



MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION

24 September 2012

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: Permit Application No. 81899A
(Shannon Atkinson, Ph.D.,
University of Alaska Fairbanks)

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 application with regard to the goals, policies, and requirements of the Marine Mammal Protection Act. Dr. Atkinson is requesting authorization to acquire and possess samples from northern sea otters for purposes of scientific research during a five-year period.

RECOMMENDATION

The Marine Mammal Commission recommends that the Fish and Wildlife Service issue the permit, as requested.

RATIONALE

Dr. Atkinson proposes to acquire and possess samples from all age classes and both sexes of up to 125 northern sea otters per year from southeast Alaska. The objectives of the proposed research are to (1) determine age at first reproduction and age-specific pregnancy rates, (2) determine morphometric changes based on age and reproductive states in both male and female sea otters, and (3) identify endocrine profiles and ovarian morphology to determine the different homeostatic reproductive states for sea otters in southeast Alaska.

Dr. Atkinson proposes to obtain blood samples, pre-molar teeth, and skinned carcasses (including the reproductive tracts) from Native subsistence hunters, who normally discard the carcasses after they collect the pelt. Hunters generally hunt in fall and spring; however, some hunts occur year-round. Therefore, samples could be obtained year-round. Dr. Atkinson anticipates that the majority of the samples would be obtained from sea otters hunted near Juneau, Hoonah, Sitka, Kake, Klawock, Ketchikan, and Craig. She would not provide payment or an incentive to the hunters nor would she promote the killing of the otters to obtain samples for her study.

Dr. Atkinson would store the samples until various assays for reproductive and stress hormones are conducted. She also would (1) section and examine the ovaries for various

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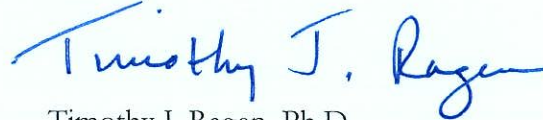
morphometric features indicating ovulation and pregnancy and (2) examine the uteri for the presence of fetuses and enlarged uterine horns or placental scars indicating pregnancy. In addition, she would send teeth to Matson's Laboratory in Montana for age analysis. Dr. Atkinson could archive any remaining samples and histology slides at the University of Alaska-Juneau, but she expects that most samples would be consumed by the respective analyses. She would not import or export any samples.

The Commission believes that the information obtained from the study would further scientific knowledge and understanding of sea otter demography and would be useful for management purposes. Therefore, the Marine Mammal Commission recommends that the Fish and Wildlife Service issue the permit, as requested.

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 the Commission's recommendation.

Sincerely,



Timothy J. Ragen, Ph.D.
Executive Director