

Environmental Studies Program: Studies Development Plan | FY 2022–2023

Title	Tag You're It! Habitat Use of Whales of the U.S. West Coast and Hawai'i (PC-22-04)
Administered by	Pacific OCS Region
BOEM Contact(s)	Desray Reeb (desray.reeb@boem.gov)
Procurement Type(s)	Cooperative Agreement
Conducting Organization(s)	Oregon State University
Total BOEM Cost	TBD
Performance Period	FY 2022–2024 (18 months)
Final Report Due	TBD
Date Revised	August 6, 2021
PICOC Summary	
<i><u>Problem</u></i>	There are currently no commercially operational offshore floating wind facilities to inform the siting of potential wind energy sites offshore Hawai'i as it relates to the potential impacts of these developments on humpback whales. Additionally, with the beginning of decommissioning activities on the horizon in the Santa Barbara Channel area, the potential impacts to large whale species need to be assessed.
<i><u>Intervention</u></i>	Collate and analyze existing whale telemetry data to identify residence times, home ranges, seasonal shifts, hot spots of aggregation, and dive profiles of large whale species to better understand habitat usage.
<i><u>Comparison</u></i>	These results can be used as baseline data and compared with during and/or post construction monitoring to evaluate and/or validate potential impacts from these and other activities.
<i><u>Outcome</u></i>	Derive spatially and temporally consistent data products or layers of whale occurrence, movements, and behavior offshore Hawai'i and in the Santa Barbara Channel area to help inform decisions about the siting of offshore floating wind development as well as the timing of conventional energy decommissioning activities.
<i><u>Context</u></i>	California, Oregon, Washington, and Hawai'i

BOEM Information Need(s): BOEM needs data on large whale occurrence, movement, and dive behavior in order to site offshore floating wind development and conduct decommissioning activities in the Southern California Planning Area in a way that minimizes any potential impacts to these species from these activities. This information will allow for compliance with BOEM's regulatory responsibilities under the MMPA, ESA, and National Environmental Policy Act. This information is applicable to all BOEM Programs.

Background: BOEM has funded, and is currently funding, efforts to collect seasonal data on the occurrence and distribution of cetacean (whale, dolphin, and porpoise) species (BOEM 2021a; 2021b; 2020a; 2020b; 2017; 2014a; 2014b; 1999; 1983), as well as ambient soundscape data (BOEM 2021a), within the California Current Ecosystem. These efforts provide an important baseline and large-scale context for BOEM's assessment of potential impacts to marine protected species. However, to make this

information even more valuable, it is critically important to gain finer-scale, high-quality information at sufficient spatial resolution (nominal grids of 10-25 km depending on application) on whale movements, home ranges, residency times, seasonal shifts, hot spots of aggregation, and dive behaviors and relate these metrics to environmental variables such as sea surface temperature, chlorophyll-a concentrations, and seafloor depth and slope (ideally over multiple concurrent years). These data would provide a 3-D look into how large whale species in the Santa Barbara Channel area and offshore Hawai'i use their habitat. The importance of this data, presented as spatially and temporally explicit layers, cannot be overstated when considering offshore floating wind development and the identification of potential mitigative strategies to minimize any potential impacts to these species as a result of these activities, as well as the timing of future conventional energy decommissioning activities.

Oregon State University (OSU) has been collecting telemetry data for four species of baleen whales along the U.S. West Coast for the past 30 years. Additionally, in the last 3-4 years, advanced satellite tags have enabled the collection of dive behavior data. Cascadia Research Collective and MarEcoTel also have telemetry data in these areas. These data need to be collated, analyzed, and interpreted in order to be available to inform management decisions. Being the lowest cost element of this process, this represents large financial savings and large returns for BOEM.

Objectives: The purpose of this study is to use existing telemetry data to gain a better understanding of how four large whale species (fin, blue, humpback, and gray whales) that occur off the U.S West Coast use their habitat.

Methods: The first phase of this study will focus on collating and analyzing data collected in the Santa Barbara Channel area and in areas offshore Hawai'i, with specific interest around the island of O'ahu. OSU's existing telemetry data (movement metrics and dive behavior) for fin, blue, humpback, and gray whales will be consolidated. These data will be integrated with telemetry data from Cascadia Research Collective and MarEcoTel for the same species. Data integrity validation will be undertaken using approved QA/QC methodologies. The data will be analyzed using state-of-the-art analytical methods to derive metrics such as residence time, home range, seasonal shifts, and hot spots of aggregation, and to relate these metrics to environmental variables (e.g., sea surface temperature, chlorophyll-a concentrations, and seafloor depth and slope). ArcGIS will be used to produce temporally and spatially explicit layers.

Specific Research Question(s):

1. At what rate are the whales moving?
2. What is the seasonal occupation rate in the areas of interest?
3. Are any whale species resident in the areas of interest? If so, where and for how long?
4. Can home ranges be identified for the different whale species?
5. How deep and how long do these whale species dive?
6. Does feeding occur in the areas of interest? If so, where, at what depths, and how often do they feed?
7. What is the spatial/geographic spread of the dives?
8. What are the drivers behind the identified movements/behaviors? Are the drivers biotic or abiotic?

Current Status: N/A

Publications Completed: N/A

Affiliated WWW Sites: N/A

References:

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- BOEM. 2014a. 2014 California Current Cetacean & Ecosystem Assessment Survey (CalCurCEAS): Final Report to Bureau of Ocean Energy Management regarding surveys of Windfloat and Wave Energy Areas. <https://www.boem.gov/PR-14-OBS/>
- BOEM. 2014b. Pacific Continental Shelf Environmental Assessment (PaCSEA): Aerial Seabird and Marine Mammal Surveys off Northern California, Oregon, and Washington, 2011-2012. <https://espis.boem.gov/final%20reports/5427.pdf>
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- BOEM. 2021b. Seabird and Marine Mammal Surveys Near Potential Renewable Energy Sites Offshore Central and Southern California. <https://www.boem.gov/pc-17-01/>