

TABLE 2—PROJECT SUMMARY—Continued

Duration of tows or sets	3 day soak.
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Project Narrative

The purpose of this survey is to provide fishery-independent data on lobster and Jonah crab growth and abundance within Massachusetts State waters of statistical areas 514 and 538. MA DMF funds this lobster abundance survey through their commercial and recreational lobster license fees. This survey has occurred annually since 2006. At least one MA DMF scientist would be on board for the sampling trips. MA DMF personnel would not be on board when traps are baited and deployed. Exemptions would not substantively change vessel operations. All catch during sampling trips would be retained temporarily to collect biological data. MA DMF staff may collect lobster and/or Jonah crab, including undersized, oversized, v-notched, and egg-bearing lobsters. Collected samples would be used for research projects on growth and maturity. No catch from the experimental traps would be landed for sale. All gear would be Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan compliant. Each trawl consists of six traps, with three vented and three ventless traps alternated along the string. Survey traps would be tagged as, "MA DMF Ventless Traps."

If approved, the applicant may request minor modifications and extensions to the EFP throughout the year. EFP modifications and extensions may be granted without further notice if they are deemed essential to facilitate completion of the proposed research and have minimal impacts that do not change the scope or impact of the initially approved EFP request. Any fishing activity conducted outside the scope of the exempted fishing activity would be prohibited.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: March 18, 2025.

Karen H. Abrams,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.
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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

[RTID 0648-XE739]

Draft 2024 Marine Mammal Stock Assessment Reports

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

ACTION: Notice; request for comments and new information.

SUMMARY: NMFS reviewed the Alaska, Atlantic, and Pacific regional marine mammal stock assessment reports (SAR) in accordance with the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA). SARs for marine mammals in the Alaska, Atlantic, and Pacific regions were revised to include new information. NMFS is soliciting public comments on the draft 2024 SARs and requesting new information for strategic stocks that were not updated in 2024.

DATES: Comments must be received by June 20, 2025.

ADDRESSES: The 2024 draft SARs are available in electronic form via the internet at <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/marine-mammal-protection/draft-marine-mammal-stock-assessment-reports>.

You may submit comments or new information, identified by NOAA-NMFS-2025-0019, via electronic submission through the Federal e-Rulemaking Portal:

Electronic Submission: Submit all electronic public comments via the Federal e-Rulemaking Portal. Go to <https://www.regulations.gov> and type NOAA-NMFS-2025-0019 in the Search box (note: copying and pasting the FDMS Docket Number directly from this document may not yield search results). Click on the "Comment" icon, complete the required fields, and enter or attach your comments.

Instructions: NMFS may not consider comments if they are sent by any other method, to any other address or individual, or received after the end of the comment period. All comments received are a part of the public record and will generally be posted for public viewing on www.regulations.gov without change. All personal identifying information (e.g., name, address, etc.), confidential business information, or

otherwise sensitive information submitted voluntarily by the sender will be publicly accessible. NMFS will accept anonymous comments (enter "N/A" in the required fields if you wish to remain anonymous).

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Zachary Schakner, Office of Science and Technology, 301-427-8106, Zachary.Schakner@noaa.gov; Nancy Young, 206-526-4297, Nancy.Young@noaa.gov, regarding Alaska regional stock assessments; Jessica McCordic, 508-495-2396, jessica.mccordic@noaa.gov, regarding Atlantic regional stock assessments; or Jim Carretta, 858-546-7171, Jim.Carretta@noaa.gov, regarding Pacific regional stock assessments.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**Background**

Section 117 of the MMPA (16 U.S.C. 1361 *et seq.*) requires NMFS and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to prepare stock assessments for each stock of marine mammals occurring in waters under the jurisdiction of the United States. These SARs must contain information regarding the distribution and abundance of the stock, population growth rates and trends, estimates of annual human-caused mortality and serious injury (M/SI) from all sources, descriptions of the fisheries with which the stock interacts, and the status of the stock. Initial SARs were completed in 1995.

