

\$100,000 Emergency Prescott Grant Awarded to Help Offset Cost of Last Year's Marine Mammal Stranding Crisis Across Three CA Counties

The Marine Mammal Care Center Leads Effort to Secure Federal Funds in Support of Last Year's Response to Stranded Marine Mammals

LOS ANGELES, Calif. (January 29, 2024) – The National Fish & Wildlife Foundation has announced that it has awarded a \$100,000 grant to a group led by Los Angeles County's Marine Mammal Care Center to help with the costs incurred during the region's response to the worst toxic algae bloom ever recorded along the coastlines of Ventura, Los Angeles, and Orange Counties. The grant will be split amongst the five marine mammal stranding organizations working in these counties.

“Marine mammal populations face more and more threats along our coastline as domoic acid events and adverse conditions created by climate change become regular occurrences,” said CEO John Warner of the Marine Mammal Care Center (MMCC). “Our hope is to address these growing issues by strengthening response capacity along Ventura, Los Angeles, and Orange Counties, and to add our voice and expertise to a growing coalition working to effectively and efficiently respond as these emergency events become more frequent.”

Unfortunately, expectations and projections indicate that similar domoic acid events and extreme El Niño events will occur more and more frequently, resulting in more and more stress on the organizations responding to marine mammals who are sick, injured and stranded along the coast.

NOAA's John H. Prescott Marine Mammal Rescue Assistance Grant Program provided the competitive grant through its emergency program, designed to address a situation that “immediately or unexpectedly raises the costs for stranding or entanglement response, recovery, sample/evidence collection, diagnostics, or rehabilitation.” The \$100,000 will be split as follows:

- \$31,000 to Channel Islands Marine & Wildlife Institute
- \$28,000 to the Marine Mammal Care Center
- \$24,996 to Pacific Marine Mammal Center in Orange County
- \$10,000 to the California Wildlife Center in Malibu
- \$6,004 to Ocean Animal Response and Research Alliance

“MMCC's services are essential to the economic vitality of Los Angeles County, home to some of the country's most popular beaches which receive millions of visitors each year that contribute to the local economy,” wrote Congressmembers Nanette Barragán and Ted Lieu in supporting the grant application. “Marine mammals strand regularly across all 75 miles of the Los Angeles County coastline, and timely response is critical for both the welfare of marine mammals and public safety of beach visitors. Over the last seven years, there has been an annual average of 272 responses to stranded marine mammals in Los Angeles County, resulting in rescues and admission to MMCC facilities.”

Warner said last year's emergency domoic acid event cost the non-profit organization more than \$400,000 and as similar events become more frequent, his and other rescue organizations will be pushed to the brink.

"A great deal more work needs to be done if we are to be truly prepared for the new normal in our oceans," he said. "We are funded almost entirely through philanthropic donations, and while this NOAA grant is helpful, we are hopeful that organizations like ours can collaborate with federal, state and local governments throughout the region to make this a priority issue and fund the ever-increasing costs to rescue and rehabilitate stranded animals, address public safety issues on our beaches, and educate the public."

MMCC is the only year-round hospital for marine animals in Los Angeles County, and more than 10,000 animals have been rehabilitated by its dedicated team of staff and volunteers since 1992. A non-profit 501(c)3 organization, MMCC depends on grants and individual contributions to meet the needs of marine mammal patients. Donations can be made at: <https://marinemammalcare.org/donate/>

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