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## Pacifica City Council dedicates Earth Day and April to the California Gray Whale

*Pacifica Tribune*

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Pacifica has many Earth Day heroes. Beyond its numerous volunteers, advocates and supporters, are the Earth Day mascots. On Monday, Pacifica's City Council proclaimed April 22 - Earth Day 2011 as California Gray Whale Awareness Day and further dedicated the month of April 2011 and the Pacifica Beach Coalition's 2011 Earth Day of Action Event on April 16 to the majestic California Gray Whale.

The Pacifica Beach Coalition dedicates each Earth Day to the ecological health of the planet by recognizing a coastal/shoreline wildlife species. "The health of our environment is determined by the health of our natural ecosystem and wildlife diversity and abundance is a primary indicator of a healthy ecosystem," said Ron Maykel, Pacifica Beach Coalition member and Rockaway Beach Steward.

This year's Earth Day mascot is the California Gray Whale (CGW), also known as the Eastern Pacific Gray Whale. It is the most ancient of the earth's baleen whales. The California Gray Whale is the most abundant and common of the Pacific's whale species and can be seen from Pacifica's shoreline on its annual migrations from its northern feeding sites to its southern breeding site in the Baja Lagoon with a roundtrip totaling over 20,000 miles. Shortly after the birthing of baby

whales the parents make the long journey north again.

Historically, the CGW's existence was threatened primarily by whale hunting. Today the CGW is threatened by many other anthropogenic perturbances, such as industrial and urban pollutants, coastal development impacts, marine vessel traffic, natural resource extraction, sonar communication, and commercial and sport fishing impacts. Additionally, the prospect of climate change by global warming may have serious impacts upon the CGW's northern feeding grounds.

Although incremental public and governmental concerns for whale population decline began as far back as 1930, it was not until the CGW's endangerment classification and the subsequent Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 that significant protection was realized. Due to the concern and efforts of the students of Dana Hills High School, the Eastern Pacific Gray Whale became California's official State Marine Mammal on Aug. 24, 1975. This state legislative act promoted additional awareness regarding California's largest marine mammal. Estimates of the California Gray Whale population is said to be approximately 25,000 today.

Although the California Gray Whale is the newest Earth Day wildlife hero, it is also to be acknowledged through "Gray Whale Awareness Month" to symbolize the value of conservation efforts and awareness for the Pacifica community and beyond.

The CGW follows last year's hero, the recovered California Brown pelican and the prior year's endangered Steelhead trout of Pacifica's San Pedro Creek.

Beyond the integral biological niche that wildlife serves, their value is important for educational, recreational, economic, scientific and aesthetic appeal.

Interestingly, the inspiration for Pacifica's Earth Day Mascots was the Earth Day Proclamation of April 26, 1998, dedicated to Pacifica's Western Snowy Plover. The proclamation was signed by the then-Mayor of Pacifica, Dorothy Edminster, one of Pacifica's past conservation-minded council members.

"I'm thrilled to proclaim Earth Day California Gray Whale Awareness Day and the month of April to the majestic California Gray Whale," said Pacifica Mayor Mary Ann Nihart.

"I hope that all Pacificans and Pacifica businesses join the Earth Day of Action event on April 16 and our efforts raise awareness and save these amazing animals from the harms of pollution from our city and beyond!"

For more information on the Earth Day event on April 16th, please go to [www.pacificabeachcoalition.org](http://www.pacificabeachcoalition.org) (<http://www.pacificabeachcoalition.org>) or call 359-5707.

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