The MMPA requires NMFS and USFWS to review the SARs at least annually for strategic stocks and stocks for which significant new information is available and at least once every three years for non-strategic stocks. The term "strategic stock" means a marine mammal stock: (A) for which the level of direct human-caused mortality exceeds the potential biological removal level or PBR (defined by the MMPA as the maximum number of animals, not including natural mortalities, that may be removed from a marine mammal stock while allowing that stock to reach or maintain its optimum sustainable population); (B) which, based on the best available scientific information, is declining and is likely to be listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) within the foreseeable future; or (C) which is listed as a threatened species or endangered species under the ESA or is designated as depleted under the

MMPA. NMFS and USFWS are required to revise a SAR if the review indicates that the status of the stock has changed or can be more accurately determined.

In order to ensure that marine mammal SARs include the best scientific information available at the time of publication, the updated SARs under NMFS' jurisdiction are peer-reviewed within NMFS' Science Centers and by members of three regional independent scientific review groups established under the MMPA to independently advise NMFS and USFWS. As a result of the time involved in the assessment of new scientific information, revision, and peer-review of the SARs, the period covered by the 2024 draft SARs is generally 2018 through 2022.

NMFS reviewed the SARs of all strategic stocks and considered whether significant new information was available for all other stocks under NMFS' jurisdiction. As a result of this

review, NMFS revised or developed new reports for 21 stocks in the Alaska, Atlantic, and Pacific regions. The 2024 revisions to the SARs consist primarily of updated or revised human-caused M/SI estimates and updated abundance estimates.

NMFS solicits public comments on the draft 2024 SARs. To ensure NMFS is aware of new information relevant to all strategic stocks, NMFS also requests new information for strategic stocks that were not updated in 2024. Specifically, new relevant information could include peer-reviewed information on human-caused M/SI, fishery interactions, abundance, distribution, population structure, and other information on emerging concerns for strategic stocks that could be incorporated into the SARs.

Alaska Reports

NMFS reviewed new information for 35 existing stocks (including all of the

strategic stocks) in the Alaska Region for the 2024 SAR cycle and revised information for five stocks contained in five SARs under NMFS' jurisdiction: Three strategic stocks (Eastern Pacific stock of northern fur seals, Cook Inlet stock of beluga whales, and Gulf of Alaska stock of harbor porpoise) and two non-strategic stocks (Bristol Bay stock of beluga whales and Bering Sea stock of harbor porpoise). In the 2024 draft SAR, the Bering Sea stock of harbor porpoise is no longer considered "strategic," as a result of an analysis using new guidance (NMFS 2023) on determining strategic status when a minimum population abundance estimate is unavailable and information on human-caused M/SI is incomplete. Information on the remaining Alaska region stocks can be found in the final 2023 SARs (Young *et al.* 2024).

A list of the new or revised SARs in 2024 for the Alaska region is presented in table 1.

TABLE 1—LIST OF MARINE MAMMAL SARs IN THE ALASKA REGION REVISED IN 2024

Strategic stocks	Non-strategic stocks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Northern fur seal, Eastern Pacific* • Beluga whale, Cook Inlet* • Harbor porpoise, Gulf of Alaska 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beluga whale, Bristol Bay.* • Harbor porpoise, Bering Sea.

* Includes updated abundance estimates.

Atlantic Reports

In 2024, NMFS reviewed all stocks in the Atlantic region under NMFS' jurisdiction for new information. Eleven stocks from the Western North Atlantic were revised (table 2), primarily with updated abundance estimates, and some were also updated with recent bycatch estimates. NMFS is not revising the SAR for the Gulf of Maine stock of humpback whales. Since the last revision of this SAR in 2019, NMFS has been reviewing

and considering the implications of recent information on stock structure of humpback whales in the North Atlantic. In addition, NMFS is not revising the North Atlantic right whale (NARW) SAR since the final 2023 NARW SAR (89 FR 104989, Dec. 26, 2024) incorporated best available scientific information available to date on NARW population abundance and human-caused mortality and serious injury of the stock. While not yet reflected in the draft 2024 SAR

revisions, pursuant to Executive Order 14172 *Restoring Names that Honor American Greatness* (January 20, 2025), NMFS will be revising relevant SARs to reflect the renaming of the "Gulf of Mexico" to the "Gulf of America" in future SAR revisions.

