

## **IFAW Marine Mammal Rescue Program Volunteer Program Information**

Thank you for your interest in becoming a volunteer for the International Fund for Animal Welfare, Marine Mammal Rescue Program (formerly known as the Cape Cod Stranding Network). IFAW responds to stranded seals, whales, dolphins, and porpoises on Cape Cod and from the Cape Cod Canal south to the Rhode Island border (SE Mass). In order to cover this much coastline effectively, trained volunteers are critical. Volunteering for a stranding network can be a rewarding experience and there are many different ways volunteers can be involved, from field response and necropsy support to office work and community outreach. Prospective field volunteers should realize that stranding response can be physically demanding and often involves exposure to the elements, heavy lifting and walking on rough terrain. We are pleased that so many people are eager to donate their time to our organization. Prospective volunteers should be aware that due to high interest, we are not able to accept all applicants. Applicants will be selected based on geographic location, experience or skills and availability.

### **How to Become a Volunteer**

The first step in becoming a volunteer for the IFAW Marine Mammal Rescue Program is to complete and send in the [Field Volunteer Application](#). Once it has been reviewed, IFAW staff will notify you of the status of your application. Accepted applicants are required to attend a Stranded Marine Mammal Response Team (SMMRT) training session in order to be placed on the active volunteer call list. Accepted applicants are also required to attend a Level A Data Collection training within the first year of volunteering.

### **Volunteer Requirements**

- All volunteers must be at least eighteen years of age.
- Field volunteers should be in good physical condition, able to lift 50lbs, and able to swim.
- Volunteers must be located within a 20-minute drive to any point of coastline on Cape Cod or the coastline south of Cape Cod to the Rhode Island border.
- All volunteers must attend the Stranded Marine Mammal Response Team training session and pay the initial training fee of \$25.
- All volunteers are required to attend a Level A Data Collection training within the first year of volunteering.
- Volunteers must complete and sign a “Release from Liability” waiver.
- All volunteers are **required to attend a training session annually** to maintain active status.
- Volunteers are responsible for informing IFAW of changes in personal contact information via email to [strandings@ifaw.org](mailto:strandings@ifaw.org) or by calling the office at 508-744-2271.

### **Volunteer Logo Gear**

Upon completion of the Stranded Marine Mammal Response Team training session and payment of initial fees, volunteers will be given their choice of an IFAW hat or t-shirt. Volunteers are encouraged to wear their logo gear when responding to strandings. This will help identify you as a trained IFAW volunteer. Please do not give this gear to non-volunteers.

### **Volunteer Training Fee**

Training fees help defray the costs of training sessions, identification cards, mailings, training manuals, and ID guides. **All volunteers must pay a fee of \$25 payable at the initial training session. Upon payment of this fee, the volunteer will receive an ID card and a hat or t-shirt.** We are no longer requiring an annual fee; however, donations of any amount are always appreciated!

## **Training Sessions and Volunteer Roles**

IFAW Marine Mammal Rescue offers five different training sessions (outlined on page 2) aimed at emphasizing different aspects of our mission. A variety of volunteer opportunities are outlined on pages 3 and 4.

### **IFAW Marine Mammal Rescue Program Training Sessions**

*\*\*\*All accepted applicants must attend  
the Stranded Marine Mammal Response Team training and Level A training\*\*\**

#### **Stranded Marine Mammal Response Team Training**

**\*Required of all new volunteers.**

Provides new and current volunteers with a general overview of IFAW's Marine Mammal Rescue Program, the Marine Mammal Protection Act, strandings on Cape Cod, mass stranding response, safety at the stranding site, and the roles volunteers can play in stranding response. This training also educates volunteers more specifically about cetacean and seal species identification, behavioral observations and supportive care. Volunteers with this training are qualified to assist in handling animals at mass strandings and to respond to single cetacean and pinniped strandings. This training is offered three times per year.

#### **Level A Data Collection Training**

**\*Required of all new volunteers.**

Trains current volunteers to collect Level A data from all marine mammal carcasses for IFAW, as required by NOAA Fisheries. This training teaches species identification, proper photographing and measuring techniques, sexing, sample collection procedures (for age and genetic analyses), and external examination methods. Identification of human interaction cases is also addressed, as well as proper documentation and report protocols. This training is offered three times per year, one month after each of the SMMRT trainings.

#### **Mass Stranding Workshop**

Further prepares current volunteers to respond to mass strandings by elaborating on response skills, teaching new techniques and protocols and promoting team building amongst volunteers and staff. The emphasized topics vary from year to year in order to best prepare volunteers for all aspects of mass stranding response. Topics addressed include supportive care, medical support, tagging and release, health assessment, safety and zoonoses, carcass recovery, necropsy assistance, crowd control, and media relations. This training is offered once per year.

