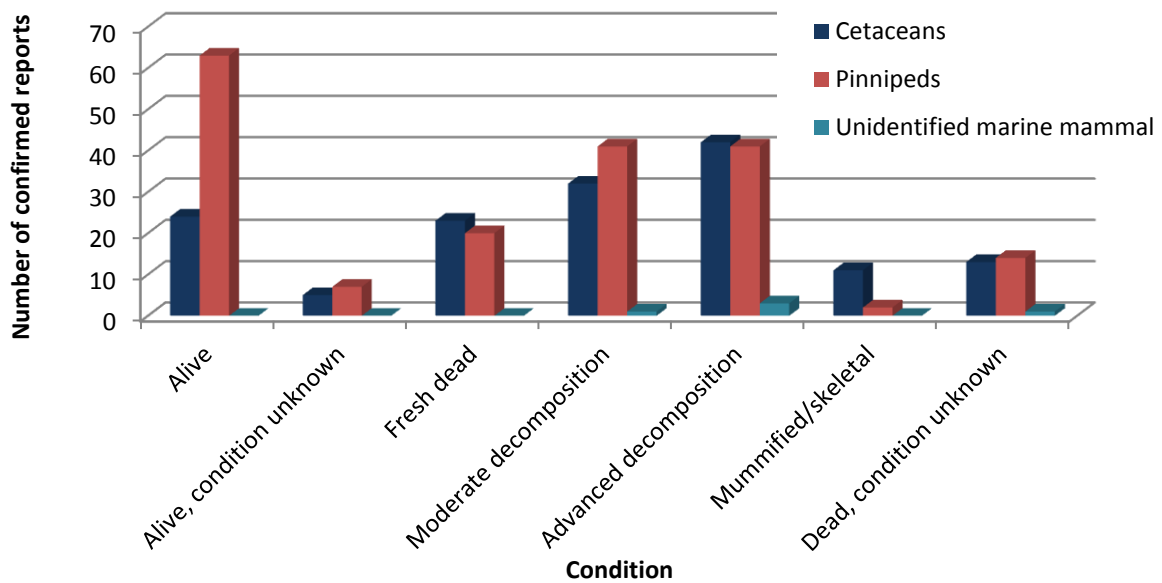


Figure 7. Number of confirmed stranding reports in 2015 by initial condition.

| Species | Initial Condition | | | Total |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------|------------|-------------------|------------|
| | Alive | Dead | Condition Unknown | |
| Minke whale | 0 | 5 | | 5 |
| Baird's beaked whale | 0 | 1 | | 1 |
| Bowhead whale | 0 | 13 | | 13 |
| Fin whale | 0 | 14 | | 14 |
| Cook Inlet beluga whale | 2 | 3 | | 5 |
| Beluga whale | 0 | 1 | | 1 |
| Gray whale | 0 | 17 | | 17 |
| Humpback whale | 27 | 32 | | 61 |
| Orca whale | 0 | 2 | | 2 |
| Dall's porpoise | 0 | 2 | | 2 |
| Harbor porpoise | 0 | 5 | | 5 |
| Unidentified cetacean | 0 | 24 | | 24 |
| <i>Cetacean Total</i> | 29 | 121 | 0 | 150 |
| Steller sea lion | 20 | 43 | | 64 |
| Harbor seal | 22 | 36 | | 58 |
| Northern fur seal | 14 | 4 | | 18 |
| Ringed seal | 6 | 12 | | 18 |
| Ribbon seal | 3 | 0 | | 3 |
| Spotted seal | 2 | 3 | | 5 |
| Bearded seal | 2 | 3 | | 5 |
| Unidentified pinniped | 1 | 15 | | 16 |
| <i>Pinniped Total</i> | 71 | 118 | 0 | 187 |
| Unidentified marine mammal | 0 | 5 | 0 | 5 |
| <i>Marine Mammal Total</i> | 100 | 242 | 0 | 342 |

Table 4. Number of confirmed standings reported in the Alaska Region in 2015 by initial condition, species, and number of animals.

