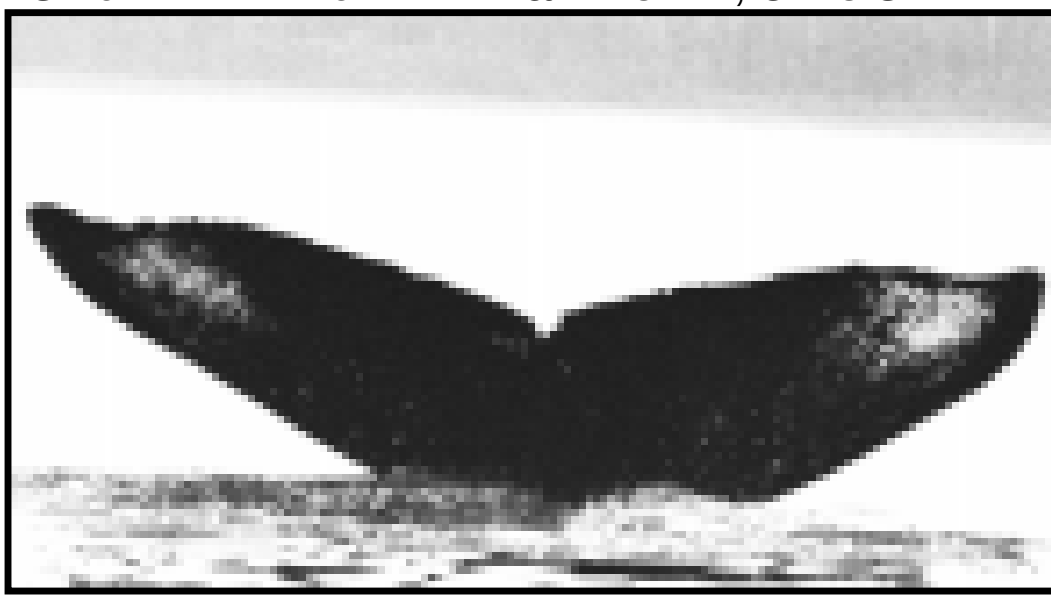
Whale photo catalog no fluke

Researchers Chris Gabriele of Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve and Jan Straley of

GLACIER BAY NATIONAL PARK & PRESERVE; CHRIS GABRIELE



Whale #117—"White Eyes"

the University of Alaska Southeast (Sitka) will be publishing in December a catalog of southeastern Alaska humpback whale "mug-shots." Individual

humpback whales can be identified by the coloration, shape, and scarring of the ventral surface (belly side) of their tail flukes. Released in both hard copy and on a series of CD-ROM discs, the images show the tails of some 1,110 humpbacks identified in southeastern Alaska between 1986 and 1996. Each fluke identification photograph is indexed and corresponds to sighting data for that individual that is contained in a companion database. Together, the sighting data and photographs will help the researchers learn more about reproduction and recruitment of the humpback whale in southeastern Alaska.

The partners secured funding last year for the project through the NPS Challenge Cost Share Program. In October 1996, the humpback whale researchers began gathering sighting data and organizing the photographic catalog. "We are very enthusiastic about the potential uses of the sighting history database," Gabriele said, "because it will allow us to document the movement of whales throughout southeastern Alaska. In particular, we will use it to compile the reproductive histories of southeastern Alaska female humpbacks and the return of their young to the study areas." Humpback whales have strong site fidelity to their feeding areas, with calves returning to the same places where their mothers took them to feed in their first year of life. Thirty-six calves have been identified in the Glacier Bay area, and park staff have documented the return of 16 of them, including one female who returned with her first calf at age eight. The eventual recruitment of individuals as

breeding adults is a vital component of the future health of the population.

The researchers plan to update the photo catalog and sighting information database annually. The photo catalog will be distributed to local charter boat operators to help them recognize whales seen out on the water. The database and catalog will be circulated to colleagues to facilitate collaborative research on the behavior, migrations, and biology of the species throughout the North Pacific. A number of catalogs will be also be made available to the public. For more information, contact Gabriele at *chris_gabriele@nps.gov*.