

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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ANNUAL REPORT ON MARINE MAMMALS NOW AVAILABLE

While the populations of nine marine mammals stayed relatively unchanged in the 12-month period ending March 31, 1979, manatee injuries and deaths caused by motorboat collisions and other human-related activities remained a major concern.

Status reports on the polar bear, dugong, marine and sea otters, Atlantic and Pacific walrus, and three species of manatee are among the information included in the Fish and Wildlife Service's annual report to Congress, "Administration of the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972." FWS and the Department of Commerce's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) share jurisdiction for protection of marine mammals, with FWS responsible for these nine species.

The illustrated report highlights the Service's efforts to protect the endangered West Indian and West African manatees and the threatened California population of sea otters. The West Indian manatee, which concentrates seasonally in Florida coastal waters, continues to suffer heavy losses: a sizable number of the large, slow-moving vegetarians are killed by collisions with motorboats and barges, or by such structures as automatic dam gates. The report describes Federal and State efforts to protect the surviving "sea cows," including passage and provisions of the Florida Manatee Sanctuary Act of 1978.

The Marine Mammal Tagging Office, funded jointly by FWS and NMFS, began operations in April 1978, compiling information about effective tagging and marking methods. Such experimental activities, described in the report, enable scientists to gather biological information on the distribution and movements of marine mammals. Numerous field studies and tests in which the Service has participated include laser branding tests on Pacific white-sided dolphins, experiments with ear tags and radio transmitters on California sea otters, satellite tracking of polar bears, and radio attachment tests on West Indian manatees.

Administrative actions discussed in the report include: financial grants to States to help them develop and implement plans for protection and management of marine mammals in their waters; an update of Service marine mammal regulations; the status of Alaska's request that management of nine marine mammals be returned to the State; marine mammal care and maintenance standards; law enforcement activities, scientific research and public display permits; the Service's research activities; Outer Continental Shelf environmental studies; ecological characterizations of U.S. coastal areas, and international activities.

The report, which covers activities from April 1, 1978, to March 31, 1979, is available to the public, as announced in the December 18, 1979, Federal Register. Single copies may be obtained from the Director (OWA), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240.