

MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION  
4340 East-West Highway, Room 700  
Bethesda, MD 20814-4447

5 June 2009

Mr. Timothy J. Van Norman  
Chief, Branch of Permits  
Division of Management Authority  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
4401 North Fairfax Drive  
Arlington, VA 22203

Re: Request for Amendment, Permit No. MA801652  
(U.S. Geological Survey, Alaska Science Center)

Dear Mr. Van Norman:

The Marine Mammal Commission, in consultation with its Committee of Scientific Advisors on Marine Mammals, has reviewed the above-referenced permit amendment request with regard to the goals, policies, and requirements of the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

The Marine Mammal Commission recommends that the Fish and Wildlife Service approve the permit amendment request, provided that the conditions contained in the current permit remain in effect.

### **BACKGROUND**

The permit-holder currently is authorized to conduct research on the distribution, abundance, and foraging behavior of Pacific walruses over a five-year period. The permit authorizes the taking annually of up to 40 walruses of both sexes (except females with dependent young or near-term pregnant females). Taking may be by capture, anesthesia, blood sampling, biopsy sampling, tagging on the tusks with electronic devices, removal of two vibrissae, and procedures related to biological impedance, ultrasound, and doubly-labeled water studies. In addition, the permit authorizes the taking of up to 150 walruses (males and females >1 year old) by biopsy sampling using darts shot from a crossbow and up to 75 walruses (adult females or males >6 years of age) by remote tagging with small, subdermally anchored electronic tags shot from a crossbow. For 8 of these 75 animals, the existing permit authorizes chemical immobilization and tagging with a tusk-mounted tag for data validation of the subdermally anchored tag. In light of the potential for drug-related complications, the permit-holder is authorized to kill accidentally up to six animals a year.

The permit-holder is requesting that the permit be amended to authorize an increase from 75 to 100 in the number of walruses that can be tagged with subdermally anchored electronic tags and an increase from 300 to 500 in the number of walruses that can be harassed incidental to conducting the research each year. The methods of deployment would be unchanged from those

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authorized in the original permit. The increases are being requested to enable the researchers to obtain tracking and foraging information from walrus in the Chukchi Sea because of oil and gas activities within the Minerals Management Service's Chukchi lease sale area; to obtain better information on walrus responses to climate change; and to compare the foraging range and effort of walrus hauled out on land during reduced ice conditions to those of walrus hauled out on ice during sea ice conditions observed in the past. The proposed research procedures have been approved by the Alaska Science Center's Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee.

The Commission believes that the activities for which it has recommended approval are consistent with the purposes and policies of the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

Please contact me if you have any questions concerning this recommendation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Michael L. Goren for".

Timothy J. Ragen, Ph.D.  
Executive Director