



MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION

12 May 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. 57198B
(Alaska Department of Fish and Game)

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. Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG) is requesting authorization to conduct research on walrus throughout their range in Alaska—permit 220846 authorized similar activities.

ADFG would conduct research on walrus in the Bering, Chukchi, and Beaufort Seas. The purpose of the research is to study walrus movement patterns, haul-out behavior, and foraging ecology. ADFG would harass, observe, biopsy sample, and remotely instrument with satellite tags 45 walrus each year. Those walrus would be at least 6 years of age and could be of either sex. However, females with calves less than 1 year of age could be biopsy sampled or tagged. Walrus could be biopsy sampled and tagged on land, on ice, or in the water. ADFG could harass up to 1,800 walrus incidental to the proposed activities. Researchers also could kill (unintentionally or via euthanasia) up to one walrus during the five-year period.

To minimize impacts from research activities on land, walrus would be biopsy sampled and tagged using a cover on the beach, camouflaged clothing, or a blind. They would be approached from downwind. If the entire group of walrus¹ leaves the beach, the activities would cease until the group hauls out again. When biopsy sampling and tagging walrus on ice, the boat would back away immediately after the biopsy sample is retrieved. In addition, researchers would not approach groups of more than 30 walrus or pursue non-target walrus in the water. Any pursuit of target walrus in the water would be limited to no more than 10 minutes. Researchers would not separate females from their calves.

ADFG is working cooperatively with the U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), Eskimo Walrus Commission, and local walrus hunters. Further, ADFG's

¹ They would not biopsy sample or tag walrus in groups larger than 300.

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Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee reviewed and approved the proposed research protocols. For these reasons, the Commission believes that the activities for which it has recommended approval are consistent with the purposes and policies of the MMPA and 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, sweeping initial "R".

Rebecca J. Lent, Ph.D.
Executive Director