

MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION
4340 East-West Highway, Room 700
Bethesda, MD 20814-4447

14 May 2009

Mr. Timothy J. Van Norman
Chief, Branch of Permits
Division of Management Authority
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
4401 North Fairfax Drive
Arlington, VA 22203

Re: Request for Amendment, Permit No. MA690038
(U.S. Geological Survey, Alaska Science Center)

Dear Mr. Van Norman:

The Marine Mammal Commission, in consultation with its Committee of Scientific Advisors on Marine Mammals, has reviewed the above-referenced permit amendment request with regard to the goals, policies, and requirements of the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

The permit-holder currently is authorized to capture, measure and weigh, sample, biopsy, tag, mark, conduct bioelectrical impedance measurements on, and release up to 200 polar bears annually over five years. Up to 50 of these animals may be taken by capture, instrumentation, collection of milk samples, muscle biopsies, and implantation with internal body temperature data-loggers. In addition, up to 30 female polar bears may be taken in maternal dens during surveys using forward-looking infrared-equipped aircraft. The permit-holder also is authorized to import an unspecified number of blood, tissue, and tooth samples collected from polar bears taken legally in Canada, Greenland, Norway, and Russia and to export samples to researchers in those countries.

The permit-holder is requesting that the permit be amended to authorize the taking of an additional 50 bears (subadult and adult males and females) for a National Science Foundation-funded collaboration with the University of Wyoming and for investigations by the U.S. Geological Survey of polar bear survival strategies. The study would involve activities currently authorized to be carried out on adult female polar bears, including fat and muscle biopsy and deployment of radio tags. In addition, the permit-holder is seeking authorization to deploy 50 "glue-on" or ear-tag radio-transmitters to monitor bears that may not accommodate a radio collar or when use of a radio collar is not desirable.

RECOMMENDATION

The Marine Mammal Commission recommends that the Fish and Wildlife Service approve the permit amendment request, provided that the conditions contained in the current permit remain in effect.

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The Commission believes that the activities for which it has recommended approval are consistent with the purposes and policies of the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

Please contact me if you have any questions concerning this recommendation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Michael L. Gork", followed by a horizontal line and the letters "for".

Timothy J. Ragen, Ph.D.
Executive Director