

# Petersburg Marine Mammal Center

## Spring 2023



Humpback whale in Frederick Sound  
Photo by Kelly Bakos

## ALL HANDS ON DECK: Helping Marine Mammals

### FREE PRESENTATION & ANNUAL MEETING

**Tuesday, May 9th**  
**Petersburg Public Library**  
**6:30pm**

Our annual public meeting will be held on May 9th at 6:30 pm at the Petersburg Public Library. Immediately to follow the short meeting, we are excited to announce that our speaker will be Sadie Wright. Sadie is NOAA Fisheries' Alaska Region Large Whale Entanglement and Oil Spill Response Coordinator and will be presenting on the large whale entanglement response program in Alaska. She will provide an exciting overview of the response program and marine mammal stranding network, including aerial drone and underwater video showing methods of assessing and disentangling large whales.

Petersburg Marine Mammal Center has been a proud and active member of the network since 2008. In close coordination with NOAA Fisheries, stranding response is a key focus of our organization's efforts. The PMMC stranding team is made up of about 20 trained active volunteers. Each year, the stranding team trains on skills to assess an entanglement, and with hands-on techniques. Mentoring is provided by our seasoned pros—including Barry Bracken, Don Holmes, Sunny Rice, and Scott Roberge—who continue to be of utmost importance and pass along their vast knowledge to the rest of the team.

Please join us on May 9, at 6:30 pm, at the Petersburg Public Library for our annual public meeting and to learn more about stranding response!

## THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT

A huge THANK YOU to our current members and donors! We are a volunteer-run organization and 100% of your membership funds and donations go directly to our outreach, education and marine mammal stranding response programs.

Our membership and donation support has shrunk since the pandemic started, but our education and stranding response has carried on despite dwindling funds. If you are a previous member and have not renewed, please consider rejoining our organization to ensure we can continue serving the Petersburg area. Memberships can be renewed online at: [www.petersburgmarinemammal.org/membership](http://www.petersburgmarinemammal.org/membership).

Checks can also be mailed (PO Box 1618, Petersburg, Alaska 99833) or dropped off at our upcoming annual meeting and presentation about marine mammal stranding on Tuesday, May 9th.

**Thank you for your ongoing support!**  
**We hope to see you in person at our annual meeting and special presentation on May 9th.**



Emaciated Steller Sea Lion  
(Photo by Brad Hunter)

## Report on a Sea Lion

—By Barry Bracken

Shortly after noon on January 10, 2023, I received a call from a neighbor who lives down the beach from us in Petersburg saying that a small sea lion was attempting to come ashore in front of her house. She said it didn't look well. I responded and saw that the animal was a very emaciated young-of-the-year Steller sea lion. It was upright when I first saw it, and then it laid over on its side. As I approached to assess and photograph, it responded by getting up weakly and swimming away from me. It swam a little over 200 yards down the beach and hauled out on a small rock in front of Brad Hunter's house at 913C Sandy Beach Road. I attempted to contact National Marine Fisheries Service marine mammal response personnel at that point, but did not get an answer.

This is the description of end of life Brad Hunter, who observed the event, sent to me:

"We first saw her out on the bigger 4' high rock surrounded by water. It left the rock as the tide was coming in, but the water was not so high that it required leaving yet. Then she weakly swam in the direction of our house in shallow water until she, with difficulty, crawled out at the waters edge. It got on a rock maybe 12" high but fell over on her side between two small rocks and appeared too weak to get out from being wedged between the two small rocks. That is when it

became apparent to me how very weak she was. Her head was pointed seaward and partially in the water. Her head would go under and then come up periodically for a breath. This went on for a couple of minutes but not very long. A couple of times I noticed she was blowing water from her nose when she exhaled. Then her head did not come up and the body quivered a couple of times and was still. I figure it was a blessing in a way that the tide was coming in, or else the dying process may have been strung out over a much longer time period."

Brad called me as soon as it died and, because the tide was still coming in, I went down immediately and we hauled the carcass above the tide line and tied it off. We did a cursory examination of the carcass and took measurements. We saw no visible signs of injury or human interaction.

