



MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION

15 December 2015

Ms. Jolie Harrison, Chief
Permits and Conservation Division
Office of Protected Resources
National Marine Fisheries Service
1315 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910-3225

Dear Ms. Harrison:

The Marine Mammal Commission (the Commission), in consultation with its Committee of Scientific Advisors on Marine Mammals, has reviewed the application submitted by the Partnership for the Interdisciplinary Study of Coastal Oceans (PISCO) at the University of California Santa Cruz¹ under section 101(a)(5)(D) of the Marine Mammal Protection Act. PISCO is proposing to take small numbers of marine mammals by harassment incidental to conducting rocky intertidal monitoring activities along the California and Oregon coasts. The Commission also has reviewed the National Marine Fisheries Service's (NMFS) 9 December 2015 notice (80 Fed. Reg. 76448) announcing receipt of the application and proposing to issue the authorization, subject to certain conditions.

PISCO proposes to conduct rocky intertidal surveys at numerous sites along the California and Oregon coasts in all months except January, August, and September. The proposed activities are part of a long-term monitoring program that includes (1) surveying permanent photoplot quadrats, permanent transects, and mobile quadrats for algae and invertebrates, (2) assessing and measuring invertebrates, (3) measuring tidal height topographically, (4) characterizing baseline intertidal data associated with new marine protected areas, and (5) monitoring invertebrate larval recruitment. Research-related sound and the increased presence of humans would be the main sources of marine mammal disturbance. Although the activities would continue indefinitely, the authorization would be valid for a one-year period only.

NMFS preliminarily has determined that, at most, the proposed activities temporarily would modify the behavior of small numbers of California sea lions, harbor seals, northern elephant seals, and Steller sea lions. It also anticipates that any impact on the affected species and stocks would be negligible. NMFS does not anticipate any take of marine mammals by death or serious injury and believes that the potential for disturbance will be at the least practicable level because of the proposed mitigation measures. The proposed mitigation, monitoring, and reporting measures include—

- (1) rescheduling surveys at sites where pups are present, unless the survey can be conducted without disturbing mothers and dependent pups;
- (2) moving slowly and staying close to the ground to prevent or minimize stampeding of pinnipeds;

¹ Both of which work in collaboration with the Multi-Agency Rocky Intertidal Network as well.

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- (3) avoiding loud noises (i.e., using hushed voices);
- (4) avoiding pinnipeds along access paths to sites by locating and taking a different access path and vacating the area as soon as the survey is completed;
- (5) monitoring the offshore area for predators (i.e., killer whales and white sharks) and avoiding flushing pinnipeds when predators are observed in nearshore waters;
- (6) using binoculars to detect pinnipeds before approaching to avoid being seen by them;
- (7) flushing pinnipeds only if they are located in the survey plots and there are no other means to accomplish the survey—however, flushing must be done slowly and quietly so as not to cause a stampede;
- (8) using qualified observers to monitor and evaluate incidental takes;
- (9) reporting tagged pinniped carcasses to the appropriate personnel;
- (10) reporting rare or unusual species, numbers, or behaviors of marine mammals to NMFS;
- (11) reporting injured and dead marine mammals to NMFS and the local stranding network using NMFS's phased approach and suspending activities, if appropriate; and
- (12) submitting a final monitoring report.

The Commission concurs with NMFS's preliminary finding and recommends that NMFS issue the incidental harassment authorization, subject to the inclusion of the proposed mitigation, monitoring, and reporting measures. Please contact me if you have questions regarding the Commission's recommendation.

Sincerely,



Rebecca J. Lent, Ph.D.
Executive Director