

Pacific Gray Whales are in Danger

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Introduction

What areas are whales washing up, and what is the reason for them becoming stranded?

Pacific gray whales are residents of the Northern Hemisphere oceans. They are regularly found in the North Pacific ocean where there are two populations; one in the eastern and one in the western pacific. These gray whales are known to have one of the longest migration distances, traveling from the warm waters off the coast of California to the cold waters of the Arctic. They breed in warm waters and feed in colder waters. These gentle giants have recently been turning up dead at a rapid rate along the west coast of the U.S, Mexico and Canada, as well as in the East Coast. Gray whales are dying faster than usual due to a number of reasons, but mostly due to human activity; Food shortage, boat accidents, and getting caught in fish nets are the top 3 threats to gray whales. Its stranding season (Apr-Jun), Pacific Gray Whales end up being beached more than any other time of year. On average, there are 5 per season. This season, there have been 31 whales strandings in the PNW alone. (NOAA Fisheries, “Gray Whale | NOAA Fisheries”))

Methods

We collected data from multiple articles from NOAA Fisheries, as well as a detailed graph of strandings in WA discovered up until 2025. We gathered our research from multiple accurate sources as well as kept up with live reports of whale strandings being reports on a weekly bases.

Graph of Beached Whales

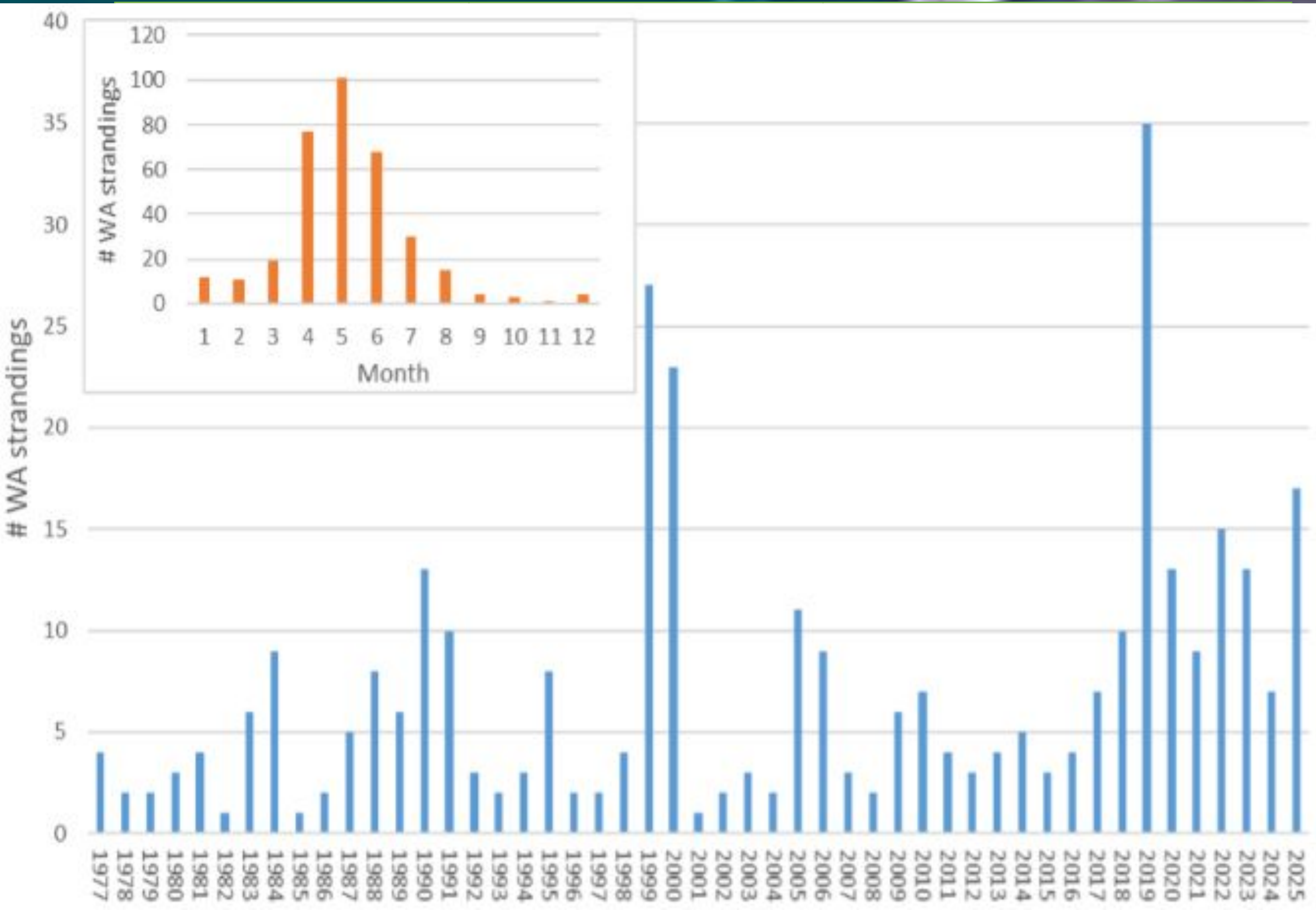


Figure 3. Annual gray whale strandings in Washington State from 1977 to 2025 (blue bars), totaling 346 individuals. Peaks occurred during unusual mortality events in 1999–2000 and 2019–2021. Inset shows monthly strandings aggregated across years, with most occurring in May and June (orange bars). Based on data from the Pacific Northwest Stranding Network (Calambokidis et al. In Prep).

Marine Mammal Strandings

2026 Puget Sound and Washington Coast Marine Mammal Strandings and Exam Summary

#	ID	Date	Location	Sex	Findings / Notes
1	CRC-2255	3/2/2026	Offshore-Copalis	Male	Floating, no necropsy
2	CRC-2257	3/21/2026	Olympic National Park, near Tokeak	Male	External exam only, emaciated
3	CRC-2258	3/28/2026	Taholah	Male	Decomposed, no necropsy
4	CRC-2261	4/1/2026	Raymond	Unknown	Malnutrition, out of habitat (upriver)
5	CRC-2262	4/3/2026	Ocean Shores	Female	Malnutrition
6	CRC-2263	4/3/2026	Ocean Shores	Male	Malnutrition, blunt force trauma
7	CRC-2264	4/6/2026	Anacortes	Male	No necropsy
8	CRC-2266	4/11/2026	Moclips	Male	Malnutrition, blunt force trauma
9	PSU26-04-12-Er	4/12/2026	Offshore-Long Beach	Male	Malnutrition, blunt force trauma, landed in Seaside OR
10	EJC-2026-08	4/17/2026	Sequim	Male	Malnutrition, trauma
