

Read, A.J. and P.R. Wade. 2000. Status of marine mammals in the United States. *Conservation Biology* 14(4):929-940. August 2000.

**Abstract:**

The 1994 amendments to the U. S. Marine Mammal Protection Act required, for the first time, an assessment of the status of every marine mammal stock in the United States. We draw conclusions about the status of marine mammals from assessments of 153 stocks conducted to meet the requirements of these amendments. We found important regional differences in the status of stocks. Most stocks in the Atlantic and Pacific experience human-induced mortality (takes), primarily from gill-net fisheries. The proportion of stocks with takes was lower in the Gulf of Mexico and Hawaii, areas with few gill-net fisheries. Estimated takes exceeded removal limits for 29% of stocks in the Atlantic, 14% in the Pacific, 8% in Alaska, 7% in the Gulf of Mexico, and 0% in Hawaii. Twenty-eight stocks are listed as threatened or endangered under the U. S. Endangered Species Act. Most, but not all, baleen whale stocks are recovering after cessation of commercial harvests. Many species of pelagic cetaceans, including beaked and sperm whales, are vulnerable to mortality in pelagic drift-net fisheries. Most pinniped stocks experience takes, but none of these takes exceeds removal limits, and all pinniped stocks on mainland coasts of the United States are increasing in abundance. Quantitative data on trends in abundance are available for few cetacean stocks, emphasizing the difficulty of monitoring trends in these species. These stock assessments have greatly advanced our understanding of the status of marine mammals in the United States, but information gaps remain, particularly regarding stock structure and possible mortality in unmonitored fisheries.