



DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

RIN 0648-XD602

Takes of Marine Mammals Incidental to Specified Activities; Taking Marine Mammals

Incidental to Rocky Intertidal Monitoring Surveys on the South Farallon Islands, California

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Notice; issuance of an incidental harassment authorization.

SUMMARY: In accordance with the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) regulations, notification is hereby given that NMFS has issued an Incidental Harassment Authorization (IHA) to the National Ocean Service's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary (GFNMS) to take marine mammals, by harassment, incidental to rocky intertidal monitoring work and searching for black abalone, components of the Sanctuary Ecosystem Assessment Surveys.

DATES: Effective January 10, 2015, through January 30, 2015.

ADDRESSES: Electronic copies of the authorization, application, and associated Environmental Assessment (EA) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) may be obtained by writing to Jolie Harrison, Supervisor, Incidental Take Program, Permits and Conservation Division, Office of Protected Resources, National Marine Fisheries Service, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910, telephoning the contact listed below (see FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT), or visiting the internet at: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/permits/incidental.htm>.

Documents cited in this notice may also be viewed, by appointment, during regular business hours, at the aforementioned address.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Robert Pauline, Office of Protected Resources, NMFS, (301) 427-8401.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

Sections 101(a)(5)(A) and (D) of the MMPA (16 U.S.C. 1361 et seq.) direct the Secretary of Commerce to allow, upon request, the incidental, but not intentional, taking of small numbers of marine mammals by U.S. citizens who engage in a specified activity (other than commercial fishing) within a specified geographical region if certain findings are made and either regulations are issued or, if the taking is limited to harassment, a notice of a proposed authorization is provided to the public for review.

Authorization for incidental takings shall be granted if NMFS finds that the taking will have a negligible impact on the species or stock(s), will not have an unmitigable adverse impact on the availability of the species or stock(s) for subsistence uses (where relevant), and if the permissible methods of taking, other means of effecting the least practicable impact on the species or stock and its habitat, and requirements pertaining to the mitigation, monitoring and reporting of such takings are set forth. NMFS has defined “negligible impact” in 50 CFR 216.103 as “...an impact resulting from the specified activity that cannot be reasonably expected to, and is not reasonably likely to, adversely affect the species or stock through effects on annual rates of recruitment or survival.”

Except with respect to certain activities not pertinent here, the MMPA defines “harassment” as: “any act of pursuit, torment, or annoyance which (i) has the potential to injure a marine mammal or marine mammal stock in the wild [Level A harassment]; or (ii) has the potential to disturb a marine mammal or marine mammal stock in the wild by causing disruption

of behavioral patterns, including, but not limited to, migration, breathing, nursing, breeding, feeding, or sheltering [Level B harassment].”

Summary of Request

On August 18, 2014 NMFS received an application from GFNMS for the taking of marine mammals incidental to rocky intertidal monitoring work and searching for black abalone. NMFS determined that the application was adequate and complete on August 29, 2014. On December 2, 2014, we published a notice in the Federal Register of our proposal to issue an IHA with preliminary determinations and explained the basis for the proposal and preliminary determinations (79 FR 71388). The notice initiated a 30-day public comment period. Responses are discussed below. In November 2012, NMFS issued a 1-year IHA to GFNMS to take marine mammals incidental to these same proposed activities (77 FR 68107, November 15, 2012). That IHA expired on November 7, 2013. However, GFNMS did not conduct any abalone sampling during this time period. Therefore, no take occurred.

GFNMS proposes to continue rocky intertidal monitoring work and the search for black abalone in areas previously unexplored for black abalone from January 16 through January 23, 2015. All work will be done only during daylight minus low tides. This is a long-term study that began in 1992. This IHA is effective from January 10 through January 30, 2015 to allow for a bit of flexibility in the sampling schedule. Twelve sites are proposed for sampling. The following specific aspects of the activities are likely to result in the take of marine mammals: presence of survey personnel near pinniped haulout sites and approach of survey personnel towards hauled out pinnipeds. Take, by Level B harassment only, of individuals of five species of marine mammals is anticipated to result from the specified activity.