E. Reports by Region

| Area | Species | No. |
|----------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------|
| <i>Arctic</i> | Bowhead whale | 14 |
| | Ringed seal | 14 |
| | Unidentified pinniped | 13 |
| | Gray whale | 11 |
| | Unidentified cetacean | 6 |
| | Unidentified marine mammal | 5 |
| | Spotted seal | 3 |
| | Bearded seal | 2 |
| | Beluga whale | 1 |
| | Ribbon seal | 1 |
| | <i>Arctic Total</i> | 70 |
| <i>Western Alaska</i> | Northern fur seal | 17 |
| | Steller sea lion | 12 |
| | Humpback whale | 10 |
| | Harbor seal | 9 |
| | Unidentified cetacean | 7 |
| | Ringed seal | 4 |
| | Minke whale | 3 |
| | Spotted seal | 3 |
| | Bearded seal | 3 |
| | Unknown Pinniped | 3 |
| | Fin whale | 3 |
| | Gray whale | 3 |
| | Ribbon seal | 2 |
| | Dalls porpoise | 1 |
| | <i>Western Total</i> | 80 |
| <i>Southcentral Alaska</i> | Harbor seal | 26 |
| | Steller sea lion | 21 |
| | Fin whale | 6 |
| | Humpback whale | 6 |
| | Cook Inlet beluga | 5 |
| | Harbor porpoise | 4 |
| | Unidentified cetacean | 3 |
| | Minke whale | 2 |
| | Gray whale | 1 |
| | Dall's porpoise | 1 |
| | <i>Southcentral Total</i> | 75 |

| | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------|
| <i>Kodiak</i> | Humpback whale | 15 |
| | Fin whale | 5 |
| | Steller sea lion | 5 |
| | Harbor seal | 4 |
| | Unidentified cetacean | 3 |
| | Gray whale | 2 |
| <i>Kodiak Total</i> | | 34 |
| <i>Southeast Alaska</i> | Steller sea lion | 27 |
| | Humpback whale | 27 |
| | Bairds beaked whale | 1 |
| | Gray whale | 1 |
| | Northern fur seal | 1 |
| | Killer whale | 2 |
| | Harbor seal | 19 |
| | Harbor porpoise | 4 |
| | Unidentified cetacean | 5 |
| <i>Southeast Total</i> | | 87 |

Table 5. Number of confirmed strandings reported in the Alaska Region in 2015 by location and species.

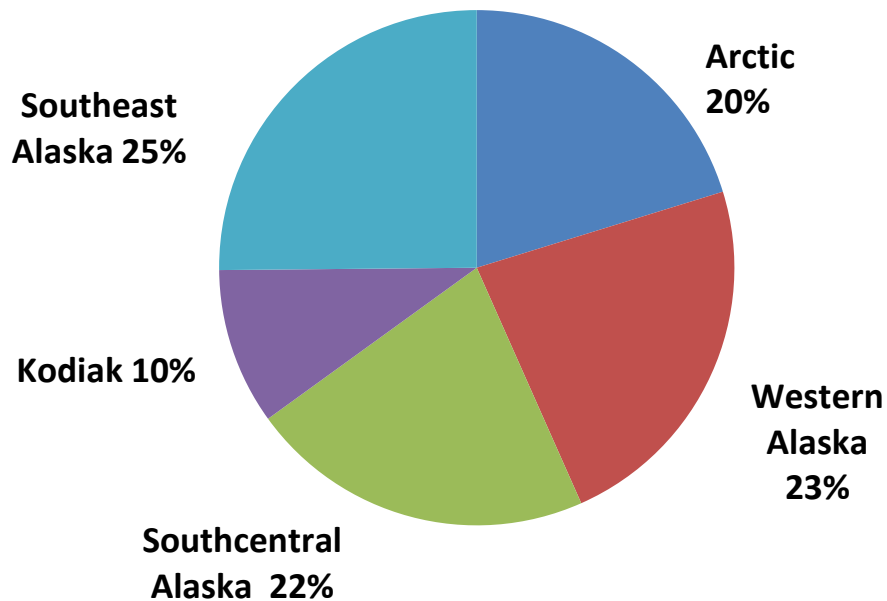


Figure 8. 2015 confirmed stranding reports by subarea.

