



MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION

27 January 2015

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. 225854
(Tom Smith, Ph.D.,
Brigham Young University)

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 amendment with regard to the goals, policies, and requirements of the Marine Mammal Protection Act (the MMPA). Dr. Smith is requesting to renew his permit to conduct research on polar bears in Alaska during a five-year period.

Dr. Smith could harass 18 polar bears up to four times per year while conducting den monitoring activities from the Colville River Delta to the Canning River Delta in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. He would conduct the activities from mid-February through the end of April each year. Those activities include using forward-looking infrared devices to locate the dens, installing video cameras, servicing the cameras and downloading the data, and dismantling the cameras. The purpose of the research is to investigate diel activity patterns of denning polar bears and responses of the bears to anthropogenic disturbance, which can be used by the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to improve management of the species and by the oil and gas industry to minimize the impacts of its activities.

If polar bears emerge from their dens when researchers are present, the researchers would go to their snowmobiles and wait until the bears go back into their dens before either leaving or proceeding with camera maintenance. If a bear approaches the researchers while they are servicing the cameras, the researchers would stand up to make their presence known, which makes the bears halt their approach and go back to their dens. If that method does not work, the researchers would vacate the area on their snowmobiles or would use bear spray to deter the bears. Any of the various incidents would be reported to FWS immediately.

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The Commission believes that the activities are consistent with the purposes and policies of the MMPA and therefore recommends that FWS 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". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "R" and a stylized "Lent".

Rebecca J. Lent, Ph.D.
Executive Director