Description of the Specified Activity and Specified Geographic Region

Since the listing of black abalone as “endangered” under the U.S. Endangered Species Act (ESA; 16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.), NMFS has requested that GFNMS explore as much of the shoreline as possible, as well as document and map the location of quality habitat for black abalone and the location of known animals. This listing prompted the need to expand the search for black abalone into other areas on the South Farallon Islands (beyond those that have been studied since 1992) to gain a better understanding of the abundance and health of the black abalone population in this remote and isolated location. The monitoring is planned to remain ongoing, and efforts to assess the status and health of the black abalone population on the South Farallon Islands may take several years, and perhaps decades, because black abalone tend to be very cryptic and difficult to find, especially when they are sparse and infrequent in occurrence. In order for the assessment of black abalone to be more comprehensive, GFNMS needs to expand shore searches in areas beyond the proximity of their quantitative quadrat sampling areas and also into new areas on Southeast Farallon and Maintop (West End) Islands. Additional information can be found in the IHA application (see ADDRESSES) and the Notice of Proposed IHA (79 FR 71388, December 2, 2014).

Routine shore activity will continue to involve the use of only non-destructive sampling methods to monitor rocky intertidal algal and invertebrate species abundances (see Figure 2 in GFNMS’ application). The sampling, photographic documentation, and shore walks for the period of this IHA have been scheduled to occur from January 16 through January 23, 2015. Each survey will last for approximately 4 to 8 days. All work will be done only during daylight minus, low tides. Each location (as listed in Tables 2 and 3 in GFNMS’ application) will be visited/sampled by five to six biologists, for a duration of 4-5 hours, one to two times each minus tide cycle. The Notice of Proposed IHA contains additional information on the survey

methodology (79 FR 71388, December 2, 2014). That information has not changed and is therefore not repeated here.

Point Blue (formerly named PRBO Conservation Science) continues its year round pinniped and seabird research and monitoring efforts on the South Farallon Islands, which began in 1968, under MMPA scientific research permits and IHAs. GFNMS biologists will gain access to the sites via boats operated by Point Blue, with disturbance and incidental take authorized via IHAs issued to Point Blue. For this reason, GFNMS has not requested authorization for take from disturbance by boat, as incidental take from that activity is authorized in a separate IHA.

Specified Geographic Location and Activity Timeframe

The Farallon Islands consists of a chain of seven islands located approximately 48 km (30 mi) west of San Francisco, near the edge of the continental shelf and in the geographic center of the GFNMS (see Figure 1 in GFNMS' application). The land of the islands above the mean high tide mark is designated as the Farallon National Wildlife Refuge (managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service [USFWS]), while the shore and subtidal below are in GFNMS. The nearshore and offshore waters are foraging areas for pinniped species discussed in this document.

The two largest islands of the seven islands are the Southeast Farallon and Maintop (aka West End) Islands. These and several smaller rocks are collectively referred to as the South Farallon Islands and are the subject of this IHA request. The two largest islands are separated by only a 9 m (30 ft) wide surge channel. Together, these islands are approximately 49 hectares (120 acres) in size with an intertidal perimeter around both islands of 7.7 km (4.8 mi).

The areas proposed for sampling are: Blow Hole Peninsula; Mussel Flat; Dead Sea Lion Flat; Low Arch; Raven's Cliff; Drunk Uncle Islet; East Landing; North Landing; Fisherman's Bay; Weather Service Peninsula; Indian Head; and Shell Beach (see Figure 2 in GFNMS'

application). Each sample site will be visited one to two times each minus tide cycle for 4-5 hours each visit.

The shorelines on these islands, including areas above the mean high tide elevation, have become more heavily used over time as haulout sites for pinnipeds to rest, give birth, and molt. The intertidal zones where GFNMS conducts intertidal monitoring area also areas where pinnipeds can be found hauled out on the shore. Accessing portions of the intertidal habitat may cause incidental Level B (behavioral) harassment of pinnipeds through some unavoidable approaches if pinnipeds are hauled out directly in the study plots or while biologists walk from one location to another. No motorized equipment is involved in conducting these surveys. The species for which Level B harassment is authorized are: California sea lions (Zalophus californianus californianus); harbor seals (Phoca vitulina richardii); northern elephant seals (Mirounga angustirostris); Stellar sea lions (Eumetopias jubatus); and northern fur seals (Callorhinus ursinus).

