

## §217.76

## 50 CFR Ch. II (10–1–21 Edition)

part of the year-end summary report required under paragraph (e) of this section.

(d) AAC shall conduct quarterly aerial surveys, ideally during mid-day coinciding with low tide, to obtain data on pinniped presence, abundance, and behavior within the action area to determine long-term trends in pinniped haulout use capturing all pinniped haulouts. Results of these quarterly surveys shall be reported to NMFS Office of Protected Resources once as part of the year-end summary report required under paragraph (e) of this section.

(e) A year-end summary report must be submitted on March 1 of each year to NMFS Office of Protected Resources that shall include results of the pre- and post-launch aerial surveys, quarterly aerial survey trend counts of pinnipeds, and comparison of the results using the time-lapsed photography systems on Ugak Island. Future aerial surveys may be reduced if the time-lapsed photography systems capture similar or better data than aerial surveys. This report must contain the following information:

(1) Date(s) and time(s) of the launches;

(2) Locations of the time-lapsed photography systems;

(3) Design of the monitoring program for the time-lapsed photography systems and a description of how data is stored and analyzed; and

(4) Results of the monitoring program for pre- and post-launch aerial surveys, quarterly aerial surveys, and the time-lapsed photography systems, including, but not necessarily limited to:

(i) Numbers of pinnipeds, by species and age class (if possible), present on the haulout prior to commencement of the launch;

(ii) Numbers of pinnipeds, by species and age class (if possible), that may have been harassed, including the number that entered the water as a result of launch noise;

(iii) The length of time pinnipeds remained off the haulout during post-launch monitoring;

(iv) Number of harbor seal pups that may have been injured or killed as a result of the launch; and

(v) Other behavioral modifications by pinnipeds that were likely the result of launch noise.

(f) A final 5-year report must be submitted to NMFS Office of Protected Resources at least 90 days prior to expiration of these regulations if new regulations are sought or 180 days after expiration of regulations. This report shall:

(1) Summarize the activities undertaken and the results reported in all previous reports;

(2) Assess the impacts of launch activities on pinnipeds within the action area, including potential for pup injury and mortality;

(3) Assess the cumulative impacts on pinnipeds and other marine mammals from multiple rocket launches; and

(4) State the date(s), location(s), and findings of any research activities related to monitoring using time-lapsed photography systems on marine mammal populations

(g) AAC shall conduct quarterly aerial surveys in the event no launch occurs during a calendar year. These quarterly surveys shall be reported in the year-end summary report as described in paragraph (e) of this section; and

(h) If NMFS believes that launch monitoring or quarterly aerial surveys indicate that the distribution, size, or productivity of the potentially affected pinniped populations has been affected due to the specified activity, the launch procedures and the monitoring methods shall be reviewed in cooperation with NMFS, and, if necessary, appropriate changes may be made through modifications to a given LOA, prior to conducting the next launch of the same vehicle under that LOA.

### §217.76 Letters of Authorization.

(a) To incidentally take marine mammals pursuant to these regulations, AAC must apply for and obtain an LOA.

(b) An LOA, unless suspended or revoked, may be effective for a period of time not to exceed the expiration date of these regulations.

(c) If an LOA expires prior to the expiration date of these regulations, AAC must apply for and obtain a renewal of the LOA.

(d) In the event of projected changes to the activity or to mitigation and monitoring measures required by an LOA, AAC must apply for and obtain a modification of the LOA as described in § 217.77.

(e) The LOA shall set forth:

(1) The number of marine mammals, by species, authorized to be taken;

(2) Permissible methods of incidental taking;

(3) Means of effecting the least practicable adverse impact (*i.e.*, mitigation) on the species of marine mammals authorized for taking, its habitat, and on the availability of the species for subsistence uses; and

(4) Requirements for monitoring and reporting.

(f) Issuance of an LOA shall be based on a determination that the level of taking shall be consistent with the findings made for the total taking allowable under these regulations.

(g) Notice of issuance or denial of an LOA shall be published in the FEDERAL REGISTER within 30 days of a determination.

**§ 217.77 Renewals and modifications of Letters of Authorization.**

(a) An LOA issued under § 216.106 of this chapter and § 217.76 for the activity identified in § 217.70(a) shall be renewed or modified upon request by the applicant, provided that:

(1) The specified activity and mitigation, monitoring, and reporting measures, as well as the anticipated impacts, are the same as those described and analyzed for these regulations (excluding changes made pursuant to the adaptive management provision in paragraph (c)(1) of this section), and

(2) NMFS determines that the mitigation, monitoring, and reporting measures required by the previous LOA under these regulations were implemented.

(b) For an LOA modification or renewal request by the applicant that includes changes to the activity or the mitigation, monitoring, or reporting (excluding changes made pursuant to the adaptive management provision in paragraph (c)(1) of this section) that do not change the findings made for the regulations or result in no more than a minor change in the total estimated

number of takes (or distribution by species or years), NMFS may publish a notice of proposed LOA in the FEDERAL REGISTER, including the associated analysis of the change, and solicit public comment before issuing the LOA.

(c) An LOA issued under § 216.106 of this chapter and § 217.76 for the activity identified in § 217.70(a) may be modified by NMFS under the following circumstances:

(1) Adaptive Management—NMFS may modify (including augment) the existing mitigation, monitoring, or reporting measures (after consulting with AAC regarding the practicability of the modifications) if doing so creates a reasonable likelihood of more effectively accomplishing the goals of the mitigation and monitoring set forth in the preamble for these regulations:

(i) Possible sources of data that could contribute to the decision to modify the mitigation, monitoring, or reporting measures in an LOA:

(A) Results from AAC's monitoring from the previous year(s);

(B) Results from other marine mammal and/or sound research or studies; and

(C) Any information that reveals marine mammals may have been taken in a manner, extent or number not authorized by these regulations or any LOA issued under §§ 216.106 and 217.76 of this chapter.

(ii) If, through adaptive management, the modifications to the mitigation, monitoring, or reporting measures are substantial, NMFS shall publish a notice of proposed LOA in the FEDERAL REGISTER and solicit public comment.

(2) Emergencies—If NMFS determines that an emergency exists that poses a significant risk to the well-being of the species or stocks of marine mammals specified in §§ 217.70(b) and 217.72(a), an LOA may be modified without prior notice or opportunity for public comment. A notice shall be published in the FEDERAL REGISTER within 30 days of the action.