

requests harassment of 13,600 harbor seals annually from ground surveys, and 50,000 annually from vessel surveys and playback experiments. The geographic locations of the proposed study are the Washington State inland waters of the Salish Sea: two haul-out sites in Puget Sound and four haul-out sites in the vicinity of Sucia Island, in the San Juan Islands.

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 28, 2011.

P. Michael Payne,

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

[FR Doc. 2011-33765 Filed 1-3-12; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510-22-P

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

RIN 0648-XA914

Marine Mammals; File No. 16998

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

ACTION: Notice; receipt of application.

SUMMARY: Notice is hereby given that Mr. Gregory Walker, University of Alaska Fairbanks, Fairbanks, AK has applied for a permit to conduct research on Steller sea lions (*Eumetopias jubatus*) in Alaska.

DATES: Written, telefaxed, or email comments must be received on or before February 3, 2012.

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. 16998 from the list of available applications.

These documents are also available upon written request or by appointment in the following offices:

Permits and Conservation Division, Office of Protected Resources, NMFS, 1315 East-West Highway, Room 13705, Silver Spring, MD 20910; phone (301) 427-8401; fax (301) 713-0376; and

Alaska Region, NMFS, P.O. Box 21668, Juneau, AK 99802-1668; phone (907) 586-7221; fax (907) 586-7249.

Written comments on this application should be submitted to the Chief, Permits and Conservation Division, at the address listed above. Comments may also be submitted by facsimile to (301) 713-0376, or by email to NMFS.Pr1Comments@noaa.gov. Please include the File No. in the subject line of the email comment.

Those individuals requesting a public hearing should submit a written request to the Chief, Permits and Conservation Division at the address listed above. The request should set forth the specific reasons why a hearing on this application would be appropriate.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Tammy Adams or Laura Morse, (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 objective of the project is to demonstrate novel methods for imaging Steller sea lion terrestrial habitat in the Aleutian Islands with the accuracy and fidelity necessary for population surveys and at a cost low enough to allow frequent monitoring. Ship-based unmanned aircraft would be used for low-altitude (75 to 120 meters) aerial surveys of rookeries and haul outs between March and December 2012. A permit is requested for harassment of 13,000 Steller sea lions, 200 harbor seals (*Phoca vitulina*), 10 killer whales (*Orcinus orca*), 10 humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*), and 10 northern fur seals (*Callorhinus ursinus*). The permit is requested for a period of one year.

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 activities proposed are consistent with the Preferred Alternative in the Final Programmatic Environmental Impact

Statement for Steller Sea Lion and Northern Fur Seal Research (NMFS 2007), and that issuance of the permit would not have a significant adverse impact on the human environment.

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 28, 2011.

P. Michael Payne,

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

[FR Doc. 2011-33766 Filed 1-3-12; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510-22-P

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

RIN 0648-XA888

Marine Mammals; File No. 15682

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

ACTION: Notice; issuance of permit.

SUMMARY: Notice is hereby given that a permit has been issued to Mithriel MacKay, Texas A&M University at Galveston, Galveston, TX 75003 to conduct research on humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*).

ADDRESSES: The permit and related documents are available for review upon written request or by appointment in the following offices:

Permits and Conservation Division, Office of Protected Resources, NMFS, 1315 East-West Highway, Room 13705, Silver Spring, MD 20910; phone (301) 427-8401; fax (301) 713-0376; and

Southeast Region, NMFS, 263 13th Avenue South, Saint Petersburg, FL 33701; phone (727) 824-5312; fax (727) 824-5309.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Kristy Beard or Joselyd Garcia-Reyes, (301) 427-8401.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: On April 4, 2011, notice was published in the **Federal Register** (76 FR 18533) that a request for a permit to conduct research on humpback whales off Puerto Rico had been submitted by the above-named applicant. The requested permit has been issued under the authority of the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972, as amended (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.*), and the regulations governing the taking, importing, and exporting of endangered and threatened species (50 CFR parts 222–226).

The permit authorizes up to 700 humpback whales to be harassed each year during vessel-based photo-identification, behavioral observation, and passive acoustic recording. The applicant requested that we remove the original request for divers to conduct underwater photography from the application. Whales will be harassed year-round, with efforts focused from October through July. The permit is valid for five years from the date of issuance.

An environmental assessment (EA) was prepared analyzing the effects of the permitted activities on the human environment in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*). Based on the analyses in the EA, NMFS determined that issuance of the permit would not significantly impact the quality of the human environment and that preparation of an environmental impact statement was not required. That determination is documented in a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), signed on December 16, 2011.