At this point I called the stranding hotline again, waited on line several minutes until someone answered and gave them a description of the event. When a member of the Juneau Office responded, they suggested we freeze the carcass if possible. I contacted the Alaska Department of Fish and Game and found out they have a freezer available that was adequate to hold the

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Stranding volunteers collect a deceased Steller Sea Lion for further study (Photo by Toby Bakos — PMMC/NOAA MMHSRP Permit #932-1905)

*(SEA LION, Continued from Page 2)*

carcass intact. I then called Scott Roberge, who is on our stranding team, who in turn called Toby Bakos, our Stranding Coordinator. Together we wrapped the carcass in a tarp, and Scott and Toby took it to ADFG to freeze. The carcass was later shipped to the Marine Mammal Lab in Juneau for necropsy. We are still awaiting formal results, but based on condition suspect starvation.

This is the second emaciated young sea lion that our stranding team has responded to in the immediate vicinity of Petersburg since our response team was formed. The first was captured alive and given IV fluids in an attempt to revive it enough to send to the Alaska Sealife Center in Seward for rehabilitation. Unfortunately, it died during the night. The carcass was shipped and the cause of death was determined to be starvation. We suspect that this occurs quite frequently in nature for a number of possible reasons and that these two animals just happened to be where they could be seen and responded to.

*Only qualified and authorized personnel can respond to an marine mammal entanglement. If you see a stranded, injured, entangled, or dead marine mammal, call the NOAA Fisheries Alaska Statewide 24-hour Stranding Hotline, (877) 925-7773. Petersburg Marine Mammal Center's entanglement response team operates strictly under a permit from NOAA for any entanglement response activities. To volunteer in the Petersburg area, contact Toby Bakos, PMMC's Stranding Coordinator (907-650-7325).*



Students observing an iceberg during Summer Science Camp (Photo by Kelly Bakos)

**SUMMER SCIENCE CAMP**  
—By Kelly Bakos

Our summer science camp is still going strong! This year the camp will continue to focus on marine and terrestrial science with a special addition of geology and glaciology. In support of this new unit, we just received a grant from the Alaska Community Foundation to help offset partial costs for taking the campers on a field trip to the LeConte Glacier. Camp will take place July 30th to August 4th, and we will begin accepting applications in June from students entering 6th-8th grade. Notices will be posted on our Facebook page (@Petersburg Marine Mammal Center - PMMC) so keep an eye out if you know a potential camper, or contact us directly.



Audience watching a Petersburg Science Series presentation (Photo by PMMC)

**PETERSBURG SCIENCE SERIES**  
—By Sunny Rice

PMMC returned to in-person scientific talks at our Petersburg Science Series this year after taking a break during the Covid pandemic. Our goal is to have one talk per month during the winter months, and when researchers visit town during the summer months. Our next presentation will be on Tuesday, May 16 at the Petersburg Public Library. Dr. Tyler Hennon, an oceanographer with the University of Alaska Fairbanks, will give a talk highlighting new information about Frederick Sound and nearby waters collected by commercial trollers in an exciting new partnership that should give insights into the understudied inside waters of Southeast Alaska. Come learn how the temperature and salinity of the water varies throughout the year and how that impacts the food web.

## THANK YOU!

PMMC would like to acknowledge the following individuals and businesses who have been important supporters, advisors and members over the years:

Alaska Passages  
Alaska Sea Adventures (Dennis & Toni Rogers)  
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The Petersburg Marine Mammal Center develops EDUCATION programs, assists RESEARCH efforts and is a disseminator of INFORMATION on research and sightings of marine mammals in Southeast Alaska.

## Board of Directors

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2) Like us on Facebook at **Petersburg Marine Mammal Center - PMMC**

2) Visit our new website at [www.petersburgmarinemammal.org](http://www.petersburgmarinemammal.org)

The Petersburg Marine Mammal Center is a registered 501 (c)(3) nonprofit organization

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