

Dead Humpback Washes Ashore in Chiniak

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An adult male humpback on the beach in Chiniak appears to have been killed by orca whales. Bree Witteveen photo

Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

Chiniak residents got an unexpected visitor last week when an adult male humpback washed up on the beach across from Road's End restaurant. Bree Witteveen is a marine mammal specialist and assistant professor at the Kodiak Seafood and Marine Science Center on Near Island; she said she received two calls about the whale.

"Yeah, I got a call about it on Wednesday afternoon from one of the loggers that drives that road a lot and he said he saw a whale on the beach," she said. "And later in the day I got a second report of the whale that was out there and this report said there was a lot of blood in the water which made me believe it was a rather fresh carcass."

Witteveen made it out to Chiniak on Thursday and determined the whale was the victim of a killer whale attack.

-- (Humpback Whale 2 :19 "Well it's missing part of its lower jaw and tongue which is a really common thing when killer whales attack both humpback and gray whales. For some reason they think that jaw and tongue is a bit of a treat and that's all they eat generally and we're left with the partial carcass on the beach.")

Witteveen said the whale is far enough out of the way that they will leave the carcass where it is and let it decompose naturally. She said the spot will most likely be a good bear viewing location in the weeks to come as the whale decomposes and attracts hungry scavengers. While the whale will be fair game for the bears, Witteveen said it is important that community members remember it is not an open invitation for collecting souvenirs.

-- (Humpback Whale 3 :12 “Um I am wanting to remind people that it is illegal to contain hard parts from endangered whales so don’t be tempted to go out and take any bones or baleen or anything like that.”)

Just because residents can’t take anything from the whale doesn’t mean they can’t go check it out. Witteveen said it’s very cool to see and encourages those interested to make the drive out before the carcass gets too stinky.

It’s not uncommon for whales to wash up on shore, and Witteveen said the best thing someone can do if they find a whale, or any beached marine mammal, is call her at the marine science center or NOAA enforcement.

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