A list of the new or revised SARs in 2024 for the Atlantic region is presented in table 2. Information on the remaining Atlantic region stocks can be found in the final 2023 SARs (Hayes *et al.* 2024).

TABLE 2—LIST OF MARINE MAMMAL SARs IN THE ATLANTIC REGION REVISED IN 2024

Strategic stocks	Non-strategic stocks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WNA # common bottlenose dolphin, Biscayne Bay Stock* • WNA Tamanend's bottlenose dolphin, South Carolina/Georgia Coastal Stock*. • WNA Tamanend's bottlenose dolphin, Northern Florida Coastal Stock*. • WNA Tamanend's bottlenose dolphin, Central Florida Coastal Stock*. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harbor porpoise, Gulf of Maine/Bay of Fundy.* • Cuvier's beaked whale, Western North Atlantic. • Blainville's beaked whale, Western North Atlantic. • Gervais' beaked whale, Western North Atlantic. • Sowerby's beaked whale, Western North Atlantic. • True's beaked whale, Western North Atlantic. • Gray seal, Western North Atlantic.*

Western North Atlantic = WNA.

* Includes updated abundance estimates.

Pacific Reports

In 2024, NMFS reviewed all 85 stocks in the Pacific region (waters along the U.S. West Coast, within waters surrounding the main and Northwestern

Hawaiian Islands, and within waters surrounding U.S. territories in the Western Pacific) for new information and revised five stocks contained in five SARs under NMFS' jurisdiction: three

strategic stocks (Monk seal, Guadalupe fur seal, and Eastern North Pacific Southern Resident killer whale) and two non-strategic stocks (California breeding Northern elephant seal and California

Northern fur seal). A list of revised SARs in 2024 for the Pacific region is

presented in table 3. Information on the remaining Pacific region stocks can be

found in the final 2023 SARs (Carretta *et al.* 2024).

TABLE 3—LIST OF MARINE MAMMAL SARs IN THE PACIFIC REGION REVISED IN 2024

Strategic stocks	Non-strategic stocks
• Monk seal, Hawai‘i*	• Northern elephant seal, California breeding stock.*
• Killer whale, Eastern North Pacific Southern Resident*	• Northern fur seal, California stock.*
• Guadalupe fur seal*	

* Includes updated abundance estimates.

References

Carretta *et al.* 2024. U.S. Pacific marine mammal stock assessments: 2023. U.S. Department of Commerce, NOAA Technical Memorandum NMFS-SWFSC-704.2024

Hayes, S.A., E. Josephson, K. Maze-Foley, P.E. Rosel, and J. McCordic, eds. 2024. U.S. Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico marine mammal stock assessments 2023. NOAA Tech. Memo. NMFS-NE-321, 375 p.

National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). 2023a. Guidelines for preparing stock assessment reports pursuant to the Marine Mammal Protection Act. Protected Resources Policy 02-038-01. Available online: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/s3/2023-05/02-204-01-Final-GAMMS-IV-Revisions-clean-1-kdr.pdf>. Accessed September 2024.

Young, N.C., Brower, A.A., Muto, M.M., Freed, J.C., Angliss, R.P., Friday, N.A., Birkemeier, B.D., Boveng, P.L., Brost, B.M., Cameron, M.F., Crance, J.L., Dahle, S.P., Fadely, B.S., Ferguson, M.C., Goetz, K.T., London, J.M., Oleson, E.M., Ream, R.R., Richmond, E.L., Shelden, K.E. W., Sweeney, K.L., Towell, R.G., Wade, P.R., Waite, J.M., and Zerbini, A.N. 2024. Alaska marine mammal stock assessments, 2023. U.S. Dep. Commer., NOAA Tech. Memo. NMFS-AFSC-XXX, 327 p.

