

# Pilot whale beaches at KSC



**Jim Waymer, FLORIDA TODAY** 2:19 p.m. EDT May 8, 2015



*(Photo: Hubbs-SeaWorld Research Institute)*

Biologists will test whether a measles-like virus that killed more than 1,600 dolphins since July 2013 also did in an 11-foot-long pilot whale that beached itself Thursday at NASA's Kennedy Space Center.

"It's a big female," said Megan Stolen, a research scientist with the Hubbs-SeaWorld Research Institute. "It was emaciated."

Stolen and fellow biologists are examining the pilot whale's remains today (May 8) at Hubb's lab near Melbourne Beach, extracting lung, lymph node and spinal cord tissues to test for the so-called morbillivirus.

The virus has been killing bottlenose dolphins along the Atlantic Coast for more than two years in the worst outbreak of the virus in almost three decades.

The virus claimed 740 dolphins from New Jersey to Florida in 1987.

At about 8:30 a.m. Thursday, Hubbs biologists received a report from Canaveral National Seashore staff that the whale had stranded alive on the beach within the national park.

The whale washed out for a while but had washed back into the beach at KSC by about 1 p.m. Thursday, Stolen said.



**Staff from Canaveral National Seashore, NASA security and fire-rescue help haul in a beached pilot whale Thursday at Kennedy Space Center. Hubbs-SeaWorld Research Institute had to euthanize the whale because of an ongoing viral outbreak killing dolphins from New Jersey to Florida. (Photo: Hubbs-SeaWorld Research Institute)**

Hubbs staff euthanized the whale. Deep-sea whales rarely survive beaching. But NOAA Fisheries also mandates all whales and dolphins that beach during a morbillivirus outbreak must be euthanized to prevent spread of the virus.

The dolphins infected with the virus wash up with lesions on their skin, mouth, joints, or lungs.

Since July 2013, the virus has killed more than 1,660 bottlenose dolphins, from New Jersey to Brevard, more than 300 of them in the Florida, according

to NOAA Fisheries.

Stolen said about 30 dead bottlenose dolphins in the Indian River Lagoon region have tested positive for the virus. But as many as 100 in the region may have died from the virus, the Hubbs researchers suspect.

"We haven't had any positive cases in other species," Stolen said, adding that none have tested positive in the lagoon since Feb. 10.

"So we feel like things are getting better," Stolen said.

If tests continue to show no morbillivirus infections, NOAA Fisheries may soon consider declaring a formal end to the unusual die-off, Stolen said. That would also end the mandatory euthanizing of the stranded dolphins and whales.

Contact Waymer at 321-242-3663 or [jwaymer@floridatoday.com](mailto:jwaymer@floridatoday.com). Follow him on Twitter @JWayEnviro



Read or Share this story: <http://on.flatoday.com/1H6GzNC>

**Rescuers haul in a pilot whale that stranded Thursday at Kennedy Space Center.** (Photo: Hubbs-SeaWorld Research Institute)

