Marine Fisheries Service, Office of Enforcement, 8484 Georgia Ave., Suite 415, Silver Spring, Maryland, 20910, Telephone (301) 427–2300.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

I. Abstract

Under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (Act) Alaskan natives may take marine mammals only for subsistence purposes or for creating and selling native handicrafts. The possession of marine mammals so taken are limited to natives or to registered agents or tanners. Agents or tanners must apply for registration, and after registration must annually submit copies of transaction records. The information is collected to (1) grant certain members of the public an exemption under the Act to which they would not otherwise be entitled, and (2) to manage the program and provide for effective law enforcement.

II. Method of Collection

Respondents will meet the requirements set forth in the regulation. No forms will be used.

III. Data

OMB Number: 0648–0179.

Form Number: None.

Type of Review: Regular Submission.

Affected Public: Business or other for profit organizations.

Estimated Number of Respondents: 75.

Estimated Time Per Response: 2.0 hrs.

Estimated Total Annual Burden Hours: 150.

Estimated Total Annual Cost to Public: $0 (no capital expenditures).

IV. Request for Comments

Comments are invited on: (a) Whether the proposed collection of information is necessary for the proper performance of the functions of the agency, including whether the information shall have practical utility; (b) the accuracy of the agency's estimate of the burden (including hours and cost) of the proposed collection of information; (c) ways to enhance the quality, utility, and clarity of the information to be collected; and (d) ways to minimize the burden of the collection of information on respondents, including through the use of automated collection techniques or other forms of information technology.

Comments submitted in response to this notice will be summarized and/or included in the request for OMB approval of this information collection; they also will become a matter of public record.

Linda Engelmeier,

Departmental Forms Clearance Officer, Office of Management and Organization.

[FR Doc. 98–12604 Filed 5–11–98; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510–22–P

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

Final Certification for the Combined Consolidation and/or Automation and Closure of 80 Weather Service Offices (WSOs) and Consolidation of Two WSOs

ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: On May 6, 1998 the Under Secretary for Oceans and Atmosphere approved and transmitted 14 office consolidation, 46 office automation, and 80 office closure certifications to Congress. Pub. L. 102–567 requires that the final certifications be published in the **Federal Register**.

EFFECTIVE DATE: May 12, 1998.

ADDRESSES: Requests for copies of the final certification packages should be sent to Tom Beaver, Room 11426, 1325 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Tom Beaver at 301–713–0300 ext. 144.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The two consolidation certifications for Astoria and Wichita Falls were proposed in the December 27, 1996 **Federal Register** and the 60-day public comment period closed on February 25, 1997. The remaining 80 certification packages were proposed in the January 7, 1997 **Federal Register** and the 60-day public comment period closed on March 10, 1997. Thirteen timely and three late public comments were received pertaining to WSO Astoria. Individual public comments were received pertaining to each of the following WSOs: Muskegon, Michigan; Rapid City, South Dakota; Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; Apalachicola, Florida; and Port Arthur, Texas. Two public comments were received pertaining to Athens, Georgia and one comment was received that pertained to Pennsylvania sites in general. These comments and responses are set forth here for reference.

Comment: Thirteen timely and three late comments were received from individuals in the Astoria, Oregon area. Individuals providing comments included Congresswoman Elizabeth Furse, State Representative Jackie Taylor, Senator George H. Smith, Congressman Earl Blumenauer, State Representative Tim Josi, Sheriff and Director of Emergency Services John P. Raichl, Airport Manager and Director of Operations Port of Astoria Ron Larsen, and Captain and President Columbia River Bar Pilots George A. Waer. The main concern presented by all individuals was the loss of face to face interaction with National Weather Service (NWS) personnel and the perceived inability to forecast for the ''unique'' weather conditions at Astoria from Portland.