Comments and Responses

A Notice of Proposed IHA was published in the Federal Register on December 2, 2014 (79 FR 71388) for public comment. During the 30-day public comment period, NMFS received one letter from the Marine Mammal Commission. No other organizations provided comments on the proposed issuance of an IHA for this activity. The Marine Mammal Commission recommended that NMFS issue the IHA, subject to the inclusion of the proposed mitigation and monitoring measures. NMFS has included all of the mitigation and monitoring measures in the Notice of Proposed IHA (79 FR 71388, December 2, 2014) in the issued IHA.

Description of Marine Mammals in the Area of the Specified Activity

Many of the shores of the two South Farallon Islands provide resting, molting, and

breeding habitat for pinniped species: northern elephant seals; harbor seals; California sea lions; northern fur seals; and Steller sea lions. California sea lion is the species anticipated to be encountered most frequently during the specified activity. The other four species are only anticipated to be encountered at some of the sites. Tables 2 and 3 in GFNMS' application outline the average and maximum expected occurrences of each species at each sampling location, respectively. Numbers in these tables are based on weekly surveys conducted by PRBO (now Point Blue) in January 2012 and 2013. Figures contained in Appendix I of GFNMS' application depict the overlap between pinniped haulouts and abalone sampling sites. None of the species noted here are listed as threatened and endangered under the ESA. On November 4, 2013, NMFS published a final rule delisting the eastern distinct population segment (DPS) of Steller sea lions (78 FR 66139). We have determined that this DPS has recovered and no longer meets the definition of an endangered or threatened species under the ESA. The Steller sea lions on the South Farallon Islands are part of the eastern DPS.

We refer the public to Carretta et al. (2014) and Allen and Angliss (2014) for general information on these species which are presented below this section. The publications are available on the internet at: http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/sars/pdf/pacific2013_final.pdf and http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/sars/pdf/ak2013_final.pdf. Additional information on the status, distribution, seasonal distribution, and life history can also be found in GFNMS' application and NMFS' Notice of Proposed IHA (79 FR 71388, December 2, 2014). The information has not changed and is therefore not repeated here.

California (southern) sea otters (Enhydra lutris nereis), listed as threatened under the ESA and categorized as depleted under the MMPA, usually range in coastal waters within 2 km (1.2 mi) of shore. PRBO has not encountered California sea otters on Southeast Farallon Island

during the course of seabird or pinniped research activities over the past five years. This species is managed by the USFWS and is not considered further in this notice.

Potential Effects of the Specified Activity on Marine Mammals

The appearance of researchers may have the potential to cause Level B harassment of any pinnipeds hauled out on Southeast Farallon and Maintop (West End) Islands. Although marine mammals are never deliberately approached by abalone survey personnel, approach may be unavoidable if pinnipeds are hauled out in the immediate vicinity of the permanent abalone study plots. Disturbance may result in reactions ranging from an animal simply becoming alert to the presence of researchers (e.g., turning the head, assuming a more upright posture) to flushing from the haul-out site into the water. NMFS does not consider the lesser reactions to constitute behavioral harassment, or Level B harassment takes, but rather assumes that pinnipeds that move greater than 1 m (3.3 ft) or change the speed or direction of their movement in response to the presence of researchers are behaviorally harassed, and thus subject to Level B taking. Animals that respond to the presence of researchers by becoming alert, but do not move or change the nature of locomotion as described, are not considered to have been subject to behavioral harassment. NMFS' Notice of Proposed IHA (79 FR 71388, December 2, 2014) contains information regarding potential impacts to marine mammals from the specified activity. The information has not changed and is therefore not repeated here.

Typically, even those reactions constituting Level B harassment would result at most in temporary, short-term disturbance. Researchers will visit approximately 12 sites over about an 8 day period. Each site visit typically lasts 4-5 hours. Therefore, disturbance of pinnipeds resulting from the presence of researchers lasts only for short periods of time. Because such disturbance is sporadic, rather than chronic, and of low intensity, individual marine mammals are

unlikely to incur any detrimental impacts to vital rates or ability to forage and, thus, loss of fitness. Correspondingly, even local populations, much less the overall stocks of animals, are extremely unlikely to accrue any significantly detrimental impacts.

