



MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION

2 May 2013

Mr. P. Michael Payne, Chief
Permits and Conservation Division
Office of Protected Resources
National Marine Fisheries Service
1315 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910-3225

Re: Permit Application No. 17344
(Samuel Wasser, Ph.D.,
University of Washington)

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. Dr. Wasser is requesting authorization to collect killer whale fecal samples during a five-year period. He is seeking to renew permit 10045.

RECOMMENDATION

The Marine Mammal Commission recommends that the National Marine Fisheries Service issue the permit, as requested.

RATIONALE

Dr. Wasser proposes to collect fecal samples from killer whales, primarily southern residents, in Washington's waters around the San Juan Islands and in Puget Sound. Sampling occurs primarily from May through October, but could occur year-round. The main objectives of the proposed research are to investigate hypotheses related to the decline of the southern resident killer whale, including (1) reduced prey availability, (2) exposure to environmental contaminants, and (3) disturbance from private and commercial vessel traffic.

Dr. Wasser would approach all individual southern resident killer whales up to six times per year and 15 transient killer whales up to two times per year to collect whale feces. Individuals of all age classes and either sex could be harassed. Dr. Wasser uses dogs that have been trained to detect whale feces. The dog would ride on the bow of the boat where it could detect the scent of fecal matter. The boat would be positioned at least 183 m downwind of areas where whales have recently traveled. Dr. Wasser would collect the feces from the water using beakers. In the past, he has collected 97 percent of the samples beyond 100 m from the whales. Exceptions occur when the whales move toward Dr. Wasser's boat. If one or more whales move to within 100 m of the vessel, Dr. Wasser would turn off the engine and note any behavior changes. He also would photograph

Mr. M. Payne
2 May 2013
Page 2

individual whales at a distance of no less than 100 m to aid in identifying the source of the feces. Each fecal sample would be analyzed for genetic signatures and hormone and contaminant concentrations at the Service's Northwest Fisheries Science Center. Dr. Wasser would not approach any non-target species within 200 m when collecting fecal samples and, therefore, has not requested to take any non-target species by Level B harassment.

The Commission believes that the research is useful and promising with respect to the amount of information that can be obtained non-invasively from fecal samples alone. In view of the precautions taken to avoid disturbance of the whales, the Marine Mammal Commission recommends that the National Marine Fisheries Service 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 Marine Mammal Protection Act. Please contact me if you have any questions concerning the Commission's recommendation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Timothy J. Ragen". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "T".

Timothy J. Ragen, Ph.D.
Executive Director