



Humpback Whale Rescue



Humpback whale entangled in a line and buoy

Entangled Whale

At around 4pm on September 21, 2009, an entangled humpback whale trailing an orange buoy about 150 ft behind it was spotted by two Park visitors on a vessel in lower Glacier Bay. They reported the sighting to a Park dispatcher via VHF radio, and luckily, two Park vessels were nearby to respond.

Quick Response

Within 30 minutes, the keen-eyed crew of the *Serac* had found the entangled whale and was standing by. Shortly thereafter, Park rangers aboard the *Capelin* arrived on scene. Meanwhile on shore, Park mechanic Bruce McDonough readied an inflatable boat for potential use in a disentanglement operation. Park whale biologists Chris Gabriele and Janet Neilson, who are both trained and experienced in whale disentanglement, notified the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) whale stranding network, gathered the Park's whale disentanglement tool kit and arrived at the scene around 5pm in the *Sand Lance* to

The entanglement appeared to prevent the whale from raising its tail to dive...potentially life threatening.

photograph and assess the whale's condition. Assessment involves determining whether the entanglement is likely to be life threatening to the whale, and whether a disentanglement effort is feasible. The whale was traveling rapidly out of Glacier Bay at a steady 6-7 knots, but the entanglement appeared to prevent the whale from raising its tail to dive. Gabriele and Neilson determined that the entanglement was potentially life threatening, and that disentanglement was feasible, but that diminishing daylight and the whale's travel speed precluded a safe attempt that day.

Tracking the Whale

For just such circumstances, the whale rescue kit includes a satellite telemetry buoy which can be attached to the fishing gear that trails behind the whale, so that the whale's location can be tracked until factors such as weather, location, vessel support and personnel converge to create a safe opportunity to try to disentangle the whale. Ranger Wendy Bredow, who is also trained in whale disentanglement,

transferred from the *Capelin* to the *Sand Lance* to help deploy the satellite buoy, which was accomplished at around 6pm. Rangers onboard the *Capelin* stood by as the support boat and Park dispatch staff stayed late to monitor the operation's progress. As the whale continued to swim rapidly west, Park staff headed in for the night.



Glacier Bay staff use a grappling hook to attach the satellite buoy (above) to fishing gear trailing the whale

