



OLYMPIC COAST NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY

Navigating the Future

Management Plan Review



Marine Mammal and Seabird Research and Monitoring

Marine mammals and seabirds thrive off the Olympic Coast, where strong seasonal upwelling of nutrient rich waters promotes optimal conditions for ocean productivity. Long-term monitoring of these populations is essential. Sanctuary researchers and collaborators characterize the diversity, abundances, and health of marine mammals and seabirds to correlate habitat use patterns with oceanographic conditions.



Humpback whales

Twenty-nine species of marine mammals have been sighted in the sanctuary, including eight species listed under the Endangered Species Act. The humpback whale and killer whale are seasonal foragers in the sanctuary. Gray whales travel through the sanctuary on their annual migrations between breeding and calving grounds off the Baja Peninsula and summer feeding grounds in the northern Pacific. The eastern Pacific population of gray whales is no longer considered threatened or endangered. Sea otters frequent kelp beds, while harbor seals and Steller and California sea lions haul out on coastal islands throughout much of the year.



Black-footed albatross

Seabirds are the most conspicuous members of the offshore fauna of the Olympic Coast. Over 90 bird species use the sanctuary during their breeding, foraging or migrating seasons. Sea stacks and islands provide critical nesting habitat for 19 species of seabirds, raptors and shorebirds. Productive offshore waters provide food that attracts large aggregations of seabirds that breed in other regions of the world but travel great distances to feed in sanctuary waters. Sand and gravel beaches furnish foraging areas for shorebirds, eagles, gulls and a host of other birds. The coastline forms an important migratory pathway for millions of birds that pass through each year, guiding waterfowl, cranes, shorebirds, and raptors toward northern breeding areas during the spring and southward as winter approaches.

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