Response: To ensure all concerns were addressed and understood, the March 1997 Modernization Transition Committee (MTC) meeting was held in Astoria. The community leaders and anyone else concerned with NWS Modernization actions had the opportunity to express their concerns to the Committee. The MTC and the public in attendance listened to both the NWS management from Portland and the public. The major topics discussed during the six-hour public comment period on the Astoria Consolidation Certification during the March 18, 1997 meeting are summarized below. A major concerns surrounding the Astoria Consolidation was the ability of the Portland NEXRAD Weather Service Forecast Office (NWSFO) to provide information on the Columbia River Bar and offshore marine environment. To address these concerns the NWS presented the following: (1) the Portland office has access to all data that the Astoria office did and access to data that the Astoria office never had; (2) the Astoria WSO never produced the marine forecasts, these products have always been issued from Seattle or Portland; (3) mariners can contact the forecasters in Portland directly by phone; and (4) an Internet home page maintained in Portland allows ready access to current weather forecasts and products for Oregon and the coastal waters.

The ability of the Portland office to recognize rapid changes in the Atoria weather was questioned. However, the infrastructure affecting this ability has only improved since services were transferred to Portland. The more timely and robust data sets of the Modernization (i.e., Doppler radar, high resolution satellite imagery and continuous surface observations) provide a superior platform for Portland to monitor rapid weather changes than was previously present in the Astoria office. The severe weather spotter volunteers previously used by Astoria are still in place, except they now call Portland when severe weather threatens.

The Portland office also employs two staff from the Astoria WSO, so ''local'' expertise is available.

Since Portland is serving a larger metropolitan area, the ability of the office to give the Astoria community attention was challenged. However, most of the forecast services for Astoria have always come from Portland. A result of the Modernization in Oregon is that the Portland area of responsibility is decreasing substantially; thus more time is being spent on Astoria than before. A Warning Coordination Meteorologist and Weather Coordination Officer are assigned to the Portland office and coordinate with the Astoria office to ensure everyone receives adequate attention. Portland has made significant service adjustments in the NOAA Weather Radio (NWR) and marine reports program to meet the Astoria community needs, and will continue to take this approach in the future. After hearing both sides, the MTC members determined that there would not be a degradation of services associated with this proposed Consolidation certification. However, the MTC recognized potential future degradation of services associated with Automation and Closure certification and made the following recommendation:

The Portland WFO will work with the Astoria WCO and the community to define the remaining concerns and develop and implement procedures to ensure degradation of service does not occur. The issues identified by the committee include, but are not limited to, the need to ensure the adequacy of ASOS augmentation, the availability of consultation concerning river bar forecasts, and the implementation of special procedures during extreme conditions. In addition, the Committee has determined that a data buoy in proximity to the bar is essential. However, the characteristics of Data Buoy 46029 are not adequate to provide needed services.

The Committee agreed to pay careful attention to future actions concerning the Astoria office and requested follow-up briefings from the NWS at future meetings. The MTC also encouraged the public to keep them advised through public comments. Both the public and the NWS management seemed satisfied with the MTC conclusion, and everyone gained a better understanding of the problems and required solutions.

Comment: Mr. Roy Wheeler, Assistant Director of the Muskegon County Emergency Services, responded to the **Federal Register** Announcement concerning the Consolidation, Automation, and Closure Certifications for Muskegon, MI. He expressed concern that: (1) he is not being served as well with the Modernized technology and organizational structure as he was with the ''old system''; (2) during severe weather he does not receive ''adequate weather reports'' and he does not receive accurate information in support of major fires and chemical spills; (3) the Amateur Radio Community is installing automated weather observing equipment; (4) while the staff at NEXRAD Weather Service Office (NWSO) Grand Rapids has been cooperative, he has lost the personal contact that he received from the ''old system''; and (5) ''on more than one occasion this past season, we were not notified when severe weather was present''.

