

The effect of predation (current and historical) by humpback whales (Megaptera novaeangliae) on fish abundance near Kodiak Island, Alaska.

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Abstract

Humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) are significant marine consumers. To examine the potential effects of humpback whale predation on fish abundance near Kodiak Island, Alaska, consumption (kg of prey daily) and prey removal (kg of prey annually) were modeled for a historic feeding aggregation of humpback whales off northeastern Kodiak Island, Alaska. A current population was modeled by using an estimate of the 2002 humpback whale abundance. A historic rate of removal was modeled using a prewhaling abundance estimate (population size prior to 1926). Two provisional humpback whale diets were used to model consumption rate. One diet was based on the stomach contents of whales that were commingled at the Hobron whaling station in Kodiak, Alaska, between 1926 and 1937, and the second diet, based on local prey items determined by fish surveys conducted within the study area, was used to model consumption rate by the current population. The latter diet was also used to model consumption by the current population and to project a consumption rate by the current population were to grow to reach the historic population size. Models of these simulated diets showed that the current population likely removes nearly 8.83 times the amount of prey as the historic population.

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