



WDFW Status of Whale Entanglements in Coastal Crab Fishery May 2019

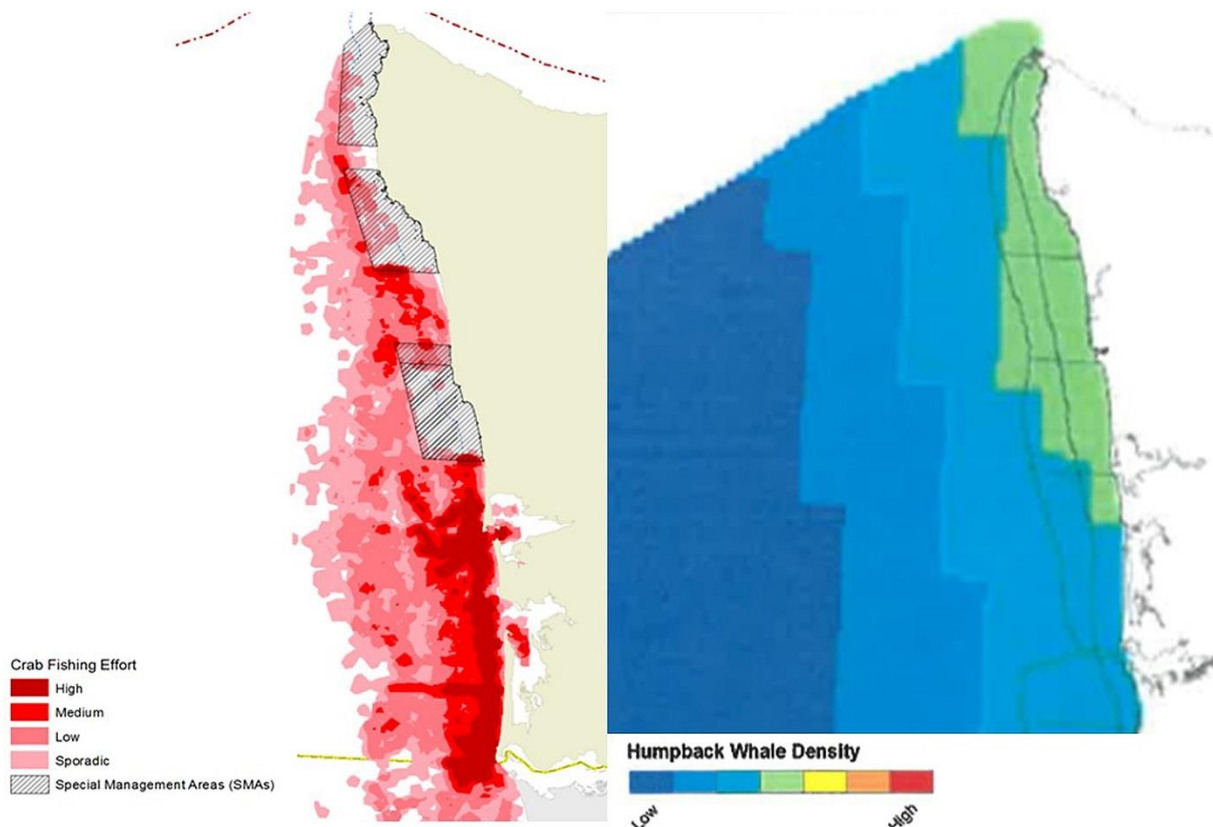
West Coast Large Whale Entanglements

- From 2000-2013, NOAA estimates there were about ten large whale entanglements, on average per year, in all West Coast fisheries combined
- NOAA estimates increased to 50 whales in 2015, 48 in 2016, 31 in 2017, and a preliminary estimate of about 37 in 2018
- Increases are attributed to increasing whale populations and changes in patterns of distribution and movement of whales and forage fish
- Washington coastal Dungeness crab fishery has entangled gray whales (not ESA-listed) and humpback whales (ESA-listed)—see Figure 1.

