



MAKAH TRIBAL COUNCIL

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Identity of Whale Killed 8 September 2007 Determined

Five Makah tribal members attempted to harvest a gray whale in the Strait of Juan de Fuca on September 8, 2007. After the five individuals were detained by the Coast Guard, the Makah Tribe's marine mammal biologist was asked to examine the injured whale to determine the nature of the whale's injuries, to determine if the whale should be euthanized, and to collect photos for photo-identification of the whale. The whale subsequently died due to the injuries received.

Identification photos of gray whales are normally taken of a side view of the dorsal hump which is seen just before a whale dives. The whale killed on September 8th did not perform diving behavior normally seen in gray whales which limited photos to the head region of the whale. Photos of the whale were provided to Cascadia Research by the Makah Tribe for comparison to their photo-identification catalogue of whales seen in previous years. Cascadia Research, an Olympia-based non-profit research organization has been studying the gray whales in Washington since the mid-1980s and maintains the largest photographic catalog of the gray whales that spend summer months feeding in the Pacific Northwest. The photos were very challenging for staff at Cascadia Research to make a match, but a match was finally made with the assistance of some additional photographs from prior to 8 September that were taken by NOAA.

The whale was identified as CRC-175. This whale has been observed feeding during the summer in California, Oregon, Washington, and Vancouver Island on many occasions since 1995. The whale was frequently observed around Neah Bay having been observed within the Makah Usual and Accustomed Fishing and Hunting Grounds in seven of the twelve years it was observed.

The ability to identify this whale speaks highly of the staff of Cascadia Research and of the effort to collect gray whale photographs for identification by gray whale researchers up and down the coast. The results of this identification show the power of photo identification as a management tool.

The Makah Tribe is currently proposing to use photo-identification as a tool to limit their impact on whales that feed in the Pacific Northwest during the summer (whales which are commonly called the Pacific Coast Feeding Aggregation). The Makah Tribe has submitted a proposal to NOAA Fisheries for a hunt that is limited to the migratory season for gray whales, between December 1 and May 31st, to reduce the chance they will harvest a whale that feeds in the local environment. All whales that are landed will be photographed by the Makah Tribe's marine mammal biologist and by biologists of NOAA Fisheries. These photographs will be compared to Cascadia Research's photo-catalogue of whales known to feed in the Pacific Northwest during the

summer. Under the proposal, if a whale is landed that feeds in the Pacific Northwest during the summer, than it will count against a conservative limit called an “allowable bycatch level”. If the allowable bycatch level is exceeded than all future hunts for the year will be suspended. The ability of Cascadia Research to identify the whale killed on September 8, 2007 shows the power of photo-identification as a tool for a conservative, well-managed Makah whale hunt.

The Makah Tribe’s proposal to resume whale hunts is currently being reviewed by NOAA Fisheries. NOAA Fisheries published a draft Environmental Impact Statement on May 9, 2008 that assessed the impacts of the hunt on the human environment. The draft Environmental Impact Statement is available for review at www.nwr.noaa.gov/Marine-Mammals/Whales-Dolphins-Porpoise/Gray-Whales/Makah-DEIS-info.cfm. NOAA Fisheries is currently analyzing and preparing response to public comments. Cascadia Research Collective has a more complete report on photo-identification studies of PCFA whales conducted in 2007 on their website at <http://www.cascadiaresearch.org/graywhale.htm>.

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