

Harbor Seal Population Change In Alaska - The Big Picture

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Harbor seal populations in Alaska have been monitored at specific sites since the 1970s, with more widespread and consistent monitoring since about 1990. As measured by the sample of sites with data, there have been regional differences in the population trajectories (i.e., population change over time). Sampled populations at Kodiak and in Bristol Bay declined dramatically beginning in the 1970s and have been increasing in the 1990s, but remain at reduced levels. Seal populations in Prince William Sound declined throughout the 1990s, but might be stabilizing. The seal population in Glacier Bay has declined dramatically throughout the 1990s with the decline apparently continuing. At sample sites in northern and southern Southeast Alaska, seal populations increased from the 1980s and are currently stable. Some caution is needed in interpreting these estimates, as they are from a non-random sample of seal haulouts; glacial ice sites in particular are poorly represented and might have different patterns. In addition, the observed patterns largely are based on molting counts; the limited pupping period counts (i.e., June) show somewhat different patterns.

Marine Science in Alaska: 2005 Symposium Abstracts

**January 24-26, 2005
Hilton Hotel
Anchorage, Alaska**

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