Dated: March 17, 2025.

Evan Howell,

Director, Office of Science and Technology,
National Marine Fisheries Service.

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[RTID 0648-XE767]

Taking and Importing Marine Mammals; Taking Marine Mammals Incidental to Geophysical Surveys Related to Oil and Gas Activities in the Gulf of America (Formerly Gulf of Mexico)

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

ACTION: Notice; issuance of letter of authorization.

SUMMARY: In accordance with the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), as amended, its implementing regulations, and NMFS' MMPA regulations for taking marine mammals incidental to geophysical surveys related to oil and gas activities in the Gulf of America, originally published as "Taking Marine Mammals Incidental to Geophysical Surveys Related to Oil and Gas Activities in the Gulf of Mexico," notification is hereby given that a Letter of Authorization (LOA) has been issued to TGS for the take of marine mammals incidental to geophysical survey activity in the Gulf of America (GOA).

DATES: The LOA is effective from March 17, 2025, through December 31, 2025.

ADDRESSES: The LOA, LOA request, and supporting documentation are available online at: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/action/incidental-take-authorization-oil-and-gas-industry-geophysical-survey-activity-gulf-mexico>. In case of problems accessing these documents, please call the contact listed below (see **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT**).

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Rachel Wachtendonk, Office of Protected Resources, NMFS, (301) 427-8401.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

Sections 101(a)(5)(A) and (D) of the MMPA (16 U.S.C. 1361 *et seq.*) direct the Secretary of Commerce to allow, upon request, the incidental, but not intentional, taking of small numbers of marine mammals by U.S. citizens who engage in a specified activity (other than commercial fishing) within a specified geographical region if certain findings are made and either regulations are issued or, if the taking is limited to harassment, a notice of a proposed authorization is provided to the public for review.

An authorization for incidental takings shall be granted if NMFS finds that the taking will have a negligible impact on the species or stock(s), will

not have an unmitigable adverse impact on the availability of the species or stock(s) for subsistence uses (where relevant), and if the permissible methods of taking and requirements pertaining to the mitigation, monitoring and reporting of such takings are set forth. NMFS has defined "negligible impact" in 50 CFR 216.103 as an impact resulting from the specified activity that cannot be reasonably expected to, and is not reasonably likely to, adversely affect the species or stock through effects on annual rates of recruitment or survival.

Except with respect to certain activities not pertinent here, the MMPA defines "harassment" as: any act of pursuit, torment, or annoyance which (i) has the potential to injure a marine mammal or marine mammal stock in the wild (Level A harassment); or (ii) has the potential to disturb a marine mammal or marine mammal stock in the wild by causing disruption of behavioral patterns, including, but not limited to, migration, breathing, nursing, breeding, feeding, or sheltering (Level B harassment).

On January 19, 2021, we issued a final rule with regulations to govern the unintentional taking of marine mammals incidental to geophysical survey activities conducted by oil and gas industry operators, and those persons authorized to conduct activities on their behalf (collectively "industry operators"), in U.S. waters of the GOA¹ over the course of 5 years (86 FR 5322, January 19, 2021). The rule was based on our findings that the total taking from the specified activities over the 5-year period will have a negligible impact on the affected species or stock(s) of marine mammals and will not have an unmitigable adverse impact on the availability of those species or stocks for subsistence uses, and became effective on April 19, 2021.

¹ Pursuant to Executive Order 14172, "Restoring Names That Honor American Greatness," and Department of the Interior Secretarial Order 3423, "The Gulf of America," the body of water formerly known as the Gulf of Mexico is now called the Gulf of America. Accordingly, this **Federal Register** notice hereafter refers to the Gulf of America.