

Marine Mammals Committee

Committee Members: D. Allen, R. L. Brownell, Jr., C. M. Callahan, J. P. Dines (Chair), K. M. Dudzinski, H. H. Edwards, T. J. McIntyre, D. K. Odell, C. W. Potter, S. Sheffield, E. E. Smith.

Mission:

The Marine Mammals Committee was formed in 1921 and Chaired by E. W. Nelson. It is the longest-standing active Committee of the American Society of Mammalogists. Its mission is to maintain and encourage interest in marine mammals in the ASM, to provide the Society Membership with information about marine mammalogy, including conservation and legislative issues, to spearhead resolutions and legislation involving marine mammals, and to serve as a liaison between ASM and the Society for Marine Mammalogy (SMM). Members of the Marine Mammals Committee are frequently active in both ASM and the Society for Marine Mammals.

Information Items:

(1) Members of the Committee were pleased to provide input on the joint ASM-American Ornithological Society-Society for Conservation Biology North America letter of September 2018, spearheaded by Joe Cook and the Conservation Committee, which urged the US Departments of Interior and Commerce to withdraw proposed changes to the Endangered Species Act.

(2) Update on the vaquita (*Phocoena sinus*):

a. Over the past several years, we have reported the precipitous decline of the vaquita, a small porpoise endemic to the northern waters of the Gulf of California. The latest estimate (March 2019) is there are no more than 22, and perhaps as few as 6, individual vaquitas remaining.

<http://www.iucn-csg.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/CIRVA-11-Final-Report-6-March.pdf>

b. Committee member Bob Brownell co-authored a paper in the Jan 2019 issue of *BioScience* critiquing a study that named decreased flow of Colorado River as the primary cause of the vaquita's decline. The authors emphasize that it has been well documented, for decades, that the primary cause of death among vaquita is incidental capture in gillnets, in particular for the totoaba. Moreover, publication of unsubstantiated claims can have tragic consequences for conservation outcomes. <https://academic.oup.com/bioscience/article/69/1/12/5172289>

(3) Jim Dines will be stepping down as chair of the Committee.

Action Items: None.

Respectfully submitted,

James P. Dines

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