



DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[RTID 0648-XF544]

Marine Mammals; File No. 29418

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

ACTION: Notice; receipt of application.

SUMMARY: Notice is hereby given that the University of Alaska Southeast, 1332 Seward Ave., Sitka, AK 99835 (Responsible Party: Lauren Wild, Ph.D.), has applied in due form for a permit to conduct research on marine mammals in Alaska.

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. 29418” 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. 29418” 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: Courtney Smith, Ph.D., or Amy Hapeman, (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.*), the regulations governing the taking, importing, and exporting of endangered and threatened species (50 CFR parts 222-226), and the Fur Seal Act of 1966, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1151 *et seq.*).

The applicant proposes to conduct research on 18 species of cetaceans in Alaska, with studies targeted on killer whales (*Orcinus orca*; including the Southern Resident Distinct Population Segment [DPS]) and three endangered species: gray (*Eschrichtius robustus*; including the Western North Pacific DPS), humpback (*Megaptera novaeangliae*; including the Western North Pacific DPS and Mexico DPS), and sperm (*Physeter macrocephalus*) whales. Four species of pinnipeds may be unintentionally harassed. The objective of the research is to further biological understanding of Alaskan cetaceans by evaluating species abundance, population and stock structure, life history parameters, foraging behavior and prey specialization, social behavior, seasonal movements and migrations, and depredation interactions with longline fishing vessels. Research methods resulting in Level A and Level B harassment include close approach by vessels and unmanned aircraft systems to conduct photo-identification, behavioral observations, underwater photography/video, count/survey, active acoustic sonar for prey mapping, tagging (suction-cup and dart/barb), biological sampling (skin/blubber biopsy, prey samples, exhaled air, sloughed skin, feces), passive acoustic recordings, and collection of prey remains and water samples for environmental DNA. Some marine mammal parts may be exported for analysis. See the application for complete numbers of

animals requested by species, stock or listing unit, life stage, and procedure. The permit is requested for 10 years.

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: April 15, 2026.

Shannon Bettridge,

Chief, Marine Mammal and Sea Turtle Conservation Division,

Office of Protected Resources,

National Marine Fisheries Service.

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