



DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[RTID 0648-XF418]

Marine Mammals; Issuance of Letters of Confirmation

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

ACTION: Notice; issuance of permits.

SUMMARY: Notice is hereby given that, in the year 2025, the following individuals and institutions have been issued Letters of Confirmation (LOCs) for activities conducted under the General Authorization for Scientific Research on marine mammals. See

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION for a list of names and addresses of recipients.

ADDRESSES: The LOCs and related documents are available for review upon written request via email to NMFS.Pr1Comments@noaa.gov.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Amy Hapeman (LOC Nos. 24033-01, 25638-02, 28412, 28781, 28811-01, 28851, 29005); Shasta McClenahan, Ph.D. (LOC Nos. 23069-02; 23673, 28083, 28797); Courtney Smith, Ph.D. (LOC No. 28811, 29177); and Sara Young (LOC Nos. 25751-01, 28613, 28653, 28669, 28905) at the email listed above or 301-427-8401.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The requested LOCs have been issued under the authority of the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1361 *et seq.*), and the regulations governing the taking and importing of marine mammals (50 CFR Part 216). The General Authorization allows for *bona fide* scientific research that may result only in taking by Level B harassment of marine mammals. The below LOCs were issued in the calendar year 2025 (January 1, 2025 – December 31, 2025).

File No. 23069-02: Issued to Florida Atlantic University's Harbor Branch

Oceanographic Institute, 5353 Parkside Drive Building MC17, Room 109, Jupiter, FL 33458 (Responsible Party [RP]: Gregg Fields, Ph.D.; Principal Investigator [PI]: Steven Burton) on March 16, 2021. The LOC authorizes vessel-based photo-identification and observational surveys of nine species of cetaceans in Florida for research on cetacean biology, ecology, behavior, social structure, health, and anthropogenic activities: Atlantic spotted dolphin (*Stenella frontalis*), bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*), humpback whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*; Gulf of Maine Stock/West Indies Distinct Population Segment [DPS]), long-finned (*Globicephala melas*) and short-finned (*Globicephala macrorhynchus*) pilot whale, pantropical spotted dolphin (*Stenella attenuata*), pygmy sperm whale (*Kogia breviceps*), Risso's dolphin (*Grampus griseus*), and Rough-toothed dolphin (*Steno bredanensis*). This amended LOC action adds an unmanned aircraft system (UAS) for research and extends the duration for 12 months until March 31, 2027.

File No. 23673: This LOC, held by the Wild Dolphin Project (PI: Denise Herzing, Ph.D.), was extended on May 13, 2025, while the holder's new application (File No. 29005) was in process. The LOC authorizes vessel-based research of 13 species of cetaceans including: Atlantic spotted, bottlenose, Fraser's (*Lagenorhynchus hosei*), pantropical spotted, Risso's, spinner (*Stenella longirostris*), striped (*Stenella coeruleoalba*), and unidentified lagenorhynchine (*Lagenorhynchus spp.*) dolphins; and false killer (*Pseudorca crassidens*), unidentified beaked (*Ziphius cavirostris* and *Mesoplodon spp.*), long-finned and short-finned pilot, and unidentified *Kogia* (dwarf or pygmy sperm; *Kogia spp.*) whales. Research is authorized within Florida waters of the Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of America from Martin County through the Florida Keys including in the Intracoastal Waterway, coastal waters, and offshore waters. The objectives of the research have not changed. The extended LOC expires on May 31, 2026.

File No. 24033-01: Issued to Eric Montie, Ph.D., University of South Carolina

Beaufort, One University Boulevard, Bluffton, South Carolina, 29909 on January 30, 2025. This amended LOC action authorizes a minor expansion in the location where research activities may occur to include waters around Pritchards Island, South Carolina. The LOC currently authorizes vessel-based research for photo-identification, passive acoustics, photography/videography, and behavioral observations of bottlenose dolphins in the coastal waters of Bluffton and Hilton Head, South Carolina. The LOC expires on March 31, 2026.

