



DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[RTID 0648-XF586]

Marine Mammals; File No. 28671

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

ACTION: Notice; receipt of application.

SUMMARY: Notice is hereby given that Colleen Reichmuth, Ph.D., Long Marine Laboratory, Institute of Marine Sciences, University of California at Santa Cruz, 115 McAllister Way, Santa Cruz, CA 95060, has applied in due form for a permit to conduct research on five species of pinnipeds.

DATES: Written comments must be received on or before [*INSERT DATE 30 DAYS AFTER DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE FEDERAL REGISTER*].

ADDRESSES: The application and related documents are available for review by selecting “Records Open for Public Comment” from the “Features” box on the Applications and Permits for Protected Species home page, <https://apps.nmfs.noaa.gov>, and then selecting File No. 28671 from the list of available applications. These documents are also available upon written request via email to NMFS.Pr1Comments@noaa.gov.

Written comments on this application should be submitted via email to NMFS.Pr1Comments@noaa.gov. Please include File No. 28671 in the subject line of the email comment.

Those individuals requesting a public hearing should submit a written request via email to NMFS.Pr1Comments@noaa.gov. The request should set forth the specific reasons why a hearing on this application would be appropriate.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Sara Young or Jennifer Skidmore, (301) 427-8401.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The subject permit is requested under the authority of the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1361 *et seq.*), the regulations governing the taking and importing of marine mammals (50 CFR part 216), the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*), and the regulations governing the taking, importing, and exporting of endangered and threatened species (50 CFR parts 222-226).

The applicant proposes to conduct comparative psychological and physiological studies with five species of captive pinnipeds: California sea lions (*Zalophus californianus*), harbor seals (*Phoca vitulina*), spotted seals (*Phoca largha*), threatened Arctic distinct population segment (DPS) of ringed seals (*Pusa hispida*), and threatened Beringia DPS of bearded seals (*Erignathus barbatus*) at Long Marine Laboratory (Santa Cruz, CA) and the Alaska SeaLife Center (Seward, AK). Up to four individuals per species may be studied at any given time over the duration of the permit.

During psychological assessments, pinnipeds may participate in passive (observational) or active (operantly trained) behavioral tasks. Individuals may be observed in a variety of settings, and stimulus detection and discrimination tasks may be conducted on land or in water. Stimuli are controlled cues that are used to evaluate species-typical sensory and cognitive performance. Stimuli may be from any sensory modality, though there is an emphasis on hearing so that conservation issues related to ocean noise can be addressed. For physiological assessments, the same individuals participate in routine physical evaluations to improve understanding of general biology. This includes longitudinal measurements of growth, nutrition, health, metabolism, physiological capacities, and environmental tolerance.

Research procedures include: passive and acoustic recording, drug and sedative administration, collection of molt, scat, and urine, Evan's blue dye and serial blood samples, external and internal instrumentation, flipper tagging, measuring, metabolic chamber or hood studies, behavioral observations, photogrammetry, photography and videography, flyovers from unmanned aircraft systems, restraint, hair clipping, transport, ultrasound, underwater photography and videography, and weighing. The application also includes a request for the unintentional mortality of up to two pinnipeds total of any species over the duration of the permit associated with research or transport including humane euthanasia at discretion of attending vet for medical purposes due to research, as well as necropsy and export of parts from the animals. The applicant requests a 10-year permit.

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

Concurrent with the publication of this notice in the **Federal Register**, NMFS is forwarding copies of the application to the Marine Mammal Commission and its Committee of Scientific Advisors.

Dated: March 6, 2026.

Shannon Bettridge,

Chief, Marine Mammal and Sea Turtle Conservation Division,

Office of Protected Resources,

National Marine Fisheries Service.