As required by the ESA, issuance of this permit was based on a finding that such permit: (1) Was applied for in good faith; (2) will not operate to the disadvantage of such endangered species; and (3) is consistent with the purposes and policies set forth in section 2 of the ESA.

Dated: December 29, 2011.

P. Michael Payne,

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

[FR Doc. 2011–33761 Filed 1–3–12; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510–22–P

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

United States Patent and Trademark Office

Matters Related to Patent Appeals

ACTION: Proposed collection; comment request.

SUMMARY: The United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO), as part of its continuing effort to reduce paperwork and respondent burden, invites the general public and other Federal agencies to take this opportunity to comment on this new information collection, as required by the Paperwork

Reduction Act of 1995, Public Law 104–13 (44 U.S.C. 3506(c)(2)(A)).

DATES: Written comments must be submitted on or before March 5, 2012.

ADDRESSES: You may submit comments by any of the following methods:

- *Email:* InformationCollection@uspto.gov. Include “0651–00xx Matters Related to Patent Appeals comment” in the subject line of the message.
- *Mail:* Susan K. Fawcett, Records Officer, Office of the Chief Information Officer, United States Patent and Trademark Office, P.O. Box 1450, Alexandria, VA 22313–1450.
- *Federal Rulemaking Portal:* <http://www.regulations.gov>.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Requests for additional information should be directed to Raul Tamayo, Legal Advisor, Office of Patent Legal Administration, United States Patent and Trademark Office, P.O. Box 1450, Alexandria, VA 22313–1450; by telephone at (571) 272–7728; or by email to Raul.Tamayo@uspto.gov.

Additional information about this collection is also available at <http://www.reginfo.gov> under “Information Collection Review.”

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

I. Abstract

During its examination of an application for patent or for reissue of a patent, or during its reexamination of a patent, the United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) makes many decisions of a substantive nature which the applicant or patent owner may feel deny him or her the patent protection to which he or she is entitled. Where the differences of opinion on such matters concern the denial of patent claims because of prior art or other patentability issues, the questions thereby raised are said to relate to the merits, and a procedure for appealing to the Board of Patent Appeals and Interferences has long been provided by statute (35 U.S.C. 134).

Applicants and patent owners initiate the appeal procedure by filing a Notice of Appeal. At the time of filing a Notice of Appeal, applicants and patent owners may request that a panel of examiners formally review the legal and factual basis of the rejections in their application prior to the filing of an Appeal Brief, by filing a Pre-Appeal Brief Request for Review. In addition, applicants and patent owners who desire an oral hearing before the Board may request the hearing by filing a Request for Oral Hearing Before the Board of Patent Appeals and Interferences.

Currently, Notices of Appeal, Requests for Oral Hearing, and Pre-appeal Brief Requests for Review are covered under 0651–0031 Patent Processing (Updating). The USPTO has determined that it would be beneficial to transfer these items out of 0651–0031 and into their own collection. Therefore, the USPTO is requesting the creation of a new collection which will transfer the three existing notices and requests out of the 0651–0031 inventory into a new collection of information titled “Matters Related to Patent Appeals.” For a complete listing of the items covered by this collection, please see the table in Section III of this notice.

The information in this collection can be submitted electronically through EFS–Web, the USPTO’s Web-based electronic filing system, as well as on paper. The USPTO is taking this opportunity to account for the electronic submissions in this collection.

There are forms associated with the Notices of Appeal (PTO/SB/31), the Requests for Oral Hearing Before the Board of Patent Appeals and Interferences (PTO/SB/32), and the Pre-appeal Brief Requests for Review (PTO/SB/33). Therefore, after approval, this collection will have three forms.

II. Method of Collection

By mail, facsimile, or hand delivery to the USPTO when an applicant files the various notices or requests. The remaining papers can also be filed as attachments through EFS–Web.

III. Data

OMB Number: 0651–00xx.
Form Number(s): PTO/SB/31/32/33.
Type of Review: New information collection.

Affected Public: Businesses or other for-profits; and not-for-profit institutions.

Estimated Number of Respondents: 54,500 responses per year, with an estimated 10,940 submitted by small entities. Of the total responses, the USPTO expects that 50,700 will be submitted through EFS–Web.

Estimated Time per Response: The USPTO estimates that it will take the public approximately 12 minutes (0.20 hours) to complete the information in this collection, with the exception of the Pre-appeal Brief Requests for Review, which the USPTO estimates will take approximately 5 hours to complete. These estimated times include gathering the necessary information, creating the documents, and submitting the completed request to the USPTO. The USPTO calculates that, on balance, it takes the same amount of time to gather the necessary information, create the