

relative to the population size of the affected species or stocks.

Unmitigable Adverse Impact Analysis and Determination

In order to issue an IHA, NMFS must find that the specified activity will not have an “unmitigable adverse impact” on the subsistence uses of the affected marine mammal species or stocks by Alaskan Natives. NMFS has defined “unmitigable adverse impact” in 50 CFR 216.103 as an impact resulting from the specified activity: (1) That is likely to reduce the availability of the species to a level insufficient for a harvest to meet subsistence needs by (i) causing the marine mammals to abandon or avoid hunting areas, (ii) directly displacing subsistence users, or (iii) placing physical barriers between the marine mammals and the subsistence hunters; and (2) That cannot be sufficiently mitigated by other measures to increase the availability of marine mammals to allow subsistence needs to be met.

The Alutiiq and Eyak people of Prince William Sound traditionally harvested marine mammals, however the last recorded subsistence harvest in Cordova was in 2014 as part of a regional effort to update the status of subsistence uses in Exxon Valdez Oil Spill communities, during which no marine mammals were harvested in Cordova (Fall and Zimpelman 2016).

In the decades since the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill, there have been declines in the number of households hunting and harvesting larger marine mammals in Prince William Sound. Surveys gathering subsistence data found that 10 percent or fewer households harvest or use harbor seals or sea lions (Poe *et al.*, 2010). Subsistence hunters in Prince William Sound report having to travel farther from their home communities to be successful when harvesting marine mammals (Keating *et al.*, 2020).

The planned project is not likely to adversely impact the availability of any marine mammal species or stocks that are commonly used for subsistence purposes or to impact subsistence harvest of marine mammals in the region because:

- There is no recent recorded subsistence harvest of marine mammals in the area;
- Construction activities are localized and temporary;
- Mitigation measures will be implemented to minimize disturbance of marine mammals in the action area; and,
- The project will not result in significant changes to availability of subsistence resources.

Based on the description of the specified activity, the measures described to minimize adverse effects on the availability of marine mammals for subsistence purposes, and the planned mitigation and monitoring measures, NMFS has determined that there will not be an unmitigable adverse impact on subsistence uses from Cordova’s planned activities.

Endangered Species Act

There is one marine mammal species (western DPS Steller sea lion) with confirmed occurrence in the project area that is listed as endangered under the ESA. The NMFS Alaska Regional Office issued a Biological Opinion on September 28, 2023 under section 7 of the ESA on the issuance of two IHAs to Cordova under section 101(a)(5)(D) of the MMPA by the NMFS Office of Protected Resources. The Biological Opinion concluded that this action is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of Western Distinct Population Segment (DPS) Steller sea lions. In addition, the proposed action is not likely to adversely affect Western North Pacific DPS humpback whales, Mexico DPS humpback whales, fin whales, or Steller sea lion critical habitat.

National Environmental Policy Act

To comply with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA; 42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*) and NOAA Administrative Order (NAO) 216–6A, NMFS must evaluate our proposed action (*i.e.*, the issuance of two IHAs) and alternatives with respect to potential impacts on the human environment.

This action is consistent with categories of activities identified in Categorical Exclusion B4 (IHAs with no anticipated serious injury or mortality) of the Companion Manual for NAO 216–6A, which do not individually or cumulatively have the potential for significant impacts on the quality of the human environment and for which we have not identified any extraordinary circumstances that would preclude this categorical exclusion. Accordingly, NMFS has determined that the issuance of these IHAs qualifies to be categorically excluded from further NEPA review.

Authorizations

NMFS has issued two consecutive IHAs to Cordova for the potential harassment of small numbers of marine mammal species incidental to the Cordova Harbor Rebuild project, in Cordova, Alaska, that includes the

previously explained mitigation, monitoring and reporting requirements.

Dated: September 29, 2023.

Kimberly Damon-Randall,

*Director, Office of Protected Resources,
National Marine Fisheries Service.*

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[RTID 0648–XD446]

New England Fishery Management Council; Public Meeting

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

ACTION: Notice of public meeting.

SUMMARY: The New England Fishery Management Council (Council) is scheduling a public meeting of its Groundfish Committee via webinar to consider actions affecting New England fisheries in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ). Recommendations from this group will be brought to the full Council for formal consideration and action, if appropriate.

DATES: This webinar will be held on Monday, November 13, 2023, at 9:30 a.m.

ADDRESSES: Webinar registration URL information: <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/4122443360576842070>.

Council address: New England Fishery Management Council, 50 Water Street, Mill 2, Newburyport, MA 01950.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Cate O’Keefe, Executive Director, New England Fishery Management Council; telephone: (978) 465–0492.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Agenda

The Groundfish Committee will meet to discuss recommendations from the Recreational Advisory Panel and Groundfish Advisory Panel. They will review draft Framework Adjustment 66 alternatives and draft impacts analysis and recommend preferred alternatives to the Council. They will receive an update on Framework Adjustment 68/ Acceptable Biological Catches (ABC) Control Rules. They will also continue development of the Atlantic Cod Transition Plan as well as possibly recommend 2024 priorities to the Council. The Committee will discuss other business if necessary.