File No. 25638-02: Issued to Clearwater Marine Aquarium (Responsible Party: Kelly McAdams, Ph.D.), 249 Windward Passage, Clearwater, FL 33767, on November 24, 2025. This amended LOC, for research on coastal bottlenose dolphins, updated the list of authorized personnel, including a change in Responsible Party (previously James Powell, Ph.D.). The LOC expires on July 15, 2026.

File No. 25751-01: Issued to Shoals Marine Laboratory (Responsible Party: Sara Morris, Ph.D.), 24 Colovos Road, Durham, NH 03824, on April 17, 2025. This amended LOC, for research on coastal pinnipeds, added unmanned aircraft systems and updated personnel, including the Responsible Party. The LOC expires on August 31, 2026.

File No. 28083: Issued to Patricia Fair, Ph.D., South Carolina Aquarium, 100 Aquarium Wharf, Charleston, SC 29401 on January 29, 2025. This LOC authorizes vessel and UAS surveys, including close approach, counts, photography, photo-identification, photogrammetry, video recording, behavioral observations, and passive acoustic recordings of bottlenose dolphins. Research may occur in estuarine and coastal waters near Charleston, South Carolina, including Charleston Harbor and the Ashley, Cooper, and Wando Rivers. The LOC expires on January 31, 2030.

File No. 28412: Issued to Jeremy Kiszka, Ph.D., Florida International University 3000 NE 151st Street, Marine Science Building, Room 359, North Miami, FL 33181 on April 17, 2025. This LOC authorizes close approach via vessel surveys for counts,

photography/videography, photo-identification, behavioral observations, and focal follows of bottlenose dolphins in southeast Florida waters. The LOC expires on April 30, 2030.

File No. 28613: Issued to Cindy Elliser, Ph.D., Pacific Mammal Research, 1513 A Ave, Anacortes, WA 98221 on February 18, 2025. This LOC authorizes close approach via vessel, ground, and aerial surveys via UAS, counts, photography/videography, photo-identification, and behavioral observations of harbor seals (*Phoca vitulina*) and harbor porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*). Research will occur in the Salish Sea and in the inland waters of Washington state. The LOC expires on February 12, 2030.

File No. 28653: Issued to Emily Wirtz, Wildlife Program Manager, Lumi Nation, 2665 Kwina Rd, Bellingham, WA 98226 on March 4, 2025. This LOC authorizes close approach via vessel, ground, and aerial surveys via UAS, counts, photography/videography, photo-identification, behavioral observations, and scat collection of harbor seals, California sea lions (*Zalophus californianus*), and Steller sea lions (*Eumetopias jubatus*, Eastern DPS). The LOC expires on December 31, 2026.

File No. 28669: Issued to Dylan Berger, Point No Point Treaty Council, 19472 Powder Hill PI NE, Suite 210, Poulsbo, WA 98370 on April 16, 2025. This LOC authorizes Level B harassment of harbor seals during vessel and ground surveys for photography and scat collection in the Dungeness Bay and River area of Washington State. The LOC expires on May 31, 2027.

File No. 28781: Issued to the Low Country Marine Mammal Network (Responsible Party: Lauren Rust) 1367 Clearbrook Street, North Charleston, SC 29405 on May 15, 2025. This LOC authorizes Level B harassment of bottlenose dolphins during vessel and UAS surveys including close approach, counts, photo-identification, behavioral observations, and focal follows in the Charleston Estuarine System, including all major rivers and creeks, in South Carolina. The LOC expires on May 31, 2030.

File No. 28797: Issued to Ruth H. Carmichael, Ph.D., Dauphin Island Sea Lab 101 Bienville Boulevard, Dauphin Island, AL, 36528 on April 4, 2025. This LOC authorizes Level B harassment of bottlenose dolphins during vessel and UAS surveys including close approach, counts, photography, photo-identification, photogrammetry, videography, behavioral observations, and focal follows within coastal, bay, sound, and estuarine waters of Alabama, Florida, Mississippi, and Louisiana. The LOC expires on April 15, 2035.

