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

JAN 24 2013

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: Supplemental Environmental Assessment for the Issuance of an Amendment to Scientific Research Permit for Aerial and Vessel Surveys of North Atlantic Right Whales off the Southeastern United States (File No. 13927)

LOCATION: Coastal waters off the southeastern U.S. coast from Georgia to Florida, with a focus on the area south of St. Augustine, Florida.

SUMMARY: NMFS proposes to issue an amendment to a scientific research permit to increase the number of North Atlantic right whales (*Eubalaena glacialis*) that may be harassed annually during aerial surveys from 50 to 100 and during vessel surveys from 10 to 60. Research activities would consist of photo-identification, surveys, and passive acoustics off the southeastern U.S. coast from December through April, annually. 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 listed species and would not likely destroy or adversely modify designated critical habitat. The amended permit would expire on October 31, 2016.

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 supplemental environmental assessment (SEA) is enclosed for your information.

Although NOAA is not soliciting comments on this completed SEA/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