Response: The staff at NWSO Grand Rapids have had numerous contacts with the Emergency Management Services of Muskegon County since becoming operational in August of 1995 (open houses, seminars, spotter training sessions for Muskegon County, etc.). Some of the contacts were for normal operational issues, while others were to explain modernized technology and the new organizational structure. Every Emergency Management organization in the NWSO Grand Rapids County Warning Area has access to the severe weather forecaster via toll-free 800 service. Severe weather watches and warnings are provided via NOAA Weather Wire Service (NWWS), NWR, Internet Web Page, Emergency Manager Weather Information Network (EMWIN), as well as the Law Enforcement Information Network (LEIN). During HAZMAT situations on October 16, 1996 and December 13, 1996, surface observation data (i.e. wind speed and direction, temperature/dewpoint, pressure, etc.) from the Automated Surface Observing System (ASOS) at the Muskegon Airport as well as forecasts for the local area were provided to Muskegon County Emergency Dispatch and 911 upon request. NWSO Grand Rapids and the Amateur Radio Community have entered into a cooperative arrangement to expand the use of automated surface observation equipment. In fact, the NWS has provided some funding in support of the demonstration project. The automated equipment has been purchased commercially and is similar to the automated observation equipment used by television stations, utility companies, road departments, etc. NWSO Grand Rapids has been responsible for issuing severe weather warnings for Muskegon County for only the 1996 severe weather season. During that season, 3 warnings were issued. Two of them verified with reports of large hail. The other warning had no severe weather reported. Lead times were 7 and 13 minutes. When contacted in the Fall of 1996, in association with the Confirmation of Services for the NEXRAD Doppler radar at NWSO Grand Rapids, Mr. Wheeler responded ''Warnings are as good as before, but I still wish the radar had been located at Muskegon''. Mr. Wheeler has stated on previous occasions that his primary concerns are: (1) The lack of telephone contact initiated by the staff at NWSO Grand Rapids during times of severe weather; and (2) that he would have preferred the WSR–88D be located in Muskegon instead of Grand Rapids. Technology (NWR, EMWIN, Internet, NWWS, EAS, LEIN, etc.) allows severe weather warnings and statements to be transmitted quickly to all the Emergency Managers in the County Warning Area (CWA). The Muskegon County Emergency Management Services (EMS) has access to NWWS and to NWR as well as to the LEIN. Mr. Wheeler can contact the Grand Rapids staff via the 800 service anytime, but it is not possible for the staff at NWSO Grand Rapids to make calls to each of the Emergency Management Organizations in their 28 county warning area during severe weather events. The WSR–88D at Grand Rapids is of optimum range (20–50 miles) from Muskegon County for severe weather detection. Leo Grenier, the Warning Coordination Officer (WCO) at Muskegon, has made several contacts with the Muskegon County EMS and the 911 Service, discussed their concerns, and explained the most efficient means for them to receive severe weather watches, warnings, and statements, Dan Houser, Meteorologist in Charge, and Mike Heathfield, Warning Coordination Meteorologist from Grand Rapids have also had similar conversations. Mr. Houser is organizing a follow-up meeting with the Muskegon County EMS, Muskegon County 911, and the Director of the local amateur radio club. Mr. Houser will make every attempt to satisfy the concerns of the participants. [On April 30, 1998 in a conversation between Mr. Wheeler and NWSO Grand Rapids staff, Mr. Wheeler said he was satisfied with the current services provided by NWSO Grand Rapids.]

Comment: Mr. Norman Pudwill, Director of the Fall River County Emergency Management Organization, responded to the **Federal Register** Announcement concerning the Consolidation, Automation, and Closure Certification for Rapid City. While he is ''very happy'' with the products and services provided by the new NWS

office in Rapid City, he is concerned by the lack of high quality NWR coverage in Fall River County.

Response: In a reply letter from the Central Regional Director, two alternatives requiring private/public partnerships were described for Mr. Pudwill. The NWS is not funded for NWR expansion, so it is incumbent on Mr. Pudwill to work with private groups or local government entities to acquire a transmitter/antenna system that is compatible with NWS programming consoles. Central Region Headquarters will continue to work with Mr. Pudwill in his effort to improve NWS coverage in southwest South Dakota. [Central Region Headquarters has advised Mr. Pudwill of the requirements for an additional transmitter. As of April 30, 1998, Mr. Pudwill has been unable to obtain a local funding source for the additional equipment.]