NMFS does not anticipate that the activities would result in the injury, serious injury, or mortality of pinnipeds because (1) the timing of research visits would preclude separation of mothers and pups for four of the pinniped species, as activities occur outside of the pupping/breeding season and (2) elephant seals are generally not susceptible to disturbance as a result of researchers' presence. In addition, researchers will exercise appropriate caution approaching sites, especially when pups are present and will redirect activities when pups are present.

Anticipated Effects on Marine Mammal Habitat

The only habitat modification associated with the proposed activity is the quadrat locations being marked with marine epoxy. The plot corners are marked with a 3x3 cm (1.2x1.2 in) patch of marine epoxy glued to the benchrock for relocating the quadrat sites. Markers have been in place since 1993, and pinniped populations have increased throughout the islands during this time. Maintenance is sometimes required, which consists of replenishing worn markers with fresh epoxy or replacing markers that have become dislodged. No gas power tools are used, so there is no potential for noise or accidental fuel spills disturbing animals and impacting habitats. Thus, the activity is not expected to have any habitat-related effects, including to marine mammal prey species, that could cause significant or long-term consequences for individual marine mammals or their populations.

Mitigation

In order to issue an incidental take authorization (ITA) under section 101(a)(5)(D) of the

MMPA, NMFS must, where applicable, set forth the permissible methods of taking pursuant to such activity, and other means of effecting the least practicable impact on such species or stock and its habitat, paying particular attention to rookeries, mating grounds, and areas of similar significance, and on the availability of such species or stock for taking for certain subsistence uses (where relevant).

GFNMS shall implement several mitigation measures to reduce potential take by Level B (behavioral disturbance) harassment. Measures include: (1) coordinating sampling efforts with other permitted activities (i.e., Point Blue and USFWS); (2) conducting slow movements and staying close to the ground to prevent or minimize stampeding; (3) avoiding loud noises (i.e., using hushed voices); (4) vacating the area as soon as sampling of the site is completed; (5) monitoring the offshore area for predators (such as killer whales and white sharks) and avoid flushing of pinnipeds when predators are observed in nearshore waters; (6) using binoculars to detect pinnipeds before close approach to avoid being seen by animals; and (7) rescheduling work at sites where pups other than elephant seal pups are present, unless other means to accomplishing the work can be done without causing disturbance to mothers and dependent pups.

The methodologies and actions noted in this section will be utilized and included as mitigation measures in the IHA to ensure that impacts to marine mammals are mitigated to the lowest level practicable. The primary method of mitigating the risk of disturbance to pinnipeds, which will be in use at all times, is the selection of judicious routes of approach to abalone study sites, avoiding close contact with pinnipeds hauled out on shore, and the use of extreme caution upon approach. In no case will marine mammals be deliberately approached by abalone survey personnel, and in all cases every possible measure will be taken to select a pathway of approach

to study sites that minimizes the number of marine mammals potentially harassed. In general, researchers will stay inshore of pinnipeds whenever possible to allow maximum escape to the ocean. Each visit to a given study site will last for approximately 4-5 hours, after which the site is vacated and can be re-occupied by any marine mammals that may have been disturbed by the presence of abalone researchers. By arriving before low tide, worker presence will tend to encourage pinnipeds to move to other areas for the day before they haul out and settle onto rocks at low tide.

The following measures are required to avoid disturbances to elephant seal pups. Disturbances to females with dependent pups can be mitigated to the greatest extent practicable by avoiding visits to those intertidal sites with pinnipeds that are actively nursing, with the exception of northern elephant seals. The time of year when GFNMS plans to sample avoids disturbance to young, dependent pups, with the exception of northern elephant seals. Thus, late January/early February, at minimum, is preferable for the proposed intertidal survey work in order to minimize the risk of harassment. Harassment of nursing northern elephant seal pups may occur but only to a limited extent. Disruption of nursing to northern elephant seal pups will occur only as biologists pass by the area. No flushing on nursing northern elephant seal pups will occur, and no disturbance to newborn northern elephant seals (pups less than one week old) will occur. Moreover, elephant seals have a much higher tolerance of nearby human activity than sea lions or harbor seals. In the event of finding pinnipeds, other than elephant seals, breeding and nursing, the intertidal monitoring activities will be re-directed to sites where these activities and behaviors are not occurring. This mitigation measure will reduce the possibility of takes by harassment and further reduce the remote possibility of serious injury or mortality of dependent pups.

