



Media Advisory

For Immediate Release

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Dead Fin Whale to Be Removed from Border Field State Park beach at the Tijuana Estuary

What: California State Parks officials are coordinating a multi-agency effort to remove a stranded dead fin whale from the beach at Border Field State Park within the Tijuana River National Estuarine Research Reserve.

Who: California State Parks, US Fish & Wildlife Service, NOAA Fisheries

When: Initiating on May 29th, 2014. Removal operations to continue until anticipated completion on May 30 or May 31.

Where: The beach at Border Field State Park approximately 3/4 mile north of the U.S./Mexico border

Visuals:

- **Broadcast media:** State and Federal Wildlife Officials will be available for interviews on site at the western terminus of Monument Road at Border Field State Park at approximately 2:00 pm on May 29 after initial necropsy investigations have begun.
- **Print media:** High-resolution JPEGs available upon request.

Important Information:

The animal is a fin whale (*Balaenoptera physalus*), the 2nd largest whale species. It has been measured at 57 feet long. The whale was first documented on the beach at Border Field State Park the morning of May 23.

It is beached very near actively nesting endangered and threatened bird species. Endangered California least terns (*Sternula antillarum browni*) and threatened western snowy plovers (*Charadrius nivosus nivosus*) are nesting in areas immediately east of the stranding site and north and south of the site along the back dunes of the Tijuana Estuary. It is imperative that members of the public respect closed area designations on the beachfront to protect the nesting birds. The nearest active least tern nest is only a few hundred feet away from the whale carcass. The public is advised to stay back from the beached whale carcass a minimum of 50 feet and to respect all closed area designations to help protect endangered and threatened species.

Necropsy and carcass removal operations will be initiated around noon on May 29th and will continue at least until the end of the day on Friday, May 30th. The necropsy will be conducted by federal and state biologists and the dissection and removal operations will be conducted using heavy equipment. Safety of the workers and the general public will be maintained by controlling access to the general area. Some areas of the beach at Border Field State Park will be closed to the general public for a limited time period during these operations.

Officials plan to remove the whale carcass as soon as is feasible. The carcass provides an attractant to scavenging wildlife that may in turn prey upon the endangered and threatened birds, and their chicks and eggs in the adjacent nesting areas. Chicks of both species are expected to hatch soon and may move outside the boundaries designated as closed areas to the public. Beginning on May 29th, Biologists from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association's Southwest Fisheries Science Center will assist local federal and State land managers in conducting a forensic investigation of the decomposing carcass. This is an effort to determine possible cause of death for the animal, however due to the highly decomposed nature of the carcass, the potential for gathering significant scientific evidence is limited, but officials intend to make an effort to collect any scientific information that is obtainable at this time given the condition of the whale carcass.

Working together over the last six days, staff from California State Parks and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service considered many options for dealing with the carcass. They decided against attempting to tow it out to sea because it is decomposing and it is uncertain whether it would remain intact under tow. Speaking for California State Parks, District Superintendent Clay Phillips said, "We also felt it would be irresponsible of us to risk transferring our problem to the coastline of another community in the United States or Mexico." Leaving it to decompose naturally on the beach or burying it on the beach were also discarded as potential options because the carcass may attract scavengers and predators to this site immediately adjacent to

endangered species nesting habitat during the peak period for nesting activity. The species that would be especially vulnerable to increased predator presence in the area are the endangered California least tern and threatened western snowy plover.

Attempts will be made to conserve some of the whale bones for potential future interpretive and educational purposes, but officials are unsure if that is a feasible option until necropsy and dissection operations are completed.

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