



MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION

17 January 2025

Mr. Drew Crane, Deputy Assistant Regional Director
Ecological Services
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
1011 East Tudor Road
Anchorage, AK 99503-6199

Re: Permit Application No. 12101045
(Ben Hamilton, Pioneer Studios)

Dear Mr. Crane:

The Marine Mammal Commission (the Commission), in consultation with its Committee of Scientific Advisors on Marine Mammals, has reviewed the above-referenced permit application with regard to the goals, policies, and requirements of the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA). Mr. Hamilton is proposing to film¹ northern sea otters in Alaska for a documentary about the diverse ecosystems present in the Sitka region. The applicants would film sea otters in Sitka Sound through December 2026. Individuals of any age class and either sex could be harassed. The filmmakers would implement various measures to minimize impacts on sea otters and other marine mammals.

Personnel qualifications

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (FWS) application for a photography permit requests a summary of the activities each primary investigator (PI) and co-investigator (CI) will be performing under the permit and a description of their accomplishments and experience relevant to the proposed activities², including any knowledge of the marine mammal species that is the subject of the application. As noted during its informal review of the application in August 2024, it is unclear whether the PI and/or CI would be authorized to conduct both topside and UAS-based filming since the only information provided designates the PI as the producer/director and the CI as a researcher rather than specifying the filming activities each would conduct. Additionally, the curriculum vitae (CVs) provided do not describe any experience filming or working with sea otters. Without that information, it is impossible to assess whether the experience described in the CVs adequately demonstrates the PI and CI's ability to conduct the various filming activities under the permit. The Commission recommends that FWS ensure that all applicants provide sufficient information regarding the activities they would be authorized to conduct and their relevant, species-specific experience. If neither the PI nor the CI has experience working with sea otters, the Commission recommends that FWS condition the permit to require that a sea otter expert accompany the filming team in the field.

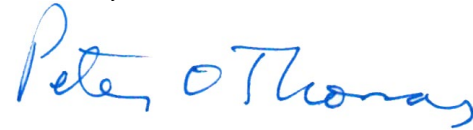
¹ Including filming topside from a vessel and on land, and in air with unmanned aircraft systems (UAS).

² e.g., filming marine mammals, operating vessels/vehicles in the presence of marine mammals, etc.

Mr. Drew Crane
17 January 2025
Page 2

The Commission believes that the proposed activities are consistent with the purposes and policies of the MMPA. Please contact me if you have any questions concerning the Commission's recommendations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Peter O. Thomas". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "P" and a distinct "O" in the middle name.

Peter O. Thomas, Ph.D.,
Executive Director