Lucky Whale

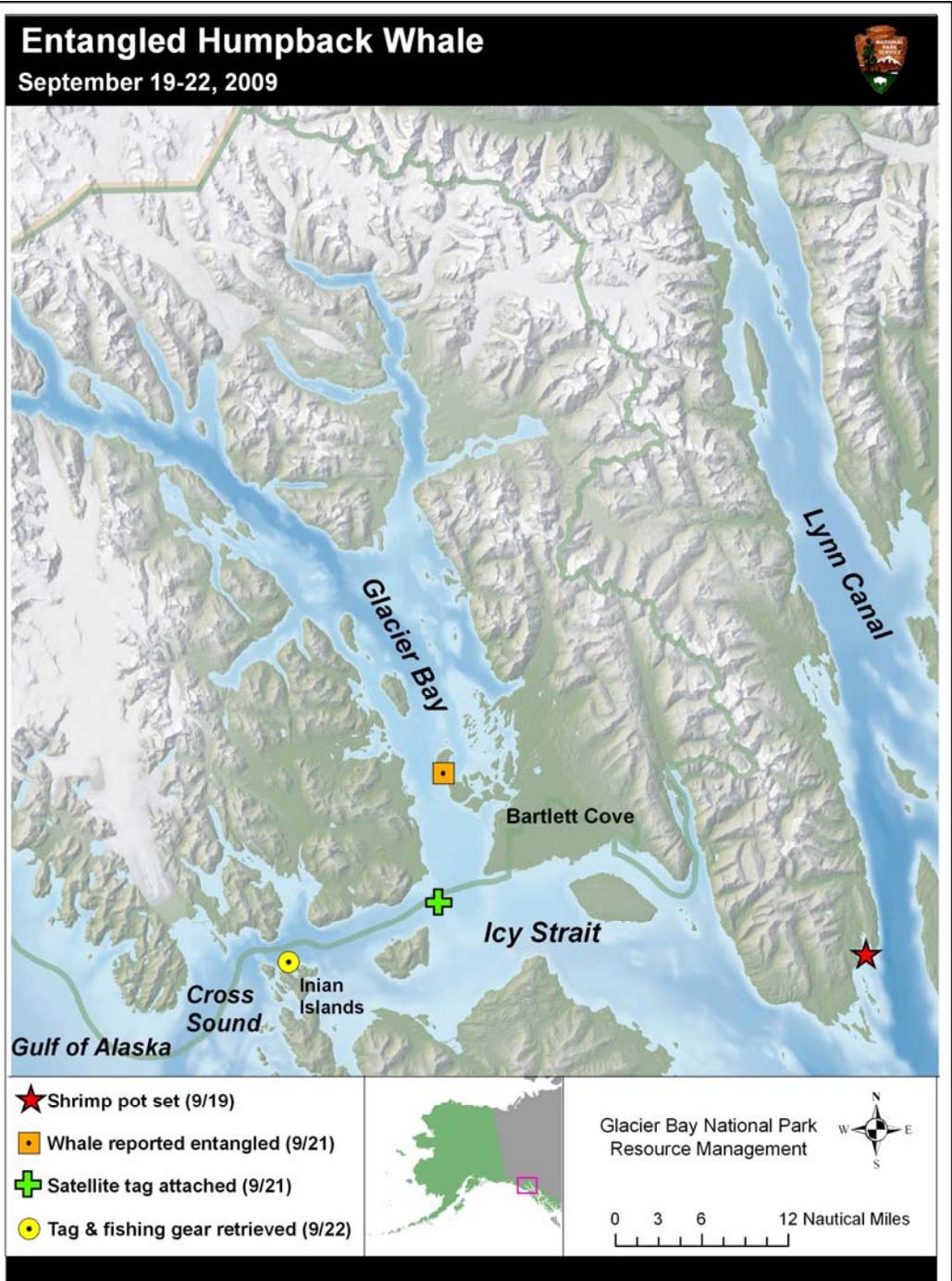
Satellite data gathered overnight indicated that the telemetry buoy was nearly stationary at a remote location in the Inian Islands, approximately 12 miles west of where the whale was last seen. When they heard about the entangled whale, Inian Island residents Jane Button and Greg Howe (Greg is the son of the late Bob Howe, former GLBA Superintendent) offered to skiff over to the buoy's location. They confirmed that the buoy was no longer attached to a whale, and better yet, the rest of the fishing gear was there too! They retrieved the satellite buoy and fishing gear (over 300 ft of polyester line) and reported that the whale was nowhere in sight.

The owner of the gear, who was contacted by Kaili Jackson of NMFS using information on the labeled buoy, said he had set a recreational shrimp pot on the previous Saturday in Lower Lynn Canal and discovered it missing on Monday.

This whale was fairly lucky, having been entangled for no more than four days and swimming at least 64 miles, compared to several whales that have been disentangled in Hawaii after having migrated 2,500 miles or more trailing fishing gear from Alaska!



Several Glacier Bay staff are trained to respond to whale entanglements



A Whale-Sized Thank You!

Because several entangled whales are reported in the North Pacific each year, the NMFS and National Marine Sanctuary Program have made a major effort to train whale entanglement response teams in several towns in Alaska, Hawaii and California, following on the successful North Atlantic disentanglement network that originated in the 1980s at the Center for Coastal Studies in Provincetown, Massachusetts.

Several GLBA staff have trained as first-responders for whale entanglement, and GLBA maintains a cache of specialized disentanglement tools. These resources and the Park's detailed Marine Mammal Stranding Protocol help ensure safe and efficient response efforts. Responding to this event was truly an inter-divisional Park effort with essential support from the NMFS. A huge (whale-sized) thank you to everyone who was involved!