



MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION

20 August 2010

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: Request for Amendment, Permit No. PRT-134907
(North Slope Borough, Department of Wildlife Management)

Dear Mr. Van Norman:

The Marine Mammal Commission, in consultation with its Committee of Scientific Advisors on Marine Mammals, has reviewed the above-referenced permit amendment request with regard to the goals, policies, and requirements of the Marine Mammal Protection Act and offers the following recommendation.

Permit No. PRT-134907 authorizes the permit holder to collect annually and transport tissues from 40 polar bears killed for subsistence purposes, 10 stranded (dead) polar bears, 100 walruses killed for subsistence purposes, and 20 stranded (dead) walruses to augment the Alaska Marine Mammal Tissue Archival Project. The permit is valid through 6 November 2012.

The permit holder is requesting that the permit be amended to authorize—

- (1) a change of principal investigator;
- (2) the addition of co-investigators to enable the collection of samples without the principal investigator being present;
- (3) the non-invasive collection of polar bear hair using snares set up around beach-cast marine mammal carcasses, including “bonepiles” created from harvested animals, to study the importance of carcasses used by polar bears (DNA collected would be included in and referenced against the current U.S. Geological Survey polar bear genetics database); and
- (4) the monitoring of and collection of hair from snares by trained individuals (i.e., local biologists or technicians) who would not need to be individually identified on the permit.

RECOMMENDATION

The Marine Mammal Commission recommends that the Fish and Wildlife Service approve the requested amendment, provided that the conditions contained in the existing permit remain in effect.

Mr. Timothy J. Van Norman
20 August 2010
Page 2

RATIONALE

In the Commission's view, the proposed new personnel are experienced and qualified to carry out the currently authorized and proposed activities. Also, the Commission does not consider it necessary that trained biologists or technicians collecting hair from snares be named in the permit, provided that the permit holder provides the names of such individuals to the Service for the record. The Commission notes that, according to the amendment request, the snares that the permit holder is proposing to use for collecting hair from polar bears have been used safely and effectively on black and brown bears (Woods et al. 1999, Beier et al. 2005). The permit holder states that the snares would be checked when bears are not present and that personnel would not come into direct contact with bears. The Marine Mammal Commission recommends that the Fish and Wildlife Service approve the requested amendment provided that the conditions currently contained in the permit remain in effect.

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.

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

Sincerely,



Timothy J. Ragen, Ph.D.
Executive Director

Literature Cited

- Beier, L.V.R., S.B. Lewis, R.W. Flynn, G. Pendleton, and T.V. Schumacher. 2005. A single-catch snare to collect brown bear hair for genetic mark-recapture studies. *Wildlife Society Bulletin* 33(2):766-773.
- Woods, J.G., D. Paetkau, D. Lewis, B.N. McLellan, M. Proctor, and C. Strobeck. 1999. Genetic tagging of free-ranging black and brown bears. *Wildlife Society Bulletin* 27(3):616-627.