

# Stellar sea lion protection sought

Greenpeace has demanded that the National Marine Fisheries Service move swiftly to designate the Steller sea lion as an endangered species, saying such a move is already years too late. Greenpeace said the Fisheries Service's failure to curb the reckless over fishing

of pollock in "critical habitat" for Stellers has led to the species' drastic decline. The Steller sea lion was scheduled to be uplisted as an endangered species last month, eight years after Greenpeace and other groups first called for such an action.

The western stock of the Steller, which relies on pollock and other commercial species for its survival, has declined 85 percent between 1960 and the present. A recent National Research Council study says the only factor

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deemed to have a "high likelihood" of explaining the Steller decline is effects of fishing on Steller prey.

"The Steller sea lions are in direct competition with the factory trawlers for food and the Stellers are losing," said Ken Stump, Greenpeace Fisheries campaigner. "The Fisheries Service must not only address how much fish is taken, but where and when."

Over 800,000 metric tons of pollock are extracted annually from areas designated as critical Steller habitat and that volume has been increasing steadily since 1982, when the U.S. first took over management of the fishery. Greenpeace is calling on Congress to conduct hearings on the failure of the

Fisheries Service to protect marine ecosystems as it manages the fisheries.

"Years of excuses and endless stalling must come to an end now," said Gerry Leape, Greenpeace Fisheries legislative director. "The Stellers' plight has been literally studied to death. Let's save the Stellers while there is still time. The endangered listing is the first to accomplish that."

Greenpeace is calling for cuts in the pollock quota in the North Pacific, a ban on U.S. factory trawling and a comprehensive environmental impact statement on the fishery. In spite of dramatically altered conditions in the fishery, such an impact statement has not been conducted in 15 years.