#### **Review Training**

Reviews key points of stranding response including cetacean and pinniped species identification, health assessment, supportive care, and cetacean mass stranding response. This course is intended to refresh and expand upon current volunteers' knowledge and skills. It is offered twice per year.

#### **Public Education and Outreach Training**

Familiarizes current volunteers with IFAW's Education and Outreach Program and better prepares them to be spokespeople for IFAW Marine Mammal Rescue. Introduces the educational activities and props used to educate the public about marine mammals and strandings. Covers essential topics to address and the best ways to portray information about strandings when speaking to the general public.

## **Volunteer Opportunities and Programs**

*\*\*\*All accepted applicants must attend  
the Stranded Marine Mammal Response Team training and Level A training\*\*\**

### **Field Volunteer**

Field volunteers are involved in seal and whale (including dolphin & porpoise) stranding response. All attendees of the SMMRT training are qualified field volunteers. IFAW staff will call upon these individuals to respond to reports of stranded marine mammals and provide information regarding the species, behavior and health. Field volunteers also assist with rescue efforts when necessary, and must be able to tolerate exposure to the elements, walking on rough terrain and heavy lifting.

### **Level A Data Collection Volunteer**

These volunteers have been through both the SMMRT and Level A Data Collection trainings and had one-on-one training with IFAW staff or experienced volunteers in the field. They collect basic data regarding species, sex, length, and condition of the carcass, as well as samples for age and genetic analyses. IFAW is required to collect these data and samples as part of a larger effort to understand trends in marine mammal strandings and populations in general.

### **Transport Volunteer**

Transport volunteers are those who are willing to drive seals from the IFAW overnight holding pen at the warehouse in Yarmouth Port to the appropriate long-term rehabilitation facility. Rehab facilities in our region are the New England Aquarium in Boston, University of New England in Biddeford, ME (volunteers usually drop the seal off to UNE volunteers at the Portsmouth, NH rotary), and Mystic Aquarium in Mystic, CT. Transport volunteers ideally have a vehicle that can fit the seal kennel in back (large station wagons, SUVs or trucks with a cap on the back) and are willing to use it for that purpose. IFAW can supply money for tolls and gas. In some instances, drivers may be needed to transport animals in the IFAW truck, and should be comfortable driving a large vehicle. Any volunteer who has attended the SMMRT training can assist with animal transport.

### **Office Volunteer**

Office volunteers have attended the SMMRT training and are interested in assisting IFAW Marine Mammal Rescue in the office in Yarmouth Port with tasks as they arise. Tasks may include assisting with fundraisers, data entry, mailings, and any other administrative tasks. Office volunteers do not make a specific commitment of time, but are called upon when necessary to help with office work.

### **Necropsy Volunteer**

Any volunteer who has attended the SMMRT training and is interested in assisting with necropsies (animal autopsies) on marine mammal carcasses can sign up to become a necropsy volunteer. These individuals are called upon to assist when IFAW is performing a necropsy. Assistance includes sample labeling and organization, data recording and clean up. Necropsy support can often involve heavy lifting as well.

### **First Responder**

First Responders are volunteers who have built upon the classroom trainings with increased one-on-one beach response with staff members and specialized instruction in small groups. The result of this experience is the development of a core group of volunteers across the coverage region; each of these volunteers is qualified to serve as the initial responder to live stranding reports.

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### **Public Education and Outreach Volunteer**

Education and outreach volunteers have attended the SMMRT and Public Education and Outreach training sessions and participate in community outreach events such as the Wellfleet Oysterfest, AmeriCorps' Earth Celebration and the Chatham Maritime Festival, as well as educational activities in schools as requested.

### **Office Intern Program**

Office Interns are required to commit to being at the IFAW office for at least one day a week for a minimum of three months. Duties include data entry, database management, administrative assistance, photo archiving, and supply organization. Depending on need and ability, office interns may also assist in field response. *For more information on becoming an office intern, please contact the IFAW office for the Office Internship Description and Intern Application Form.*

### **On-Call Stranding Support Program (Coming Soon)**

This program is designed to provide IFAW staff with additional, reliable support for stranding response in order to further improve stranding response and live animal care. Any volunteer who has completed the SMMRT training is qualified to act as a Stranding Support Volunteer. A Stranding Support Volunteer commits to being on-call one day a week for a minimum commitment period of six months. During their on-call day, the Support Volunteer must be readily available to assist with any and all stranding-related tasks. The Support Volunteer is not required to be at the IFAW office, but must be ready to respond at any time on that day. Duties include assisting with: (1) live marine mammal health assessment, collection, transport, handling, and clinical care; (2) carcass recovery, data collection, and necropsy support; (3) gear cleaning and organizing; and (4) any other tasks as needed. *If you are interested in participating in this program, please contact the IFAW office for the Volunteer On-Call Description and Application.*