

# PSR: Humpback and Gray Whales – Maintain

Chris Sato  
Wildlife Biologist, Wildlife Program



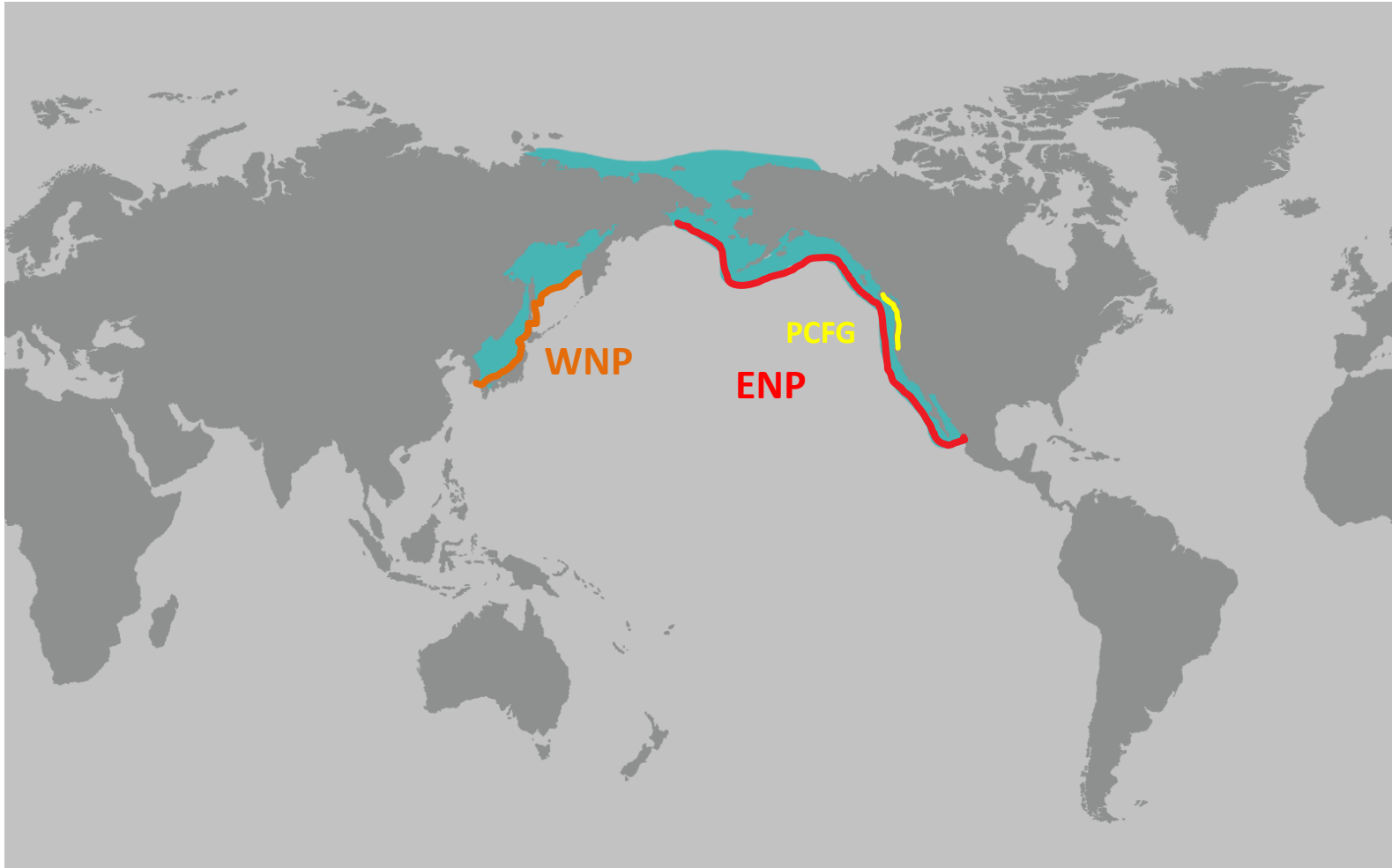


# Status of the Gray and Humpback Whales in Washington

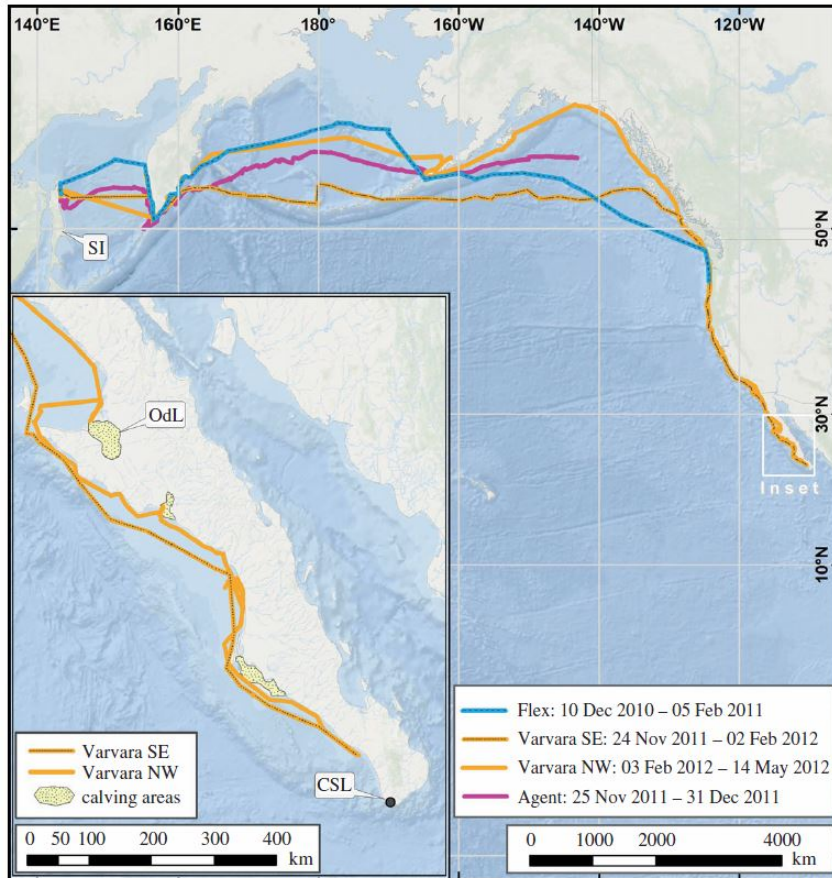


**GRAY WHALE**

# Gray Whale Distribution



# Gray Whale Natural History



- Primarily bottom feeders, strain benthic invertebrates
- Prefers coastal waters
- Migratory 20,000 km



# Gray Whale Listing Status

Protected under  
**MMPA**

**Federal:** ENP not  
listed, WNP  
endangered

**Washington:**  
endangered 1981,  
sensitive 1997



# Gray Whale Population Status and Trends

ENP: Estimated 12,000 to 24,000 pre-whaling, a few thousand by 1930s. As of 2016, between 24,000 and ~30,000.

Mortality events in 1999-2000, numbers went down to 15,000 and 16,000. Another event began in 2019.

WNP: 1,500 to 10,000 pre-whaling. As of 2016, 271 to 311 adults.