Comment: A public comment from Representative George W. Gekas raised an issue regarding deficiencies in NEXRAD coverage for the Harrisburg metropolitan region. The comment cited several documented cases of severe weather conditions which went undetected by the NEXRAD system, the most recent being in May 1996.

Response: Both the June 1995 National Research Council study, ''Toward a New National Weather Service—Assessment of NEXRAD Coverage and Associated Weather Services'' and the follow-on October 1995 ''Secretary's Report to Congress on Adequacy of NEXRAD Coverage and Degradation of Weather Services under National Weather Service Modernization for 32 Areas of Concern'' concluded that NEXRAD coverage for the Harrisburg area and associated weather services would not be degraded. Harrisburg, PA was one of 32 areas of concern established by public comments solicited by the Secretary of Commerce between November 1994 and January 1995. This information as well as the detailed findings in the Secretary's Report was conveyed to Representative Gekas in an August 26, 1996 letter from Mr. Louis J. Boezi, Deputy Assistant Administrator for Modernization of the NWS. The August 26 letter also responded with the particulars on the May 1996 severe weather event and referenced previous replies from the NWS on the earlier weather events cited by Representative Gekas.

Comment: A public comment from Larry Wells, Gulf County Emergency Management, raised the issues that the WSR–88D covering Gulf County is 60 miles away from Apalachicola and that NWSO Tallahassee (the office which is responsible for Gulf County) has almost 50 counties under its responsibility versus the two counties for which WSO Apalachicola was responsible. The comment also mentioned a severe thunderstorm warning for Gulf County on February 14, 1997 which Mr. Wells thought was issued after a storm had already passed through Gulf County.

Response: Gulf County is within overlapping coverage of both the Tallahassee and Eglin Air Force Base WSR–88Ds. Almost all of Gulf County is within 60 nm of both WSR–88Ds. Even though NWSO Tallahassee is responsible for more counties than was WSO Apalachicola, NWSO Tallahassee had a much larger staff than did WSO Apalachicola. Archived data from the Tallahassee WSR–88D indicated that the February 14, 1997 severe thunderstorm warning for Gulf County was timely.

Comment: A public comment from W.M. Timmerman, Jr. mentioned inaccurate weather information broadcast by The Weather Channel and a local TV weather reporter. Mr. Timmerman also mentioned two other instances of inaccurate weather information.

Response: The NWS is not responsible for weather information presented by The Weather Channel or local TV weather reporters. Not enough information was presented about the latter two instances in the letter to determine if the weather information was from the NWS or from local TV stations. Mr. Timmerman was contacted by NWSO Lake Charles with an invitation to visit the NWSO and become a local storm spotter/rainfall observer for the Port Arthur area.

Comment: A public comment from Barry Church, Habersham County Emergency Management, (Athens, Georgia) stated his concern over the lack of attention given by NWSO Greenville/Spartanburg to spotter reports during a February 21, 1997 tornado event in Habersham County. Mr. Church also mentioned poor NWR reception in Habersham County and his perceived lack of attention given to the six northeast Georgia counties during a statewide tornado drill on February 26, 1997.

Response: NWSO Greenville/Spartanburg's log for February 21, 1997 indicated that a tornado watch which included Habersham County was issued at 2:28 PM EST. NWSO Greenville/Spartanburg issued a Severe Thunderstorm Warning for Habersham County at 2:51 PM EST which was valid until 3:30 PM EST. Habersham County was advised by telephone of the warning at 2:53 PM. Habersham County called NWSO Greenville/Spartanburg at 3:09 PM EST with a report of damaging winds county-wide with the first damage having occurred at about 3:00 PM (some of the damage was later identified as F–1 tornado damage). At 3:28 PM EST NWSO Greenville/Spartanburg received a call from Habersham County with three reports of funnel clouds just north of Cornelia. However, by this time the line of storms had already passed through Habersham County. Poor NWR reception in Habersham County has been an ongoing problem. NWSO Greenville/Spartanburg has had recent discussions with officials in Graham County, North Carolina concerning a possible new NWR transmitter in that county financed by Natahala Power Company. The NWR signal from such a transmitter should reach into Habersham County. If a repeater is necessary for reception in Habersham County, Mr. Church has offered to donate a tower site. Habersham County was included in the Georgia statewide tornado drill held on February 26, 1997. NWSO Greenville/Spartanburg issued a practice warning during the drill which included Habersham County. NWSO Greenville/Spartanburg verified through a telephone call that Habersham County received the practice warning.

