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Identity of the Two Wayward Sacramento Delta Humpback Whales Reveals They are from California

(Sausalito, Calif – June 5, 2007) – Results from biopsy samples taken from the two wayward humpback whales that traveled nearly 80 miles inland up the Sacramento River in May revealed that both are from the Eastern North Pacific stock of humpbacks, which are part of the California feeding population. In addition, the calf has been identified as a female. John Calambokidis, a research biologist with Cascadia Research, collected the tissue samples from the mother on May 21 and from the calf on May 29. The sub samples of these tissues were sent to Dr Scott Baker and Debbie Steel of the Marine Mammal Institute in Oregon for genetic analysis.

“The fact that the calf has been identified as a female and could possibly add to the population of already endangered humpbacks, shows how significant our rescue efforts were in helping this species thrive in the wild,” said Dr. Frances Gulland, Director of Veterinary Science at The Marine Mammal Center. “Through the tremendous efforts of local, state and federal agencies, we were able to provide a humanitarian response, and at the same time, learn more about these whales. Their boat injuries highlight the risk marine mammals now face as ocean traffic and noise increase.”

The report from the Marine Mammal Institute indicates that the mitochondrial DNA marker in the California feeding population is virtually absent from the British Columbia and South East Alaska feeding populations, therefore the Sacramento Delta humpbacks were not lost members of that British Columbia feeding herd. The last humpback whale to travel up the Sacramento River to Rio Vista was Humphrey in 1985. Genetic testing completed by Dr. Scott Baker showed that Humphrey was also part of the California feeding population.

About The Marine Mammal Center:

Headquartered in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area in Sausalito, California, The Marine Mammal Center is a nonprofit veterinary hospital, research and educational center dedicated to the rescue and rehabilitation of ill and injured marine mammals - primarily elephant seals, harbor seals and California sea lions - and to the study of their health. Since 1975, The Center has rescued and treated thousands upon thousands of marine mammals and has accumulated a body of knowledge about marine mammal and ocean health from its patients. By educating the public about marine mammals, The Center hopes to foster ocean stewardship and conservation. The Center is supported almost entirely by private funds. For more information, visit www.marinemammalcenter.org

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