PCFG: Estimated 232 in 2017

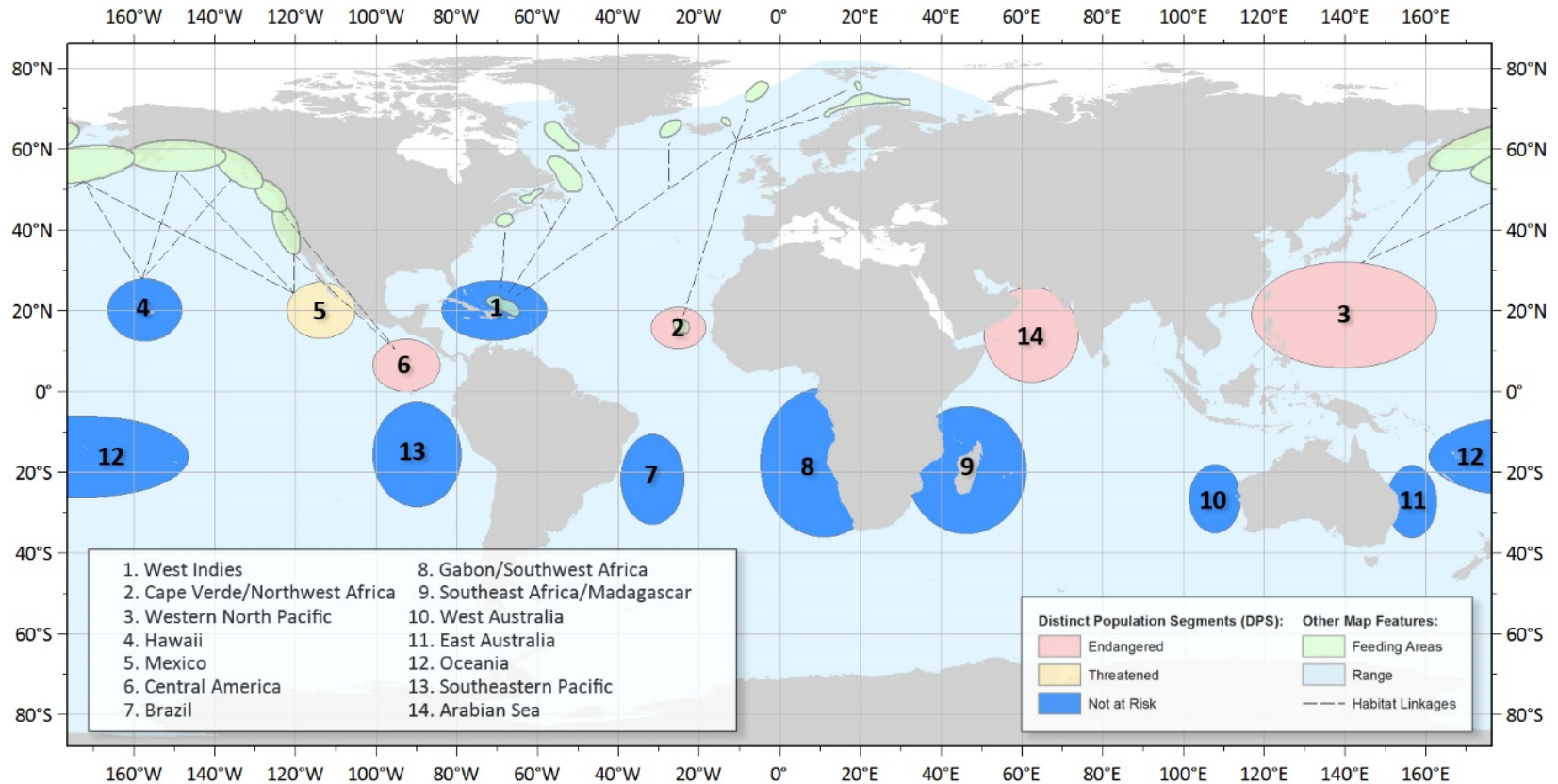




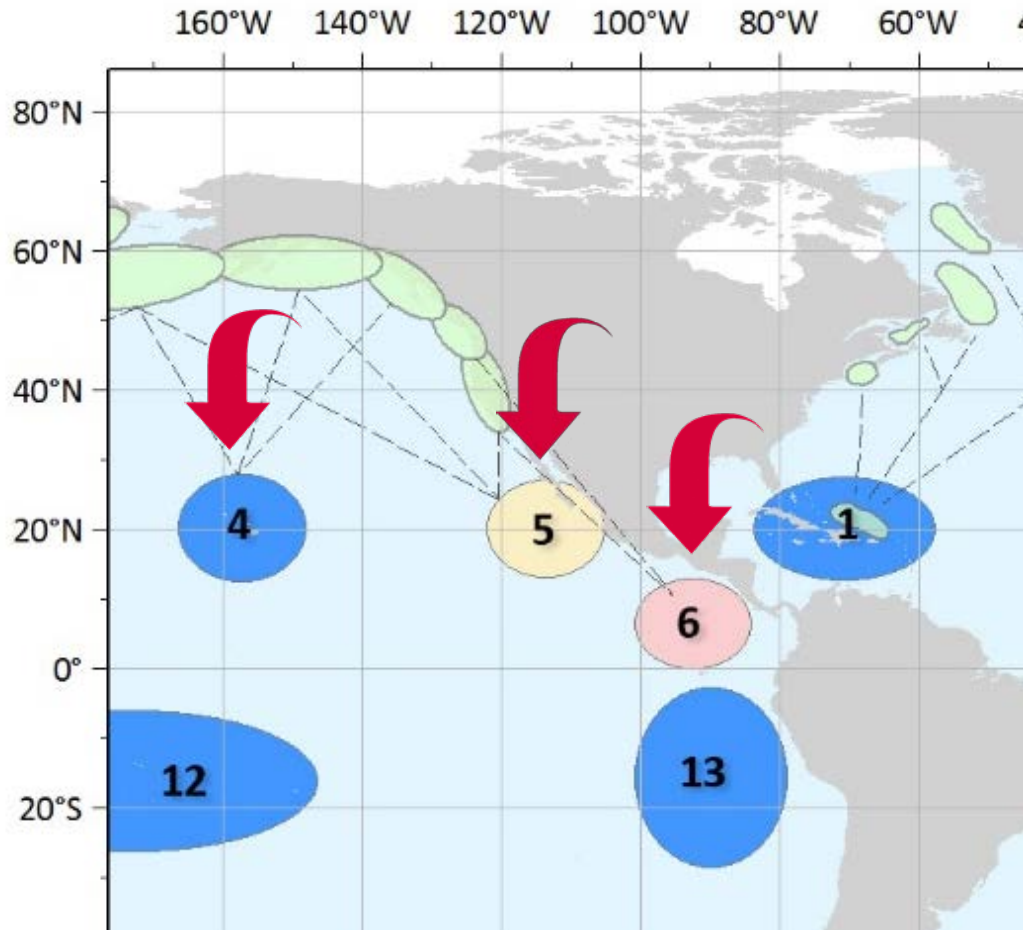
**HUMPBACK WHALE**



# Humpback Whale Distribution



# Humpback Whale Distinct Population Segments (DPS)



# Humpback Whale Natural History

- Diverse diet and variety of habitats
- Migratory 16,000 km
- Complex social organization



# Humpback Whale Listing Status

## Federal:

- Mexico DPS threatened
- Central America DPS endangered
- Hawaii DPS federally delisted in 2016

**Washington:** listed endangered, 1981



# Humpback Whale Population Status and Trend

North Pacific stock pre-whaling: 15,000 animals

Post-whaling: 1,200 to 1,400 animals

Current: 16,000 to 21,000

WA/SBC: 500 to 720

Salish Sea: Pre-whaling 200 annually. Recent increase to 500 annual sightings in 2014 and 2015



# Factors Affecting Continued Existence



# Factors Affecting Continued Existence

**Gray whale** stranding increase along U.S Pacific coast

Small population sizes risk genetic diversity loss and stochastic events:

- **Gray whale** WNP and PCFG
- **Humpback whale** Central America DPS

Increases in **gray whale** entanglements along the West Coast

**Humpback whale** vulnerable to entanglement due to large pectoral fins and flukes

**Gray whale** commercial harvest continued into the mid-20th century for WNP. Subsistence harvest thousands of years. Proposed Makah hunt, minimal take



# Factors Affecting Continued Existence

- Gray and humpback whales are two of the most commonly vessel-struck whale species
- Climate change can alter marine ecosystems and potentially impact food availability
- Oil spill risk in WA is expected to rise due to increased tanker traffic from ports in BC and WA
- Increasing human-generated noise levels in all oceans can produce physiological stress and cause changes in surface, foraging, and vocal behavior





# Conservation Actions



# Conservation Actions

- Whaling management for **gray whales**
- Proposed Critical Habitat designation for **humpback whales**
- Species management and recovery
- Entanglement mitigation strategies
- Ship strike preventive measures
- Reduction of marine noise – SRKW work helps
- Stranding response
- Oil spill prevention and response



# Recommendations

Retain **gray whale** as sensitive



Retain **humpback whale** as endangered





# Questions?

