



MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION

20 May 2010

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

Re: Permit Application No. 14610
(Alaska Department of Fish and Game)

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. The applicant is requesting authorization to (1) take by harassment several species of cetaceans in the waters of the Bering, Chukchi, and Beaufort Seas, (2) study population abundance, stock structure, feeding areas and other important habitats, migration routes, and behavior relative to human disturbance, and (3) obtain samples for identifying individuals genetically to ascertain survival rates and calving intervals.

The proposed research would target beluga whales, bowhead whales, gray whales, and humpback whales. Research on beluga whales would include aerial surveys (up to 1,000 animals from each of four stocks annually), capture for tagging (using suction cups and/or implantable tags) and sample collection (up to 35 individuals from each of four stocks annually), and biopsy sampling (up to 350 animals from each of four stocks annually). Beluga whales less than 2.5 m in length (estimated to be less than one year old) would not be tagged. The applicant states that if beluga whale females with neonate calves are accidentally captured, they would be measured, skin sampled, and released without tagging. Research on bowhead whales would include tagging (60 animals annually) and biopsy sampling (up to 50 animals annually). Research on gray whales would include tagging (up to 50 animals annually) and biopsy sampling (up to 50 animals annually). Research on humpback whales would include tagging (up to 20 animals annually) and biopsy sampling (up to 20 animals annually). The applicant states that no bowhead, gray, or humpback whale females with calves would be pursued for tagging or biopsy sampling. Up to 10 (each) harbor seals, bearded seals, ringed seals, and spotted seals would be harassed annually incidental to the cetacean research. Tissue samples collected from whales would be exported to and imported from collaborators in Canada and Russia for genetic, health, and dietary studies. The proposed research has been reviewed and approved by the applicant's Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee.

RECOMMENDATION

The Marine Mammal Commission recommends that the National Marine Fisheries Service approve the permit request, provided that the Service—

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- require that the investigators stop a tagging attempt if an animal exhibits a strong adverse reaction to such activities;
- require that an activity be suspended, pending review and authorization to proceed, if that activity contributes to three or more animals being seriously injured or killed in any one year as a result of the research activities;
- ensure that researchers working under this permit and other permit holders who might be carrying out research on the same species in the same areas coordinate their studies and, as possible, share data to avoid unnecessary duplication of research and disturbance of animals; and
- require that the applicant obtain all necessary permits under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora before importing or exporting any marine mammal parts.

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 and other applicable laws.

Please contact me if you have any questions concerning this recommendation.

Sincerely,



Timothy J. Ragen, Ph.D.
Executive Director