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Whales lost, injured in California inland waterway

Thu May 17, 2007 6:12AM EDT

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SACRAMENTO, California (Reuters) - Two lost humpback whales which swam 92 miles inland to California's Port of Sacramento have been injured, perhaps from a boat, experts said on Wednesday.

An effort to lure them back to the ocean using recorded humpback whale songs is expected to get underway on Thursday.

The approximately 45-foot female has a two-foot long, six-inch deep wound on her back in front of her dorsal fin that appears to have occurred when she surfaced underneath a boat, said Frances Gulland, the Sausalito-based Marine Mammal Center veterinarian who inspected the animals.

The whale's roughly 20-foot, 20-ton calf has a more severe wound on its right flank that may have been inflicted when the animal surfaced alongside its mother. "The calf's wound could have a long-term impact on that animal," said Gulland.

The whales reached the port on Tuesday afternoon after swimming up the Sacramento River to a man-made channel.

As of Wednesday afternoon, they were circling around in a 500- by 800-yard turning basin normally used by ships, with about 800 people lining the levies during the day for a look.

The whales are believed to belong to a group of humpbacks that migrated from Baja California, Mexico, to spend the summer near the Farallon Islands off the coast of California.

A small boat outfitted to play the recordings underwater will head back

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down the channel by mid-morning. If the whales do not follow, a flotilla of Coast Guard and police vessels will get behind the whales with the hope that rotor noise will push the whales forward, officials said.

(Reporting by Suzanne Hurt)

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