



MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION

22 December 2016

Mr. Timothy J. Van Norman, Chief
Branch of Permits, MS: IA
Division of Management Authority
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
5275 Leesburg Pike
Falls Church, Virginia 22041-3803

Re: Permit Application No. 80164B
(North Slope Borough)

Dear Mr. Van Norman:

The Marine Mammal Commission (the Commission), in consultation with its Committee of Scientific Advisors on Marine Mammals, has reviewed the above-referenced permit application with regard to the goals, policies, and requirements of the Marine Mammal Protection Act (the MMPA). North Slope Borough (NSB) is requesting authorization to conduct research on polar bears and walruses in Alaska for up to five years—similar activities were authorized under permit 134907.

NSB proposes to conduct research on polar bears and walruses along the North Slope of Alaska. The purpose of the research is to investigate genetics, disease, and/or health of polar bears and walruses. NSB would collect hair samples from up to 533 bears per year using snares set both on land and ice. Researchers also would collect environmental DNA via paw prints in snow. In addition, NSB could conduct necropsies and collect samples¹ on an unlimited number of beachcast and subsistence-hunted polar bears and walruses each year. Samples could be exported for analysis. Up to 120 non-target polar bears could be harassed each year during the proposed activities.

NSB indicated that the snares would be checked when polar bears are not present and that personnel would not come into direct contact with the bears. Researchers also would use single strand wire and stiff wire bristle brushes to collect hair and minimize entanglement risk. For these reasons, the Commission believes that the proposed activities are consistent with the purposes and policies of the MMPA and recommends that the Fish and Wildlife Service issue the permit, as requested. Kindly contact me if you have any questions concerning the Commission's recommendation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rebecca J. Lent".

Rebecca J. Lent, Ph.D.
Executive Director

¹ Including but not limited to blood, skin, blubber, muscle, kidney, liver, spleen, lung, heart, and feces.