NMFS has carefully evaluated GFNMS' mitigation measures and considered a range of other measures in the context of ensuring that NMFS prescribes the means of effecting the least practicable impact on the affected marine mammal species and stocks and their habitat. Our evaluation of potential measures included consideration of the following factors in relation to one another:

- The manner in which, and the degree to which, the successful implementation of the measure is expected to minimize adverse impacts to marine mammals;
- The proven or likely efficacy of the specific measure to minimize adverse impacts as planned; and
- The practicability of the measure for applicant implementation.

Based on our evaluation of the applicant's final measures, NMFS has determined that the mitigation measures provide the means of effecting the least practicable impact on marine mammal species or stocks and their habitat, paying particular attention to rookeries, mating grounds, and areas of similar significance.

Monitoring and Reporting

In order to issue an ITA for an activity, section 101(a)(5)(D) of the MMPA states that NMFS must, where applicable, set forth "requirements pertaining to the monitoring and reporting of such taking". The MMPA implementing regulations at 50 CFR 216.104 (a)(13) indicate that requests for ITAs must include the suggested means of accomplishing the necessary monitoring and reporting that will result in increased knowledge of the species and of the level of taking or impacts on populations of marine mammals that are expected to be present in the proposed action area.

Currently many aspects of pinniped research are being conducted by Point Blue scientists

on the Farallon Islands, which includes elephant seal pup tagging and behavior observations with special notice to tagged animals. Additional observations are always desired, such as observations of pinniped carcasses bearing tags, as well as any rare or unusual marine mammal occurrences. GFNMS' observations and reporting will add to the observational database and on-going marine mammal assessments on the Farallon Islands.

GFNMS can add to the knowledge of pinnipeds on the South Farallon Islands by noting observations of: (1) unusual behaviors, numbers, or distributions of pinnipeds, such that any potential follow-up research can be conducted by the appropriate personnel; (2) tag-bearing carcasses of pinnipeds, allowing transmittal of the information to appropriate agencies and personnel; and (3) rare or unusual species of marine mammals for agency follow-up.

Monitoring requirements in relation to GFNMS' abalone research surveys will include observations made by the applicant. Information recorded will include species counts (with numbers of pups/juveniles), numbers of observed disturbances, and descriptions of the disturbance behaviors during the abalone surveys. Observations of unusual behaviors, numbers, or distributions of pinnipeds on the South Farallon Islands will be reported to NMFS and Point Blue so that any potential follow-up observations can be conducted by the appropriate personnel. In addition, observations of tag-bearing pinniped carcasses as well as any rare or unusual species of marine mammals will be reported to NMFS and Point Blue.

If at any time injury, serious injury, or mortality of the species for which take is authorized should occur, or if take of any kind of any other marine mammal occurs, and such action may be a result of the abalone research, GFNMS will suspend research activities and contact NMFS immediately to determine how best to proceed to ensure that another injury or death does not occur and to ensure that the applicant remains in compliance with the MMPA.

A draft final report must be submitted to NMFS Office of Protected Resources within 60 days after the conclusion of the 2014 field season or 60 days prior to the start of the next field season if a new IHA will be requested. The report will include a summary of the information gathered pursuant to the monitoring requirements set forth in the IHA. A final report must be submitted to the Director of the NMFS Office of Protected Resources and to the NMFS Southwest Office Regional Administrator within 30 days after receiving comments from NMFS on the draft final report. If no comments are received from NMFS, the draft final report will be considered to be the final report.

Estimated Take by Incidental Harassment

Except with respect to certain activities not pertinent here, the MMPA defines “harassment” as: any act of pursuit, torment, or annoyance which (i) has the potential to injure a marine mammal or marine mammal stock in the wild [Level A harassment]; or (ii) has the potential to disturb a marine mammal or marine mammal stock in the wild by causing disruption of behavioral patterns, including, but not limited to, migration, breathing, nursing, breeding, feeding, or sheltering [Level B harassment].