File No. 28811: Issued to Kimberly Jones, Ph.D., 1208 US Highway 1, Ste G, North Palm Beach, FL 33408, on September 16, 2025. This LOC authorizes the taking by harassment of Atlantic bottlenose dolphins, Atlantic spotted dolphins, and humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*; Gulf of Maine stock/West Indies DPS) within offshore, coastal and estuarine waters off Brunswick County, North Carolina. Research methods include close approach with vessel and UAS surveys for photo-identification, behavioral observations, monitoring, counts, and photography/videography. The LOC expires on August 1, 2035.

File No. 28811-01: Issued to Kimberly Jones, Ph.D., Brunswick Community College, 50 College Drive NE, Supply, North Carolina 28462 on November 24, 2025. This amended LOC authorizes a minor expansion in the location where research activities may occur to include waters of New Hanover County, North Carolina. The LOC currently authorizes vessel and UAS-based surveys for photo-identification, photography/videography, counts, monitoring, and behavioral observations of cetaceans in the offshore, coastal and estuarine waters off Brunswick County, North Carolina. The LOC expires on August 1, 2035.

File No. 28851: Issued to Jonathan Scordino, Makah Tribe, Makah Fisheries Management, P.O. Box 115, 150 Resort Drive, Neah Bay, WA 98357 on June 17, 2025. This LOC authorizes Level B harassment during vessel and ground surveys of 27

cetacean and pinniped species for counts; photography/videography; photo-identification; behavioral observations; collection of blow, feces, scat, sloughed skin, and spew; and unintentional harassment in U.S. waters of Alaska and the U.S. West Coast. The LOC will take effect on October 1, 2025, and be valid through September 30, 2035.

File No. 28905: Issued to Michelle Caputo, Ph.D., University of New England, 11 Hills Beach Rd, Biddeford, ME 04005, on May 22, 2025. This LOC authorizes take of two pinniped and six cetacean species during vessel surveys, aerial surveys via UAS, photo-identification, behavioral observations, and passive acoustic monitoring in the southern Gulf of Maine: Atlantic white-sided dolphin (*Lagenorhynchus acutus*), gray seal (*Halichoerus grypus*), harbor porpoise, harbor seal, long-finned pilot whale, short-beaked common dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*), white-beaked common dolphin (*Lagenorhynchus albirostris*), and minke whale (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*). The LOC expires on May 31, 2033.

File No. 29005: Issued to the Wild Dolphin Project (Responsible Party: Denise Herzing, Ph.D.), 1208 US Highway 1, Ste G, North Palm Beach, FL 33408, on September 16, 2025. This LOC authorizes harassment of cetaceans during vessel surveys and aerial surveys via UAS for close approach, counts, photo-identification, photography/videography, and behavioral observations in the Florida waters of Palm Beach and southern Martin counties through the Florida Keys, including the Intracoastal Waterway, and adjacent Atlantic waters up to 20 miles offshore. Species that may be taken include Atlantic spotted dolphin, bottlenose dolphin, Fraser's dolphin, Pantropical spotted dolphin, Risso's dolphin, spinner dolphin, striped dolphin, false killer whale (*Pseudorca crassidens*), and long-finned and short-finned pilot whales. The LOC takes effect on June 1, 2026, and expires on May 31, 2031.

File No. 29177: This LOC, held by Tracy R. Kowalczyk, University of North Carolina at Wilmington, 4915 Beech Tree Drive SE Southport, NC 28461. The LOC

authorizes the harassment of bottlenose dolphins, during close approach from vessel and UAS surveys for counts, photography/video, photoidentification, photogrammetry, and behavioral observations and monitoring in coastal waters and offshore (up to 2 miles) waters of North Carolina from Topsail Intel south to Carolina Beach, including the Cape Fear River. Seventeen additional species of cetaceans may also be taken if encountered opportunistically. The LOC expires on December 1, 2035.

In compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*), a final determination has been made that the activities are categorically excluded from the requirement to prepare an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement.

Dated: March 9, 2026.

Shannon Bettridge,

Chief, Marine Mammal and Sea Turtle Conservation Division,

Office of Protected Resources,

National Marine Fisheries Service.

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