Although non-emergency issues not contained on the agenda may come before this Council for discussion, those issues may not be the subject of formal action during this meeting. Council action will be restricted to those issues specifically listed in this notice and any issues arising after publication of this notice that require emergency action under section 305(c) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, provided the public has been notified of the Council's intent to take final action to address the emergency. The public also should be aware that the meeting will be recorded. Consistent with 16 U.S.C. 1852, a copy of the recording is available upon request.

Special Accommodations

This meeting is physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to Cate O'Keefe, Executive Director, at (978) 465-0492, at least 5 days prior to the meeting date.

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

Dated: September 29, 2023.

Key Israel Marquez,

Acting Deputy Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[RTID 0648-XD419]

Takes of Marine Mammals Incidental to Specified Activities; Taking Marine Mammals Incidental to Marine Site Characterization Surveys in the Area of Commercial Lease of Submerged Lands for Renewable Energy Development on the Outer Continental Shelf Lease Areas OCS-A 0486, 0487, and 0500

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

ACTION: Notice; issuance of Renewal incidental harassment authorization.

SUMMARY: In accordance with the regulations implementing the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) as amended, notification is hereby given that NMFS has issued an incidental harassment authorization (IHA) to Orsted Wind Power North America LLC (Orsted) for the renewal of their 2022 incidental harassment authorization (IHA) (hereinafter, the 2022 IHA is

referred to as the "initial IHA" and the 2023 IHA is referred to as the "Renewal IHA") to take marine mammals incidental to marine site characterization surveys, using high-resolution geophysical (HRG) equipment, in coastal waters from New York to Massachusetts, including the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) Commercial Lease of Submerged Lands for Renewable Energy Development on the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) Lease Areas OCS-A 0486, 0487, 0500 and along potential export cable routes (ECR).

DATES: This Renewal IHA is valid October 6, 2023 to October 5, 2024.

ADDRESSES: Electronic copies of the original application, Renewal IHA request, and supporting documents (including NMFS **Federal Register** notices of the original proposed and final authorizations, and the initial IHA), as well as a list of the references cited in this document, may be obtained online at: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/permit/incidental-take-authorizations-under-marine-mammal-protection-act>. In case of problems accessing these documents, please call the contact listed below.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Karolyn Lock, Office of Protected Resources, NMFS, (301) 427-8401.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

The Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) prohibits the "take" of marine mammals, with certain exceptions. Sections 101(a)(5)(A) and (D) of the MMPA (16 U.S.C. 1361 *et seq.*) direct the Secretary of Commerce (as delegated to NMFS) 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 promulgated or, if the taking is limited to harassment, an incidental harassment authorization is issued.

Authorization for incidental takings shall be granted if NMFS finds that the taking will have a negligible impact on the species or stock(s) and will not have an unmitigable adverse impact on the availability of the species or stock(s) for taking for subsistence uses (where relevant). NMFS must prescribe the permissible methods of taking and other "means of effecting the least practicable adverse impact" on the affected species or stocks and their habitat, paying particular attention to rookeries, mating grounds, and areas of similar

significance, and on the availability of such species or stocks for taking for certain subsistence uses (referred to here as "mitigation measures"). NMFS must also prescribe requirements pertaining to monitoring and reporting of such takings. The definitions of key terms such as "take," "harassment," and "negligible impact" can be found in the MMPA and NMFS implementing regulations (*see* 16 U.S.C. 1362; 50 CFR 216.3; 50 CFR 216.103).

NMFS' regulations implementing the MMPA at 50 CFR 216.107(e) indicate that IHAs may be renewed for additional periods of time not to exceed 1 year for each reauthorization. In the notice of proposed IHA for the initial IHA, NMFS described the circumstances under which we would consider issuing a renewal for this activity, and requested public comment on a potential renewal under those circumstances. Specifically, on a case-by-case basis, NMFS may issue a 1-time 1-year renewal of an IHA following notice to the public providing an additional 15 days for public comments when (1) up to another year of identical, or nearly identical, activities as described in the Detailed Description of Specified Activities section of the initial IHA issuance notice is planned, or (2) the activities as described in the Description of the Specified Activities and Anticipated Impacts section of the initial IHA issuance notice would not be completed by the time the initial IHA expires and a renewal would allow for completion of the activities beyond that described in the **DATES** section of the notice of issuance of the initial IHA, provided all of the following conditions are met:

1. A request for renewal is received no later than 60 days prior to the needed renewal of the initial IHA effective date (recognizing that the renewal's expiration date cannot extend beyond 1 year from expiration of the initial IHA);

2. The request for renewal must include the following:

- An explanation that the activities to be conducted under the requested renewal are identical to the activities analyzed under the initial IHA, are a subset of the activities, or include changes so minor (*e.g.*, reduction in pile size) that the changes do not affect the previous analyses, mitigation and monitoring requirements, or take estimates (with the exception of reducing the type or amount of take); and

- A preliminary monitoring report showing the results of the required monitoring to date and an explanation showing that the monitoring results do not indicate impacts of a scale or nature