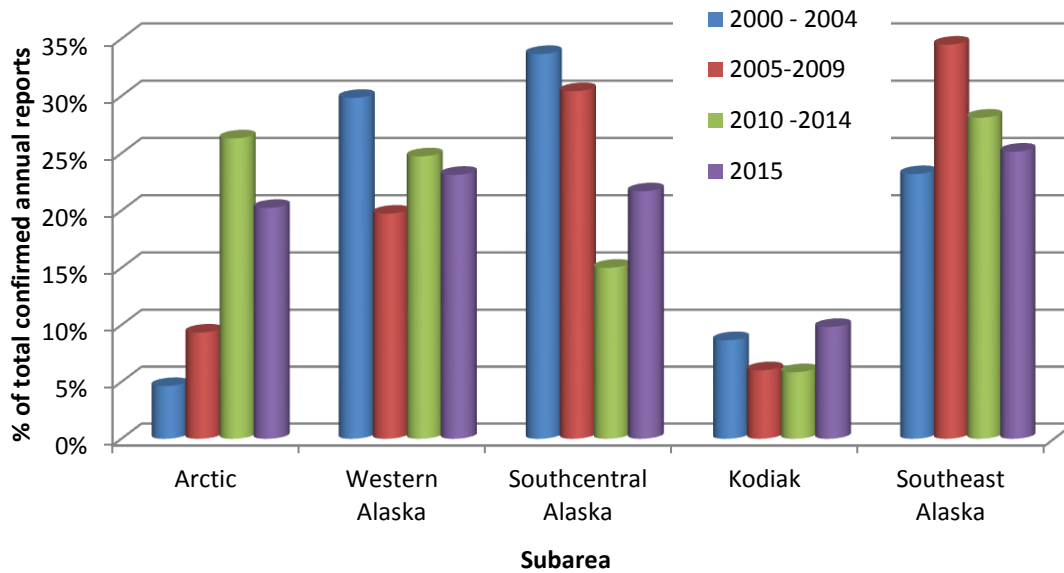


Figure 9. Contribution of regional subareas to confirmed stranding reports over time.

F. Reports involving human interaction

There is a wide variety in species susceptibility to human interaction due to features of life history and geographical overlap. The most common human interactions in stranding reports are entanglements. These include fishery interactions in which marine mammals become entangled in fishery gear, or alternately ingest fishing gear, and also interactions with marine debris. Other human interactions include ship strikes, where vessels collide with animals either foraging or traversing, and gunshot injuries, where harmful interaction is intentional.

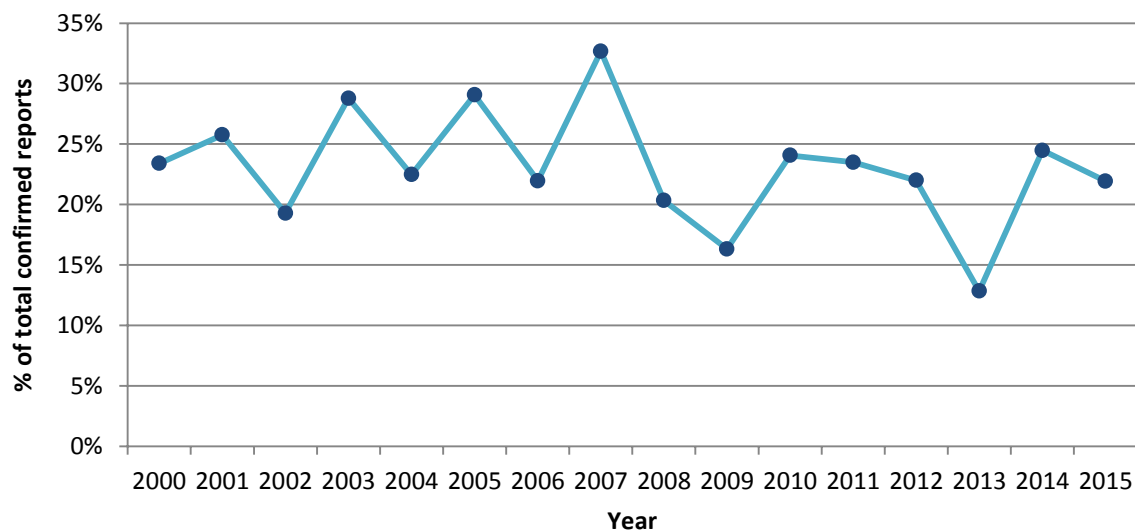


Figure 10. Percentage of total confirmed reports involving human interaction by year.

