

○ Designing and constructing up to four additional ships needed to replace vessels that would reach the end of their design service life between 2023 and 2038 (resulting in a total of 8 new ships when combined with the four new ships being constructed under Alternative A);

○ Extending service life of the existing fleet by conducting material condition assessment surveys and mid-life repairs; and

○ Increasing NOAA fleet utilization, which would provide more DAS compared to Alternative A;

Under Alternative B, all the activities described in Alternative A would continue, many at a higher level of effort. The nature of these actions would not change, but the overall level of activity would be increased.

• **Alternative C—Vessel Operations with Fleet Modernization and Optimization with Greater Funding Support:** Alternative C includes all the activities and measures described in Alternative B, but with an increase in overall funding of 20 percent relative to Alternative B, resulting in the capacity to provide more DAS. Specific examples of additional measures adopted under Alternative C over the next 15 years would include:

○ Designing and constructing two new ships in addition to the eight new ships that would be added to the NOAA fleet between 2023 and 2038 under Alternative B;

○ Increasing the number of uncrewed systems integrated into new ships that would be added to the NOAA fleet;

○ Shortening the timeframe of fleet improvement activities and the induction of new ships into the fleet;

○ Greening techniques proposed for the new ships would be implemented across the current fleet over a shorter timeframe;

○ Shortening of the timeframe to improve the OMAO small boat fleet; and

• Purchasing or developing technology to enable more efficient scheduling of vessels, equipment, and personnel to maximize crew productivity and enhance overall fleet performance, which would provide more DAS.

Under Alternative C, all the activities described in Alternative B would occur, many at a higher level of effort. The nature of these actions would not change, but the overall level of activity would be increased.

The official public review and comment period ends on January 31, 2024. Please visit the OMAO website for additional information and to access the Draft PEA: <http://omao.noaa.gov/noaa-vessel-operations-draft-pea>.

Classification: The Draft PEA was prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*) as amended by the Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023, Public Law 118–5 (2023); Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) Regulations for Implementing the Procedural Provisions of NEPA (40 CFR 1500–1508 (1978)); NOAA's Policy and Procedures for Compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act and Related Authorities (NOAA Administrative Order (NAO) 216–6A and Companion Manual for NAO 216–6A), and other relevant federal and state laws and regulations.

Dated: December 18, 2023.

Richard W. Spinrad,

Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere and NOAA Administrator.

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[RTID 0648–XD587]

Marine Mammals; File No. 27592

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

ACTION: Notice; receipt of application.

SUMMARY: Notice is hereby given that Shannon Atkinson, Ph.D., University of Alaska Fairbanks, 17101 Point Lena Loop Road, Juneau, AK 99801 has applied in due form for a permit to import, export, and receive marine mammal parts for scientific research.

DATES: Written comments must be received on or before January 22, 2024.

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 (APPS) home page, <https://apps.nmfs.noaa.gov>, and then selecting File No. 27592 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. 27592 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.

noaa.gov. The request should set forth the specific reasons why a hearing on this application would be appropriate.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Jennifer Skidmore or Erin Markin, Ph.D., (301) 427–8401.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The subject permit is requested under the authority of the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972, as amended (MMPA; 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 (ESA; 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 receive, import, and export marine mammal parts from cetaceans and pinnipeds annually for scientific research. Marine mammal parts will not exceed 1,000 animals per year within order Cetacea (dolphins, porpoises, and whales) and 500 animals per year within order Pinnipedia (seals and sea lions, excluding walrus). Secondary to research, marine mammal parts may also be used for educational purposes. Import and export activities would occur world-wide. Sources of samples include U.S. subsistence harvests and stranded animals in foreign countries. Samples may also be obtained within the United States or abroad from animals held in captivity, authorized researchers or collections, and soft or hard parts that sloughed, excreted, or naturally discharged. No live animals would be harassed or taken, lethally or otherwise, under the requested permit. The requested duration of the permit is 5 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: December 14, 2023.

Julia M. Harrison,

Chief, Permits and Conservation Division, Office of Protected Resources, National Marine Fisheries Service.

[FR Doc. 2023–28151 Filed 12–20–23; 8:45 am]

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