Background

The regulations that govern exempted fishing, at 50 CFR 600.745(b) and 697.22 allow the Regional Administrator to authorize for limited testing, public display, data collection, exploration, health and safety, environmental clean-up, and/or hazardous removal purposes, and the targeting or incidental harvest of managed species that would otherwise be prohibited. An EFP to authorize such activity may be issued, provided there is adequate opportunity for the public to comment on the EFP application, the conservation goals and objectives of Federal management of the American lobster resource are not compromised, and issuance of the EFP is beneficial to the management of the species.

The American lobster fishery is the most valuable fishery in the northeastern United States. In 2003, approximately 72 million pounds (26,873 metric tons) of American lobster were landed with an ex-vessel value of approximately $286 million. American lobster experience very high fishing mortality rates and are overfished throughout their range, from Canada to Cape Hatteras. Although harvest and population abundance are near record levels due to high recent recruitment and favorable environmental conditions, there is significant risk of a sharp drop in abundance, and such a decline would have serious implications. Operating under the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's interstate management process, American lobster are managed in state waters under Amendment 3 to the American Lobster Interstate Fishery Management Plan (Amendment 3). In Federal waters of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), lobster is managed under Federal regulations at 50 CFR part 697. Amendment 3, and compatible Federal regulations established a framework for area management, which includes industry participation in the development of a management program that suits the needs of each lobster management area while meeting targets established in the Interstate Fisheries Management Program. The industry, through area management teams, with the support of state agencies, have played a vital role in advancing the area management program.

To facilitate the development of effective management tools, extensive monitoring and detailed abundance and size frequency data on the composition of lobsters throughout the range of the resource are necessary. This proposed EFP will continue a project involved in extensive monitoring and detailed population information of American lobster in four offshore study areas using modified lobster trap gear that would otherwise be prohibited.

Proposed EFP

The proposed EFP is a continuation of a project begun in 2003, and is submitted by the AOLA and seven commercial lobster fishing vessels that are also members of the AOLA. The EFP proposes to collect statistical and scientific information as part of a project designed to monitor the offshore American lobster fishery to collect data that will assist the development of management practices appropriate to the fishery.

Each of seven commercial fishing vessels involved in this monitoring and data collection program would collect detailed abundance and size frequency data on the composition of all lobsters collected from one modified juvenile lobster trap in a string of approximately 40 lobster traps, including data on sub-legal, and egg bearing females in addition to legal lobsters. This EFP would not involve the authorization of any additional lobster trap gear in the area. Vessels would collect data from each of four general study areas: The Mid-Atlantic - Chesapeake 50 Fathom Edge; the Southern - Hudson Canyon Area; the Middle - Veatch Canyon Area; and the Northern - Georges Bank and Gulf of Maine Area. The participating vessels may retain on deck sub-legal lobsters, and egg bearing female lobsters, in addition to legal lobsters, for the purpose of collecting the required abundance and size frequency data specified by this project. Data collected would include size, sex, shell disease index, and the total number of legals, sub-legals, berried females, and v-notched females. All sub-legals, berried females, and v-notched females would be returned to the sea as quickly as possible after data collection. Pursuant to 50 CFR 600.745(3)(v), the Regional Administrator may attach terms and conditions to the EFP consistent with the purpose of the exempted fishing.

This EFP requests the inclusion of a maximum of one modified lobster trap per vessel, designated as a juvenile lobster collector trap, in the string of approximately 40 traps. This modified lobster trap would have a smaller entrance head, no escape vents and would be made of a smaller mesh than the traditional offshore trap to catch and retain a high percentage of juvenile lobsters in the 30–65 mm carapace length range. The smaller entrance head would exclude large lobsters from this trap and decrease the probability of cannibalism within the trap. The modifications to the trap are to the escape vents, and trap entrance head, not to the trap's size or configuration, therefore this modified trap would impact its environment no differently than the regular lobster trap it replaces. This EFP will add no additional traps to the areas. Due to modifications to the escape vent, the EFP proposed to waive the American lobster escape vent requirement specified at 50 CFR 697.21(c) for a maximum of one trap per vessel for a maximum of seven vessels in the program. With the exception of the one modified juvenile lobster collector trap, all traps fished by a maximum of seven participating vessels would comply with all applicable lobster regulations specified at 50 CFR part 697.

All sample collections would be conducted by seven federally permitted commercial fishing vessels, during the course of regular commercial fishing operations. There would not be observers or researchers onboard the participating vessels.

This project, including the lobster handling protocols, was initially developed in consultation with NOAA Fisheries and University of New Hampshire scientists. To the greatest extent practicable, these handling protocols are designed to avoid unnecessary adverse environmental impact on lobsters involved in this project, while achieving the data collection objectives of this project.

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

Dated: March 30, 2005.

Alan D. Risenhoover,

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

[FR Doc. E5–1481 4–1–05; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510–22–S

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[I.D. 031805C]

Marine Mammals; Permit No. 782–1719

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

ACTION: Issuance of permit amendment.

