



MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION

21 May 2012

Mr. P. Michael Payne, Chief
Permits and Conservation Division
Office of Protected Resources
National Marine Fisheries Service
1315 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910-3225

Re: Permit Application No. 16919
(Eye of the Whale)

Dear Mr. Payne:

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. Eye of the Whale is requesting authorization to conduct research on humpback whales in Alaska waters during a five-year period. This applicant is seeking to renew permit 1120-1898.

RECOMMENDATION

The Marine Mammal Commission recommends that the National Marine Fisheries Service issue the permit, as requested.

RATIONALE

Eye of the Whale proposes to photograph and observe behaviors of humpback whales in waters of Prince William Sound and adjacent waters of the Gulf of Alaska. Research would occur from June through September of each year during up to five trips that could last up to 8 days each. The purposes of the proposed research are to maintain a long-term (more than 30 years) humpback whale monitoring program investigating (1) abundance and distribution, (2) demographics and social structure, (3) vital rates, and (4) foraging ecology.

Eye of the Whale would photograph and observe behaviors of humpback whales using an 8-m motorized sailboat. It has requested 200 takes of humpback whales, which includes up to 90 animals that could be taken multiple times. An individual could be taken up to four times per year, but researchers do not expect to take individuals that frequently.

The investigators would approach whales slowly from behind at a distance of 25 m to obtain good quality images of their flukes. They would limit approaches to 30 minutes per individual or two hours for an entire group of whales. The investigators would approach whales of all age classes and either sex. They would use additional caution in approaching female-calf pairs to minimize the chance of startling them and would not position the boat between a female and her calf. They also

Mr. P. Michael Payne
21 May 2011
Page 2

would cease an encounter if a female-calf pair shows any signs of agitation. Individuals of any other species would not be approached.

Eye of the Whale coordinates its activities with and provides data to the North Gulf Oceanic Society, Cascadia Research Collective, and Southwest Fisheries Science Center. Thus, its results contribute to scientific investigations of humpback whales needed for management purposes. The Marine Mammal Commission supports the proposed research activities and recommends that the National Marine Fisheries 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,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Timothy J. Ragen". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the beginning.

Timothy J. Ragen, Ph.D.
Executive Director