UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
PROGRAM PLANNING AND INTEGRATION
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

AUG 28 2012

To All Interested Government Agencies and Public Groups:

Under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), an environmental review has been performed on the following action.

TITLE: Environmental Assessment on Effects of Issuing Marine Mammal Scientific Research Permit No. 16325

LOCATION: Maine to Florida; U.S. and Canadian waters of the Gulf of Maine; and Puerto Rico in the North Atlantic Ocean

SUMMARY: The proposed action is issuance of a scientific research permit for takes of marine mammals during vessel surveys, photo-identification, photogrammetry, behavioral observations, collection of exhaled air (blow), feces, and sloughed skin, and skin and blubber biopsy. The purposes of the research are to: 1) gather information on individual patterns of distribution, mating system, movement and habitat use, which are important for understanding ecology, stock structure, critical habitats and overlap with human activities, 2) gather data with which to better understand how individual habitat use and movement patterns vary with age, sex and other factors, 3) gather information on entanglement rates and other human impacts, and 4) undertake sample-based studies of molecular genetics, aging, toxicology, reproduction and health in the Gulf of Maine humpback whale population. Research on fin whales, blue whales, sperm whales, and sei whales will focus primarily on studies of population structure, human impacts and health. Impacts from these activities would be short-term and minimal to individual animals and negligible to the species. A biological opinion concluded that the proposed action would not likely jeopardize the continued existence of the species and would not likely destroy or adversely modify designated critical habitat. The permit would be valid for five years from the date of issuance.

RESPONSIBLE OFFICIAL:

Helen M. Golde
Acting Director, Office of Protected Resources
National Marine Fisheries Service
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
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The environmental review process led us to conclude that this action will not have a significant effect on the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared. A copy of the finding of no significant impact (FONSI) including the supporting environmental assessment (EA) is enclosed for your information.

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Although NOAA is not soliciting comments on this completed EA/FONSI we will consider any comments submitted that would assist us in preparing future NEPA documents. Please submit any written comments to the responsible official named above.

Sincerely,

Patricia A. Montanio
NOAA NEPA Coordinator

Enclosure