11	CRC-2267	4/17/2026	Ocean Shores	Male	Malnutrition
12	26Er18Apr5K-01	4/18/2026	Deception Pass	Male	No necropsy, minimal samples collected
13	CRC-2268	4/20/2026	Ocean Shores	Male	Malnutrition
14	PSU26-04-22-Er	4/22/2026	Seaview	Female	Malnutrition, blunt force trauma, recent entanglement (no gear present)
15	CRC-2269	4/26/2026	Ocean Shores	Male	Decomposed, no necropsy
16	CRC-2270	4/27/2026	Offshore-Westport	Male	Malnourished but less than others examined, no other findings. Landed in Grayland WA
17	CRC-2272	4/28/2026	Grays Harbor	Male	Decomposed, no necropsy
18	PSU26-05-08-Er	5/8/2026	Long Beach Peninsula	Female	Malnutrition, probable trauma
19	26Er13MayWI-01	5/13/2026	Whidbey Island	Male	Malnutrition, probable trauma
20	CRC-2276	5/14/2026	Moclips	Male	Advanced decomposition, minimal exam
21	CRC-2277	5/15/2026	Bay Center	Male	Malnourished but less than others examined, no other findings.
22	WDFW2026-054	5/20/2026	Bremerton	Male	Malnutrition, blunt force trauma, carcass sighted drifting near Alki on 5/22
23	CRC-2281	5/24/2026	Olympic National Park	Unknown	Pending

Figure 2. 2026 Summary of Marine Mammal Strandings on the Washington Coast. .

Discussion

During our research, we discovered that Pacific gray whales are washing up on shore due to multiple reasons including enviornmental factors changes, disease, and human- realted impacts. These whales may be affected by shifts in their feeding grounds caused by climate change, leading to malnutrition or starvation. These whales migrate to feed in Alaska, but due to melting Arctic ice and risk of algae blooms, caused by oceans temperatures risings,zooplankton that is one of their main meals is being heavily depleted.((Fisheries, “[NOAA Fisheries”)). Additionally, they can fall victim to diseases or parasites that compromise their health. Human activities, such as ship strikes and entanglement in fishing gear, also contributor to their mortality. As a result, these factors can culminate in increased instances of gray whales being found stranded on beaches. Conservationist as well as government agencies are working to working with fisherman and to reduce by-catches. The U.S Coast guard and NOAA are working together to changing shipping lanes to help reduce whales getting struck by vessels. NOAA also has implemented regulations on whales watching and overseeing of mammal strandings.We have found that most strandings are happenings along the migration route along the coast as well as in bays where the whales are trying to find other sources of food not in their common feeding areas. The Pacific gray whale is currently protected under the Marine Mammal Endangered act.

Acknowledgements

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Work Cited

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Figure 1. Pacific gray whale beached in Ocean Shores, WA