All anticipated takes would be by Level B harassment, involving temporary changes in behavior. The mitigation and monitoring measures are expected to minimize the possibility of injurious or lethal takes such that take by injury, serious injury, or mortality is considered remote. Animals hauled out close to the actual survey sites may be disturbed by the presence of biologists and may alter their behavior or attempt to move away from the researchers. No motorized equipment is involved in conducting the abalone monitoring surveys.

As discussed earlier, NMFS considers an animal to have been harassed if it moved greater than 1 m (3.3 ft) in response to the researcher’s presence or if the animal was already

moving and changed direction and/or speed, or if the animal flushed into the water. Animals that became alert without such movements were not considered harassed. The distribution of pinnipeds hauled out on beaches is not consistent throughout the year. The number of marine mammals disturbed will vary by month and location. PRBO (now Point Blue) obtains weekly counts of pinnipeds on the South Farallon Islands, dating back to the early 1970s. GFNMS used data collected by PRBO in February 2012 and 2013 to estimate the number of pinnipeds that may potentially be taken by Level B (behavioral) harassment. Table 3 in GFNMS' IHA application and Table 1 here present the maximum numbers of California sea lions, harbor seals, northern elephant seals, northern fur seals, and Steller sea lions that may be present at the various sampling sites during the activity timeframe under this IHA. Based on this information, NMFS has authorized the take, by Level B harassment only, of 7,126 California sea lions, 119 harbor seals, 66 northern elephant seals, 124 northern fur seals, and 112 Steller sea lions. These numbers are considered to be maximum take estimates; therefore, actual take may be slightly less if animals decide to haul out at a different location for the day or animals are out foraging at the time of the survey activities.

Negligible Impact and Small Numbers Analysis and Determinations

NMFS typically includes our negligible impact and small numbers analyses and determinations under the same section heading of our Federal Register notices. Despite co-locating these terms, we acknowledge that negligible impact and small numbers are distinct standards under the MMPA and treat them as such. The analyses presented below do not conflate the two standards; instead, each standard has been considered independently, and we have applied the relevant factors to inform our negligible impact and small numbers determinations.

NMFS has defined “negligible impact” in 50 CFR 216.103 as “...an impact resulting from the specified activity that cannot be reasonably expected to, and is not reasonably likely to, adversely affect the species or stock through effects on annual rates of recruitment or survival.” In making a negligible impact determination, NMFS considers a variety of factors, including but not limited to: (1) the number of anticipated mortalities; (2) the number and nature of anticipated injuries; (3) the number, nature, intensity, and duration of Level B harassment; and (4) the context in which the take occurs.

No injuries or mortalities are anticipated to occur as a result of GFNMS’ rocky intertidal monitoring work and searching for black abalone, and none are authorized. The behavioral harassments that could occur would be of limited duration, as researchers will only conduct sampling over a period of 8 days. Additionally, each site is sampled for approximately 4-5 hours before moving to the next sampling site. Therefore, disturbance will be limited to a short duration, allowing pinnipeds to reoccupy the sites within a short amount of time.

Some of the pinniped species use the islands to conduct pupping and/or breeding. However, with the exception of northern elephant seals, GFNMS will conduct its abalone site sampling outside of the pupping/breeding seasons. GFNMS will implement measures to minimize impacts to northern elephant seals nursing or tending to dependent pups. Such measures will avoid mother/pup separation or trampling of pups.

None of the five marine mammal species anticipated to occur in the activity area are listed as threatened or endangered under the ESA. Table 2 in this document presents the abundance of each species or stock, the authorized take estimates, and the percentage of the affected populations or stocks that may be taken by harassment. Based on these estimates, GFNMS would take less than 1% of each species or stock, with the exception of the California

sea lion, which would result in an estimated take of 2.4% of the stock. Because these are maximum estimates, actual take numbers are likely to be lower, as some animals may select other haulout sites the day the researchers are present.

Table 1. Estimated number of animals to be disturbed at each sampling site during from January 16 through January 23, 2015 based on maximum daily counts of pinnipeds estimated from PRBO monitoring data and the total proposed number of Level B harassment takes to be authorized for each species.

