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### **NOAA Cautions Public to Avoid Seal Pups on California Beaches**

NOAA'S **Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary** advises San Francisco Bay Area beachgoers against interacting with any seal pups they may find on the beach. Newborn harbor seal pups, born in late winter and spring, could suffer permanent harm if someone not authorized for marine mammal rescue were to move them. Seals are also federally protected animals under the Marine Mammal Protection Act, and to interfere with one could incur legal penalties.

Each year, healthy harbor seal pups are separated from their mothers by people who mistake them for orphans. The San Francisco-based Farallones sanctuary advises concerned beachgoers to report suspected orphaned or injured pups to a park ranger, or to one of the following facilities to assess the need for rescue:

- The Marine Mammal Center 415-289-SEAL (7325) (24 hrs.)
- Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary 415-561-6622 x200
- Pt. Reyes National Seashore 415-464-5170 (24 hrs.)

Harbor seal mothers normally leave their pups unattended on beaches while feeding at sea. They will later rejoin and nurse them. The presence of humans or dogs near a seal pup could prevent a mother seal from reuniting with her young one.

Such disturbance can result in pup deaths, and if persistent around a seal rookery, could contribute to overall lower birth rates, reduced habitat use and eventual abandonment of seals' haul-out sites. Although some wildlife experts recommend keeping 300 feet from any seal pups, even at that distance disturbance can occur.

"The rule of thumb is, if a seal reacts to your presence – you're too close," said sanctuary marine biologist Jan Roletto. "Avoid eye contact and back away slowly until they no longer notice you."

Approximately one-fifth of the state's harbor seals live in the Farallones sanctuary, whose largest breeding grounds are Bolinas Lagoon and Tomales Bay. They haul out in groups ranging from a few to several hundred. Females generally give birth on sandy beaches or rocky reefs to a single pup, which nurses for three to four weeks. For more information on sanctuary wildlife and programs, visit the sanctuary and sanctuary association's Web sites (see below) or call 415-561-6625.

Designated in 1981, Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary encompasses nearly 1,300 square miles of ocean and coastal waters beyond California's Golden Gate Bridge. The sanctuary supports an abundance of species including the largest breeding seabird rookery in the contiguous United States, and endangered blue and humpback whales.

NOAA understands and predicts changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and conserves and manages our coastal and marine resources. Visit <http://www.noaa.gov>.

On the Web:

Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary: <http://farallones.noaa.gov>

Farallones Marine Sanctuary Association: [www.farallones.org](http://www.farallones.org)

NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries: <http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov>