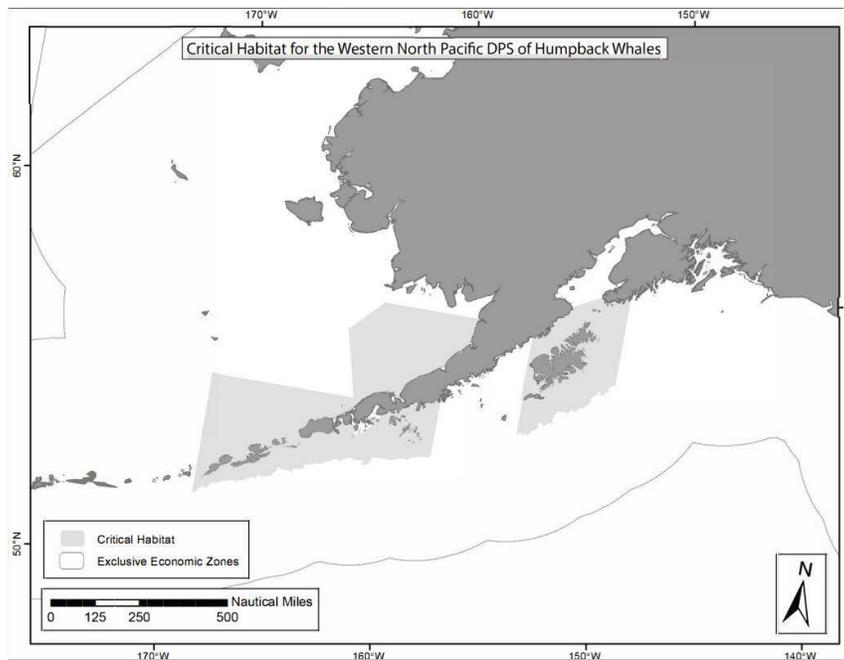




NOAA Fisheries Announces Proposed Designation of Critical Habitat for Humpback Whales off Pacific Coast

Today, NOAA Fisheries [announced](#) in the [Federal Register](#) a proposed rule to designate critical habitat for the humpback whales under the Endangered Species Act off the coasts of Alaska, Washington, Oregon and California. The designation includes more than 300,000 square nautical miles as new critical habitat to protect from oil spills, ship traffic and entanglements in fishing gear. The proposed designation would protect three distinct population segments (DPSs) of humpback whales: the endangered Western North Pacific DPS, the endangered Central America DPS and the threatened Mexico DPS. The areas being proposed as critical habitat are major feeding grounds for one or more of the DPSs and would protect prey species that are critical to the conservation of humpback whales.

Under the proposed designation in Alaska, critical habitat would be designated for the Western North Pacific DPS in Bristol Bay, the eastern Aleutians, the Shumagin Islands and the waters surrounding Kodiak.



Critical habitat for the Mexico DPS would include the aforementioned areas in addition to the Bering Sea and the Gulf of Alaska, which includes Southeast Alaska, the Prince William Sound Area, as well as the west coast.

Last year, the Center for Biological Diversity, the Turtle Island Restoration Network and the Wishtoyo Foundation sued the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) for not following through on a 2016 plan to designate two groups of Pacific Ocean humpback whales as endangered and a third group as threatened. NMFS later agreed to a settlement.

Once critical habitat is designated, federal agencies must consult with NOAA to make sure that any activities they authorize, fund or carry out are not likely to destroy or harm the critical habitat

NOAA is seeking [comments](#) on all aspects of the proposed critical habitat designations through Dec. 9, 2019 and will conduct public hearings, which will be announced in a separate notice in the Federal Register. NOAA will consider information received before making final designations.

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