



MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION

7 January 2014

Mr. Timothy J. Van Norman
Chief, Branch of Permits
Division of Management Authority
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
4401 North Fairfax Drive
Arlington, VA 22203

Re: Permit Application No. 14359B
(BBC, Natural History Unit)

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 BBC proposes to film polar bears in 2014.

RECOMMENDATION

The Marine Mammal Commission recommends that the Fish and Wildlife Service issue the permit, as requested.

RATIONALE

The BBC is requesting authorization to take up to five individual polar bears per day by Level B harassment during filming activities in Barrow, Kaktovik, and the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, Alaska. Filming would occur during a 20-day period from September through December 2014. Polar bears could be of either sex and any age. The applicant would use footage as part of a BBC documentary to educate the public on the natural history of Alaskan wildlife, including polar bears, throughout all four seasons.

Filming activities would be conducted at the bone pile in Kaktovik and in the Refuge. Two BBC cameramen would use high-definition video and still cameras to film and photograph the bears. Filming would be conducted from small boats during a four-day period in September and from vehicles and on foot for the remainder of the time. The cameramen have extensive experience filming wildlife and one of the cameramen is the foremost polar bear cameraman in the world. A Native whaling commission guide and trained Kaktovik guide, would lead the filmmakers' activities, as determined appropriate by the Fish and Wildlife Service (the FWS).

The filmmakers would approach the animals no closer than 30 m using either a truck on land or a small boat at sea. They would approach the bears slowly on land and would remain behind the viewing barriers and existing signs. While at sea, the filmmakers would approach the bears slowly and would make slow adjustments to their heading and course to maintain their position. The BBC

Mr. Timothy J. Van Norman
7 January 2014
Page 2

indicated that its primary consideration would be to avoid influencing or changing a bear's natural behaviors and that they would cease their activities if any bear becomes vigilant. Although the researchers would film females with cubs, they would keep a safe distance and would not separate a female and her cubs. The BBC would obtain a special use permit from the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge prior to conducting the filming activities and would abide by its Polar Bear Viewing Guidelines.

The Commission supports the filming of marine mammals as films can be an important means of educating the public about these animals, their natural history, and the value of conserving them. Because of the precautionary manner in which the BBC would conduct the filming activities, the Commission recommends that the 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.

The Commission appreciates the opportunity to comment on this permit application. 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 long horizontal stroke extending to the left.

Rebecca J. Lent, Ph.D.
Executive Director