Consultation

Under section 7 of the ESA, NMFS has completed consultations on the issuance of this authorization.

NEPA

In conjunction with the notice of proposed authorization, NMFS released a draft EA that addresses the impacts on the human environment from issuance of the authorization and the alternatives to the proposed action. Comments received on the draft EA, while leading to an improved EA, did not provide sufficient information that implementation of either the proposed action or the alternatives to that action would have a significant effect on the human environment. Therefore, as a result of the findings made in the EA, NMFS has concluded that implementation of either the preferred alternative or other identified alternatives would not have a significant impact on the human environment. As a result of that finding, an EIS will not be prepared. A copy of the EA is available upon request (see **ADDRESSES**).

Conclusions

NMFS has determined that the short-term impact of exploration drilling and related activities in the Beaufort Sea will result, at worst, in a temporary modification in behavior by certain species of pinnipeds, and possibly some individual bowhead or beluga whales. While behavioral modifications may be made by these species of marine mammals to avoid the resultant noise from tugs either towing the CIDS or transporting supplies, or due to drilling activities, this behavioral change is expected to have a negligible impact on the animals.

While the number of potential incidental harassment takes will depend on the distribution and abundance of marine mammals (which vary annually due to variable ice conditions and other factors) in the activity area, the number of potential harassment takings is estimated to be small. In addition, no take by injury and/or death is anticipated and takes will be at the lowest level practicable due to incorporation of the mitigation measures mentioned above. No rookeries, mating grounds, areas of concentrated feeding, or other areas of special significance for marine mammals occur within or near the planned area of operations during the season of operations.

Because bowhead whales are in the Canadian Beaufort Sea until late August/early September, moving the CIDS during August will not impact subsistence hunting of bowhead whales. Appropriate mitigation measures to avoid an unmitigable adverse impact on the availability of bowhead whales for subsistence needs was the subject of consultation between ARCO and subsistence users. As a result of discussions between the two parties, a Conflict and Avoidance Agreement has been concluded. This Agreement consists of three main components: (1) Communications, (2) conflict avoidance, and (3) dispute resolution.

Since NMFS is assured that the taking will not result in more than the incidental harassment (as defined by the MMPA) of small numbers of certain species of marine mammals, would have only a negligible impact on these stocks, will not have an unmitigable adverse impact on the availability of these stocks for subsistence uses, and would result in the least practicable impact on the stocks, NMFS has determined that the requirements of section 101(a)(5)(D) have been met and the authorization can be issued.

Authorization

Accordingly, NMFS has issued an IHA to ARCO Alaska for the above described oil exploration drilling activities in Camden Bay, Beaufort Sea, AK, provided the mitigation, monitoring and reporting requirements described in the authorization are undertaken.

Dated: September 25, 1997.

Patricia A. Montanio,

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

[FR Doc. 97–26060 Filed 10–1–97; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510–22–F

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

National Weather Service Modernization and Associated Restructuring

AGENCY: National Weather Service (NWS), NOAA, Commerce.

ACTION: Notice and opportunity for public comment.

SUMMARY: The NWS is publishing proposed certifications for the consolidation, automation, and closure of the following Weather Service offices at the indicated FAA Weather Observation Service Level:

(1) Alamosa, CO Weather Service Office (WSO) which will be automated at FAA Weather Observation Service Level D and have its services consolidated into the future Pueblo and Grand Junction Weather Forecast Offices (WFOs);

(2) Alpena, MI WSO which will be automated at FAA Weather Observation Service Level D and have its services consolidated into the future North Central Lower Michigan WFO;

(3) Houghton Lake, MI WSO which will be automated at FAA Weather Observation Service Level D and have its services consolidated into the future North Central Lower Michigan and Grand Rapids WFOs;

(4) Kalispell, MT WSO which will be automated at FAA Weather Observation Service Level D and have its services consolidated into the future Missoula WFO;

(5) Lander, WY WSO which will be automated at FAA Weather Observation Service Level D and have its services consolidated into the future Riverton WFO;

(6) Norfolk, NE WSO which will be automated at FAA Weather Observation Service Level D and have its services consolidated into the future Omaha and North Platte WFOs;

(7) Sault Ste. Marie, MI WSO which will be automated at FAA Weather Observation Service Level D and have its services consolidated into the future North Central Lower Michigan and Marquette WFOs;

(8) Scottsbluff, NE WSO which will be automated at FAA Weather Observation Service Level D and have its services consolidated into the future Cheyenne and North Platte WFOs;

(9) Sheridan, WY WSO which will be automated at FAA Weather Observation Service Level D and have its services consolidated into the future Billings and Riverton WFOs; and

(10) St. Cloud, MN WSO which will be automated at FAA Weather Observation Service Level D and have its services consolidated into the future Minneapolis and Aberdeen WFOs.

In accordance with Pub. L. 102–567, the public will have 60 days in which to comment on these proposed consolidation, automation, and closure certifications.

DATES: Comments are requested by December 1, 1997.

ADDRESSES: Requests for copies of the proposed consolidation, automation and closure packages should be sent to Tom Beaver, Room 11426, 1325 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910, telephone 301–713–0300. All comments should be sent to Tom Beaver at the above address.