| Species | Non-human interaction | Human Interaction (HI) | | | | | Total reports | % HI |
|-------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|-------------|---------|-------|----------|---------------|-------|
| | | Entanglement | Ship strike | Gunshot | Other | Total HI | | |
| Humpback whale | 29 | 22 | 6 | | 1 | 29 | 58 | 50.0% |
| Steller sea lion | 40 | 18 | | 6 | | 24 | 64 | 37.5% |
| Northern fur seal | 3 | 14 | | | 1 | 15 | 18 | 83.3% |
| Harbor seal | 54 | 1 | | 2 | 1 | 4 | 58 | 6.9% |
| Fin whale | 13 | | 1 | | | 1 | 14 | 7.1% |
| Beluga whale - CI | 4 | | | | 1 | 1 | 5 | 20.0% |
| Bowhead whale | 12 | 1 | | | | 1 | 13 | 7.7% |

Table 6. 2015 confirmed stranding reports involving human interaction, by species.

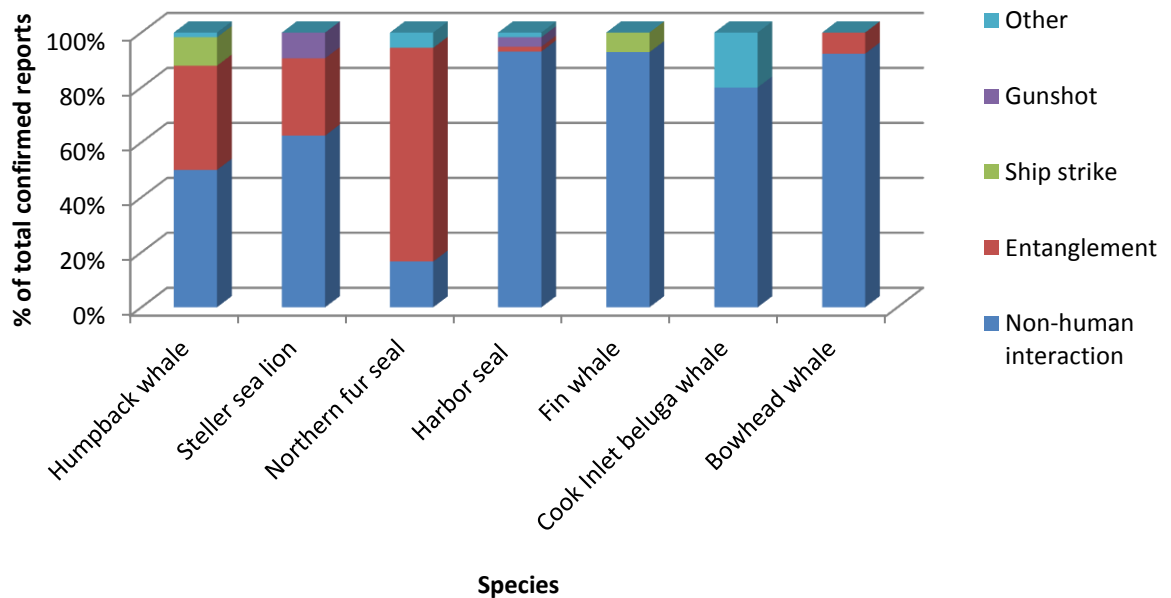


Figure 11. 2015 confirmed stranding reports involving human interaction, by species.

G. Alaska Sealife Center

The Alaska Sealife Center is the only facility that is qualified to rescue, retain, rehabilitate and release marine mammals in Alaska.

| Species | Outcome | Animals |
|--------------|----------------------------------|-----------|
| Spotted seal | Rehab/Released | 1 |
| | Died | 0 |
| | Euthanized | 0 |
| | <i>Spotted seal total</i> | 1 |
| Ringed seal | Rehab/Released | 1 |
| | Died | 0 |
| | Euthanized | 0 |
| | <i>Ringed seal total</i> | 1 |
| Harbor seal | Rehab/Released | 13 |
| | Died | 1 |
| | Euthanized | 0 |
| | <i>Harbor seal total</i> | 14 |
| Total | | 16 |

Table7. 2015 Alaska Region live strandings handled by the Alaska SeaLife Center for rehabilitation by species, outcome, and number of animals.