

## II. NOAA Proposed Action

NOAA is releasing for public comment a DEIS that analyzes a proposed action to expand the FGBNMS boundary to include additional bank and reef areas in the northcentral Gulf of Mexico and to apply the existing sanctuary regulations and management regime to the expanded area. NOAA developed five alternatives for expanding the FGBNMS boundary. The alternatives range from taking no action to adding as much as an additional approximate 880 square miles.

NOAA's preferred alternative (Alternative 3) is the expansion of the existing boundaries from ~56 square miles to an area that encompasses ~383 square miles of waters in the northwestern Gulf of Mexico. This alternative would add 15 additional banks ranging from 70 to 120 miles off-shore that are comprised of reefs and bottom features that provide habitat for fish and other biological resources that serve as engines of sustainability for much of the Gulf of Mexico.

The proposed sanctuary expansion advances NOAA's mission to conserve and manage coastal and marine ecosystems and resources and furthers the FGBNMS mission to identify, protect, conserve, and enhance the natural and cultural resources, values, and qualities of FGBNMS and its regional environment for this and future generations. The need for the proposed sanctuary expansion is informed by widespread acute and chronic threats to marine habitat in the north central Gulf of Mexico that can most effectively be addressed through NOAA's evaluation and implementation of the comprehensive suite of habitat conservation and management actions made possible by FGBNMS expansion to ensure that valuable natural resources are available to future generations of Americans.

NOAA is seeking public comment on the DEIS which is available at <http://flowergarden.noaa.gov/> or may be obtained by contacting the individual listed under the heading **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT**.

**Authority:** 16 U.S.C. 1431 *et seq.*

Dated: June 1, 2016.

**John Armor,**

*Acting Director, Office of National Marine Sanctuaries.*

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## DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

### National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

**RIN 0648-XE404 and 0648-XE486**

### Marine Mammals; File Nos. 18978 and 19768

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

**ACTION:** Notice; issuance of permits.

**SUMMARY:** Notice is hereby given that permits have been issued to the following entities for research on marine mammal parts:

File No. 18978: Pam Miller, Alaska Community Action on Toxics, 505 West Northern Lights Blvd., Suite 205, Anchorage, AK 99503; and

File No. 19768: Evin Hildebrandt, Ph.D., University of Massachusetts Medical School, 55 Lake Avenue, S3-221, Worcester, MA 01655.

**ADDRESSES:** The permits and related documents are available for review upon written request or by appointment in the 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.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Jennifer Skidmore or Amy Sloan, (301) 427-8401.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** On March 8, 2016 (File No. 18978; 81 FR 12075) and March 11, 2016 (File No. 19768; 81 FR 12879), notices were published in the **Federal Register** that requests for permits to conduct research on marine mammal parts had been submitted by the above-named applicants. The requested permits have 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).

File No. 18978 (Miller) authorizes the receipt and export of subsistence hunted marine mammal parts. Researchers will work with Yupik households and local hunters on St. Lawrence Island, Alaska, to obtain samples from up to 8 animals per year from ringed seal (*Pusa hispida*); bearded seal (*Erignathus barbatus*); and ribbon seal (*Histiophoca fasciata*) and 9 animals per year from bowhead whale

(*Balaena mysticetus*) and spotted seal (*Phoca largha*). Samples would be measured for contaminant levels to determine marine mammal exposure to polybrominated diphenyl ethers and perfluorinated compounds. No live animals would be affected. The permit is valid through April 30, 2021.

File No. 19768 (Hildebrandt) authorizes the receipt of cell lines from other researchers and the creation of cell lines from animal tissues obtained from the stranding network under a regional authorization letter for scientific research purposes. Up to 15 cell lines would be received or created annually from certain cetacean species. These cell lines would be used to study the evolution of endogenous viruses (viruses that integrate into the genome of the host) using the DNA and RNA sequencing. No live animals would be affected. The permit is valid through May 31, 2021.

In compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*), a final determination has been made that the activities proposed are categorically excluded from the requirement to prepare an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement.

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

Dated: June 6, 2016.

**Julia Harrison,**

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

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## DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

### National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

**RIN 0648-XE619**

### Magnuson-Stevens Act Provisions; General Provisions for Domestic Fisheries; Application for Exempted Fishing Permits

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

**ACTION:** Notice; request for comments.

**SUMMARY:** The Assistant Regional Administrator for Sustainable Fisheries, Greater Atlantic Region, NMFS