Humpback Whale Status

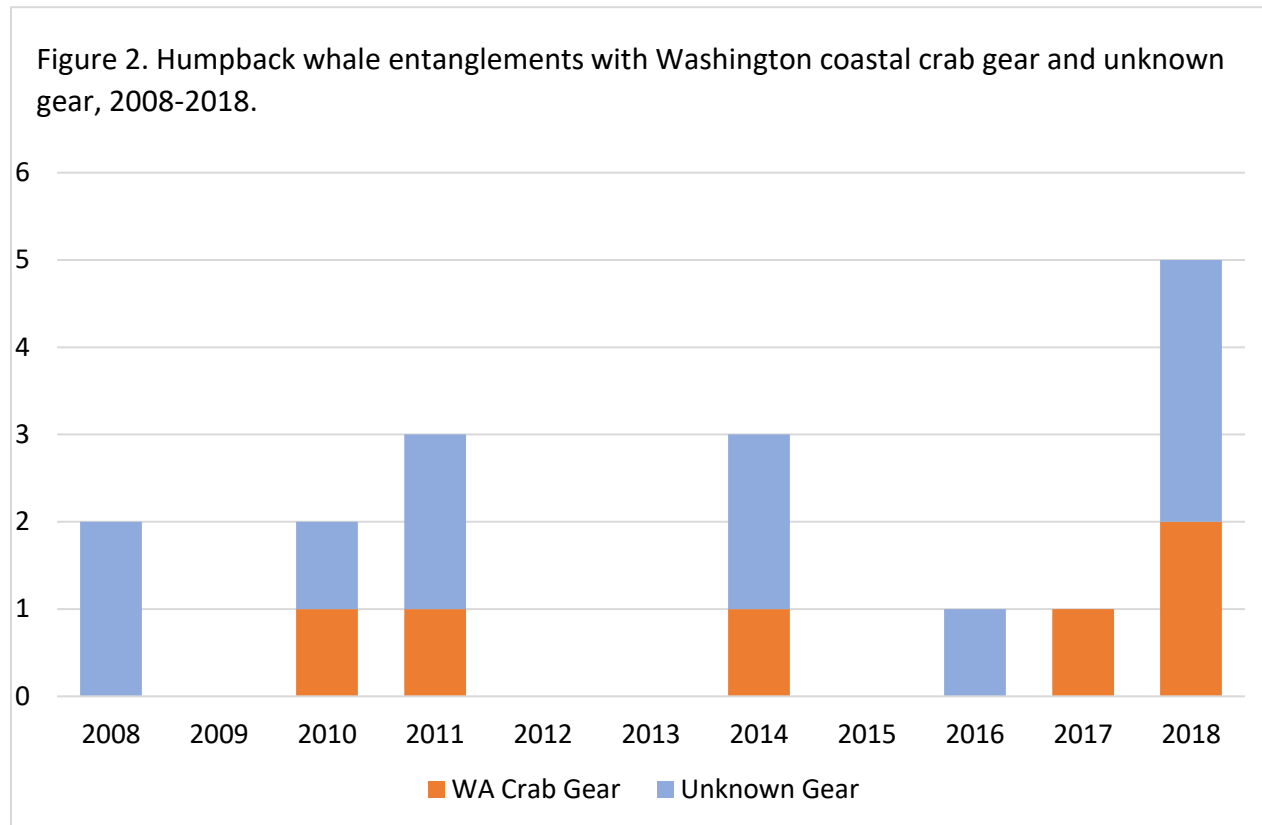
- Two of the 14 ESA-listed humpback whale distinct population segments (DPS) are present off Washington:
 - Mexico (Threatened) and Central America (Endangered)
- Based on limited data from NOAA, Cascadia Research, and WDFW survey efforts, marine mammal scientists estimate humpback whale composition off Washington as:
 - 45% Mexico DPS (Threatened)
 - 45% Hawaiian (Not Listed)
 - 10% Central America DPS (Endangered)

Figure 1. Washington crab fishing intensity and NOAA humpback whale density map, 2017.



Humpback Whale Entanglements in Washington Coastal Crab Fishery

- The number of NOAA confirmed humpback whale entanglements with Washington coastal crab fishing gear and unknown gears are displayed in Figure 2.
- Note: NOAA estimates that confirmed whale entanglements comprise about ten percent of the total that occurs.



Center for Biological Diversity Lawsuit Against CDFW

- Center for Biological Diversity filed a lawsuit against CDFW in 2017 due to lack of regulatory changes in response to interactions with ESA-listed species
- Lawsuit included multiple fisheries (including Dungeness crab) and multiple species (e.g., humpback whales, blue whales, and leatherback sea turtles)
- March 2019 – Settlement agreement includes spring closure, deadline to submit ESA incidental take permit application to NOAA, area closures/gear requirements, and prescribed process and criteria (linked to whale presence) to close fishery

Management Considerations and Proposed Next Steps

1. WDFW needs to comply with ESA requirements
 - Work with NOAA on ITP application and habitat conservation plan
 - WDFW limited staff capacity – target completion date: Dec 31, 2020
 - NOAA review and approval process averages 3 years
2. Humpback whale interactions difficult to estimate and predict
 - Variability in prey availability and distribution and shifting humpback whale distribution
3. Working with crab industry to identify interim measures to reduce whale interactions
 - Regulatory actions considered through Fish and Wildlife Commission process