Comment: A public comment from Peggy Hewatt, Barrow County Emergency Management, questioned whether NWSFO Atlanta could communicate with her office as well as WSO Athens had in the past.

Response: Ms. Hewatt gave no specific instance where NWSFO Atlanta had failed to communicate weather information to Barrow County and even stated that her comment ''does not mean that Peachtree City is not doing a fine job * * *'' NWSFO Atlanta's area of responsibility is larger than that which WSO Athens had and it may be that NWSFO Atlanta may not be able to use the telephone to communicate with each individual county as often as WSO Athens did in the past. However, communication methods such as NWR, NWWS, and EMWIN are available for the receipt of weather information.

Comment: A public comment from Senator Arlen Specter raised an issue regarding the reliance on stand-alone ASOSs at Lehigh Valley Airport (Allentown, PA) specifically and throughout Pennsylvania generally. The comment stated ''since the start of ASOS operations on November 12, 1996, Lehigh Valley International Airport has been forced to deal with numerous discrepancies in determining visibility and types of precipitation at the airport.'' The comment also stated

that Bradford Regional Airport had experienced several ASOS power losses.

Response: None of the NWS-sponsored ASOSs located at WSOs in Pennsylvania are stand-alone systems. All of these are classified as Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) service level C or higher which means that humans will be present to provide augmentation and back-up for the ASOSs. Augmentation means adding parameters that ASOS does not measure. Back-up means measuring parameters in the event of an ASOS failure or if the ASOS measurement is not representative of the meteorological conditions. Augmentation and back-up is done either by FAA controllers or a contractor. ASOS operations at Lehigh Valley International Airport did not start on November 12, 1996. This ASOS was commissioned on November 1, 1995 after a pre-commissioning checkout period to determine that the system was performing reliably and correctly. Upon commissioning, NWS employees at WSO Allentown performed required augmentation and back-up of the ASOS until November 12, 1996 when responsibility for this was transferred to the FAA. FAA was planning to provide the augmentation and backup at service level C by air traffic controllers at the airport, however, the Lehigh Valley International Airport Authority sponsored a contract to provide level B service. The Bradford Regional Airport is an FAA-sponsored expansion site. This means that prior to the ASOS being commissioned there on December 2, 1996, this airport had no round-the-clock surface observation.

The MTC considered and endorsed these certifications at its March 18, 1997 meeting, concluding that these certifications would not result in any degradation of service.

