



MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION

12 November 2014

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 Renewal and Amendment
Application No. 212570
(National Marine Mammal Laboratory)

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). The National Marine Mammal Laboratory (NMML) is seeking to renew and amend permit 212570 that authorizes it to conduct aerial surveys of polar bears and walruses in Alaska during a five-year period.

NMML would conduct manned and unmanned aerial surveys in the Chukchi and Beaufort Seas from April through November of each year. Polar bears and walruses of any age class and either sex could be harassed during the surveys. The purpose of the research is to investigate distribution and abundance of marine mammals, including polar bears and walruses.

NMML would make every effort to minimize disturbance and would cease activities if the well-being of any of the animals is threatened. Pilots also would divert manned aircraft (or adjust the altitude) from walruses on ice floes or in open water and would not fly directly over haul-out sites. If NMML's activities cause a walrus stampede or any walrus or polar bear is killed, NMML would cease its activities and consult with the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). For these reasons, the Commission recommends that FWS 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 MMPA. 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