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

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: In accordance with section 706 of Pub. L.

102–567, the Secretary of Commerce must certify that these consolidation, automation, and closure certifications will not result in any degradation of service to the affected areas of responsibility and must publish the proposed consolidation, automation, and closure certifications in the FR. The documentation supporting each proposed certification includes the following:

(1) A draft memorandum by the meteorologist(s)-in-charge recommending the certification(s), the final of which will be endorsed by the Regional Director and the Assistant Administrator of the NWS if appropriate, after consideration of public comments and completion of consultation with the Modernization Transition Committee (the Committee);

(2) A description of local weather characteristics and weather-related concerns which affect the weather services provided within the service area;

(3) A comparison of the services provided within the service area and the services to be provided after such action;

(4) A description of any recent or expected modernization of NWS operation which will enhance services in the service area;

(5) An identification of any area within the affected service area which would not receive coverage (at an elevation of 10,000 feet) by the next generation weather radar network;

(6) Evidence, based upon operational demonstration of modernized NWS operations, which was considered in reaching the conclusion that no degradation in service will result from such action including the WSR–88D Radar Commissioning Report(s), User Confirmation of Services Report(s), and the Decommissioning Readiness Report (as applicable);

(7) Evidence, based upon operational demonstration of modernized NWS operations, which was considered in reaching the conclusion that no degradation in service will result from such action including the ASOS Commissioning Report; series of three letters between NWS and FAA confirming that weather services will continue in full compliance with applicable flight aviation rules after ASOS commissioning; Surface Aviation Observation Transition Checklist, where required, documenting transfer of augmentation and backup responsibility from NWS to FAA; successful resolution of ASOS user confirmation of services complaints; and an in-place supplementary data program at the responsible WFO(s);

(8) Warning and forecast verification statistics for pre-modernized and modernized services which were utilized in determining that services have not been degraded;

(9) An Air Safety Appraisal for offices which are located on an airport; and

(10) A letter appointing the liaison officer.

These proposed certifications do not include any report of the Committee which could be submitted in accordance with sections 706(b)(6) and 707(c) of Pub. L. 102–567. In December 1995 the Committee decided that, in general, they would forego the optional consultation on proposed certifications. Instead, the Committee would just review certifications after the public comment period had closed so their consultation would be with the benefit of public comments that had been submitted.

This notice does not include the complete certification packages because they are too voluminous to publish. Copies of the certification packages and supporting documentation can be obtained through the contact listed above.

Once all public comments have been received and considered, the NWS will complete consultation with the Committee and determine whether to proceed with the final certifications. At the June 25, and September 24, 1997 MTC meetings the Committee stated that its endorsement of certifications is ''subject to the following qualifications:

(1) The number of trained staff in each modernized field office meets staffing requirements as established by the modernization criteria and documented in the National Implementation Plan and the Human Resources Plan (WBS 1100). Delays in training or failure to fill required positions will increase the risk of degradation of service;

(2) The availability of operational systems in each modernized field office meets requirements as established by the modernization criteria and documented in the System Commissioning and Support Function Demonstration Plans; and

(3) The operational and administrative infrastructures and technical development needed to support the modernized field offices be maintained as required by the modernization plan.'' It is expected that these qualifications can be met for the above proposed certifications. If these qualifications can not be met prior to the December MTC meeting, these proposed certifications may or may not be presented to the Committee. If a decision to certify is made, the Secretary of Commerce must publish the final certification in the FR and transmit the certification to the appropriate Congressional committees prior to consolidating, automating, and closing these offices.

Dated: September 26, 1997.

Robert S. Winokur,

Acting Assistant Administrator for Weather Services.

[FR Doc. 97–26127 Filed 10–1–97; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

National Weather Service Modernization and Associated Restructuring

AGENCY: National Weather Service (NWS), NOAA, Commerce.

ACTION: Notice and opportunity for public comment.

SUMMARY: The NWS is publishing proposed certifications for the automation and closure of the following Weather Service offices at the indicated FAA Weather Observation Service Level:

(1) Abilene, TX Weather Service Office (WSO) which will be automated at FAA Weather Observation Service Level C and with services being provided by the future San Angelo, Dallas/Fort Worth, Lubbock, and Midland/Odessa Weather Forecast Offices (WFOs);

(2) Concordia, KS WSO which will be automated at FAA Weather Observation Service Level D and with Services being provided by the future Topeka, Wichita, and Hastings WFOs;

(3) Ely, NV WSO which will be automated at FAA Weather Observation Service Level D and with services being provided by the future Elko WFO;

(4) Havre, MT WSO which will be automated at FAA Weather Observation Service Level D and with services being provided by the future Great Falls WFO;

(5) International Falls, MN WSO which will be automated at FAA Weather Observation Level D and with services by the future Duluth and Eastern North Dakota WFOs;

(6) Santa Maria, CA WSO which will be automated at FAA Weather Observation Service Level C and with services being provided by the future Los Angeles and San Francisco Bay Area WFOs;

(7) Tupelo, MS WSO which will be automated at FAA Weather Observation Service Level D and with services being provided by the future Memphis and Jackson WFOs;