SUMMARY: Notice is hereby given that the National Marine Mammal Laboratory, National Marine Fisheries Service, NOAA, 7600 Sand Point Way, NE, BIN C15700, Bldg. 1, Seattle, WA 98115–0070, [John L. Bengtson, Ph.D., Principal Investigator] has been issued

an amendment to Permit No. 782–1719 for purposes of scientific research.

ADDRESSES: The permit and related documents are available for review upon written request or by appointment:

Permits, Conservation and Education Division, Office of Protected Resources, NMFS, 1315 East-West Highway, Room 13705, Silver Spring, MD 20910; phone (301)713–2289; fax (301)713–0376; and

Assistant Administrator for Protected Resources,, Pacific Area Office, NMFS, 1601 Kapiolani Blvd., Rm, 1110, Honolulu, HI 96814–4700; phone (808)973–2935; fax (808)973–2941.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Ruth Johnson or Carrie Hubard, (301)713–2289.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: On June 4, 2003, notice was published in the **Federal Register** (68 FR 33477) that requests for a scientific research permit to take various marine mammals, including calves less than six months of age, had been submitted by the above-named organizations. The requested permit amendment has 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).

Issuance of this permit, as required by the ESA, was based on a finding that such permit (1) was applied for in good faith, (2) will not operate to the disadvantage of the endangered species which is the subject of this permit, and (3) is consistent with the purposes and policies set forth in section 2 of the ESA.

Dated: March 23, 2005.

Stephen L. Leathery,

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

[FR Doc. 05–6613 Filed 4–1–05; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510–22–S

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[I.D. 030205A]

Endangered Species; File No. 1507

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

ACTION: Issuance of permit.

SUMMARY: Notice is hereby given that Llewellyn Ehrhart, University of Central Florida, 4000 Central Florida Blvd., Orlando, Florida 32816–2368 has been issued a permit to take green (*Chelonia mydas*), loggerhead (*Caretta caretta*), hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricata*), Kemp's ridley (*Lepidochelys kempii*), and leatherback (*Dermochelys coriacea*) sea turtles for purposes of scientific research.

ADDRESSES: The permit and related documents are available for review upon written request or by appointment in the following office(s):

Permits, Conservation and Education Division, Office of Protected Resources, NMFS, 1315 East-West Highway, Room 13705, Silver Spring, MD 20910; phone (301)713–2289; fax (301)427–2521; and

Southeast Region, NMFS, 9721 Executive Center Drive North, St. Petersburg, FL 33702–2432; phone (727)570–5301; fax (727)570–5320.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Patrick Opay or Carrie Hubard, (301)713–2289.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: On December 2, 2004, notice was published in the **Federal Register** (69 FR 70125) that a request for a scientific research permit to take loggerhead, Kemp's ridley, green, leatherback, and hawksbill sea turtles had been submitted by the above-named individual. The requested permit has been issued under the authority of 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).

Researchers will annually capture, flipper tag, PIT tag, measure, mark, weigh, blood sample, lavage, photograph, attach a satellite transmitter to, attach a tethered instrument to, release, and track loggerhead, green, hawksbill and Kemp's ridley sea turtles. The purpose of the research is to conduct in-water studies of marine turtle populations in the Indian River Lagoon (Project 1); to conduct studies of marine turtle populations residing on the Sabellariid Worm Reef of Indian River County, Florida (Project 2); to study sea turtle distribution and movement through the use of satellite telemetry (Project 3); to assess the juvenile green turtle population at the Trident Turning Basin, Cape Canaveral Air Force Station (Project 4); and to study juvenile green turtle and loggerhead habitat utilization in the central region of the Indian River Lagoon System, Florida (Project 5). The permit is issued for 5 years.

Issuance of this permit, as required by the ESA, was based on a finding that such permit (1) was applied for in good faith, (2) will not operate to the disadvantage of any endangered or threatened species, and (3) is consistent with the purposes and policies set forth in section 2 of the ESA.

Dated: March 29, 2005.

Stephen L. Leathery,

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

[FR Doc. 05–6609 Filed 4–1–05; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510–22–S

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[I.D. 032905A]

Marine Mammals; File Nos. 434–1669, 1010–1641, 800–1664, 881–1668, 782–1768, 358–1769, 715–1784, and 1034–1773

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

ACTION: Receipt of applications.

SUMMARY: Notice is hereby given that the following individuals and institutions have applied for a permit or permit amendment to conduct research on Steller sea lions (*Eumetopias jubatus*): Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Corvallis, OR (ODFW; File No. 434–1669); the Aleutians East Borough, Juneau, AK (AEB: File No. 1010–1641); Dr. Randall Davis, Texas A&M University, Galveston, TX (File No. 800–1664); the Alaska SeaLife Center, Seward, AK (ASLC: File No. 881–1668); the National Marine Mammal Laboratory, Alaska Fisheries Science Center, Seattle, WA (NMML: File No. 782–1768); the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Anchorage, AK (ADF&G: File No. 358–1769); The North Pacific Universities Marine Mammal Research Consortium, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C. (NPUMMRC: File No. 715–1784); and Dr. Markus Horning, Texas A&M University, Galveston, TX (File No. 1034–1773).

DATES: Written, telefaxed, or e-mail comments must be received on or before May 4, 2005.

ADDRESSES: The applications and related documents are available for review upon written request or by appointment in the following office(s):