	East Landing & Blowhole Peninsula	North Landing & Fisherman's Bay	Dead Sea Lion Flat	Mussel Flat	Low Arch	Weather Service Peninsula	Raven's Cliff	Indian Head	Shell Beach	Drunk Uncle Islet & Pelican Bowl		
CA Sea Lion January 2012	0	497	539	941	620	250	871	1153	1655	600		
CA Sea Lion January 2013	0	251	464	192	569	153	220	675	732	169		
Maximum	0	497	539	941	620	250	871	1153	1655	600	7126	
Harbor Seal January 2012	8	6	0	38	0	0	0	0	0	0		
Harbor Seal January 2013	14	20	10	73	0	2	0	0	0	0		
Maximum	14	20	10	73	0	2	0	0	0	0	119	
N. Elephant Seal January 2012	0	4	0	2	29	0	0	15	7	0		
N. Elephant Seal January 2013	0	4	4	7	25	0	0	8	0	0		
Maximum	0	4	4	7	29	0	0	15	7	0	66	
N. Fur Seal January 2012	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	62	0	0		
N. Fur Seal January 2013	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20	0	0		
Maximum	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	62	0	0	124*	
Steller Sea Lion January 2012	0	0	8	2	0	0	8	17	23	0		
Steller Sea Lion January 2013	0	2	30	13	1	0	2	35	17	0		
Maximum	0	2	30	13	1	0	8	35	23	0	112	
											MAXIMUM TOTAL	7547

*A high but undetermined population growth rate for northern fur seals on the South Farallon Islands is anticipated. Therefore, the maximum total for fur seals has been doubled.

Based on the analysis contained herein of the likely effects of the specified activity on marine mammals and their habitat, and taking into consideration the implementation of the mitigation and monitoring measures, NMFS finds that the rocky intertidal monitoring program will result in the incidental take of small numbers of marine mammals, by Level B harassment only, and that the total taking from the rocky intertidal monitoring program will have a negligible impact on the affected species or stocks.

Table 2. Population abundance estimates, total proposed Level B take, and percentage of population that may be taken for the potentially affected species during the proposed rocky intertidal monitoring program.

Species	Abundance*	Total Proposed Level B Take	Percentage of Stock or Population
Harbor Seal	30,196	119	0.4
California Sea Lion	296,750	7,126	2.4
Northern Elephant Seal	124,000	66	0.05
Steller Sea Lion	63,160 to 78,198	112	0.1-0.2
Northern Fur Seal	12,844	124*	0.01

*Abundance estimates are taken from the 2013 U.S. Pacific Marine Mammal Stock Assessments (Carretta *et al.*, 2014) and 2013 Alaska Marine Mammal Stock Assessments (Allen and Anglis, 2014)

Impact on Availability of Affected Species or Stock for Taking for Subsistence Uses

There are no relevant subsistence uses of marine mammals implicated by this action. Therefore, NMFS has determined that the total taking of affected species or stocks would not have an unmitigable adverse impact on the availability of such species or stocks for taking for subsistence purposes.

Endangered Species Act (ESA)

None of the marine mammals for which incidental take is proposed are listed as threatened or endangered under the ESA. Therefore, NMFS has determined that issuance of the IHA to GFNMS under section 101(a)(5)(D) of the MMPA will have no effect on species listed as threatened or endangered under the ESA.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

In 2012, we prepared an EA analyzing the potential effects to the human environment from conducting rocky intertidal surveys along the California and Oregon coasts and issued a FONSI on the issuance of an IHA for GFNMS' rocky intertidal surveys in accordance with section 6.01 of the NOAA Administrative Order 216-6 (Environmental Review Procedures for Implementing the National Environmental Policy Act, May 20, 1999). GFNMS' proposed activities and impacts for 2015 are within the scope of our 2012 EA and FONSI. We have reviewed the 2012 EA and determined that there are no new direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts to the human and natural environment associated with the IHA requiring evaluation in a supplemental EA and we, therefore, reaffirm the 2012 FONSI.

Authorization

As a result of these determinations, NMFS has authorized the take of marine mammals incidental to GFNMS' rocky intertidal and black abalone monitoring research activities, provided the previously mentioned mitigation, monitoring, and reporting requirements are incorporated.

Dated: January 15, 2015.

Donna S. Wieting,
Director,
Office of Protected Resources,
National Marine Fisheries Service.

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