

Quantifying and evaluating human interaction with juvenile harbor seals (*Phoca vitulina*) through strandings along the coast of southern Maine

Harbor Seals (*Phoca vitulina*) have faced overhunting and other anthropogenic stresses, resulting in negative effects to their populations. Human disturbances today include pedestrians near haul-out sites, vessel-based tourism, low flying airplanes, and fishing gear entanglement. The objective of this study was to quantify and evaluate human interaction in juvenile Harbor Seals through stranding calls along the southern coast of Maine. Specifically, this study investigated human interaction through beachgoers and nearby home owners at stranding sites. It has been observed that the result of human interaction with seal pups is abandonment and death. Seal stranding data in the summer of 2013-2015 from the Marine Mammals of Maine allowed visualizations of the frequency of human interaction that takes place. Results include large clusters of human interaction events in Harbor seal strandings between Scarborough and Wells, and heightened dependent Harbor seal pup strandings during the months of May and June. These results will help Marine Mammals of Maine target their outreach programs to specific geographic locations, and increase public awareness in order to decrease the amount of interactions between humans and seals.