(1) Astoria, OR—Consolidation
(2) Wichita Falls, TX—Consolidation
(3) Omaha, NE—Consolidation/Closure
(4) Sacramento, CA—Consolidation/Closure
(5) Akron, OH—Automation/Closure
(6) Allentown, PA—Automation/Closure
(7) Atlanta, GA—Automation/Closure
(8) Atlantic City, NJ—Automation/Closure
(9) Baltimore, MD—Automation/Closure
(10) Baton Rouge, LA—Automation/Closure
(11) Chicago, IL—Automation/Closure
(12) Columbia, MO—Automation/Closure
(13) Columbus, OH—Automation/Closure
(14) Dayton, OH—Automation/Closure
(15) Daytona Beach, FL—Automation/Closure
(16) Detroit, MI—Automation/Closure
(17) El Paso, TX—Automation/Closure
(18) Flint, MI—Automation/Closure
(19) Knoxville, TN—Automation/Closure
(20) Lubbock, TX—Automation/Closure
(21) Lynchburg, VA—Automation/Closure
(22) Mansfield, OH—Automation/Closure
(23) Moline, IL—Automation/Closure
(24) Montgomery, AL—Automation/Closure
(25) Norfolk, VA—Automation/Closure
(26) Oklahoma City, OK—Automation/Closure
(27) Raleigh, NC—Automation/Closure
(28) Richmond, VA—Automation/Closure
(29) Roanoke, VA—Automation/Closure
(30) San Antonio, TX—Automation/Closure
(31) San Diego, CA—Automation/Closure
(32) Sioux City, IA—Automation/Closure
(33) Stockton, CA—Automation/Closure
(34) Toledo, OH—Automation/Closure
(35) Tulsa, OK—Automation/Closure
(36)West Palm Beach, FL—Automation/Closure
(37) Wilke-Barre, PA—Automation/Closure
(38) Williamsport, PA—Automation/Closure
(39) Wilmington, DE—Automation/Closure
(40) Youngstown, OH—Automation/Closure
(41) Asheville, NC—Consolidation/Automation/Closure
(42) Augusta, GA—Consolidation/Automation/Closure
(43) Cincinnati, OH—Consolidation/Automation/Closure
(44) Fargo, ND—Consolidation/Automation/Closure
(45) Greensboro, NC—Consolidation/Automation/Closure
(46) Lewiston, ID—Consolidation/Automation/Closure
(47) Muskegon, MI—Consolidation/Automation/Closure
(48) Rapid City, SD—Consolidation/Automation/Closure
(49) Savannah, GA—Consolidation/Automation/Closure
(50) Springfield, IL—Consolidation/Automation/Closure
(51) Apalachicola, FL—Closure
(52) Athens, GA—Closure
(53) Austin, TX—Closure
(54) Bakersfield, CA—Closure
(55) Billings, MT—Closure
(56) Bristol, TN—Closure
(57) Cape Hatteras, NC—Closure
(58) Columbus, GA—Closure
(59) Del Rio, TX—Closure
(60) Eugene, OR—Closure
(61) Fort Myers, FL—Closure
(62) Galveston, TX—Closure
(63) Grand Island, NE—Closure
(64) Harrisburg, PA—Closure
(65) Helena, MT—Closure
(66) Klamath Falls, OR—Closure
(67) Los Angeles, CA—Closure
(68) Macon, GA—Closure
(69) New Orleans, LA—Closure
(70) New York City, NY—Closure
(71) Olympia, WA—Closure
(72) Orlando, FL—Closure
(73) Pensacola, FL—Closure
(74) Phoenix, AZ—Closure
(75) Port Arthur, TX—Closure
(76) Reading, PA—Closure
(77) Reno, NV—Closure
(78) Rosewell, NM—Closure
(79) Salem, OR—Closure
(80) St. Louis, MO—Closure
(81) Waco, TX—Closure
(82) Winslow, AZ—Closure

After consideration of the public comments received and the MTC endorsements, the Under Secretary for Oceans and Atmosphere approved these 82 combined consolidation and/or automation and closure certifications and transmitted them to Congress on May 6, 1998. Certification approval authority was delegated from the Secretary to the Under Secretary in June 1996. The NWS is now completing the certification requirements of Pub. L. 102–567 by publishing the final consolidation and/or automation and closure certifications in the **Federal Register**.

Dated: May 7, 1998.

John J. Kelly, Jr.,

Assistant Administrator for Weather Services.

[FR Doc. 98–12605 Filed 5–11–98; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510–12–M

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

Department of the Army

Proposed Collection; Comment Request

AGENCY: Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel (DAPE–ZXI–RM), Department of the Army, DOD.

ACTION: Notice.

In compliance with Section 3506(c)(2)(A) of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, the Department of the Army announces a proposed public information collection and seeks public comment on the provisions thereof. Comments are invited on: (a) whether the proposed collection of information is necessary for the proper