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**NOAA issues science-based measures to protect marine mammals during Shell's proposed oil and gas exploratory programs in the Beaufort and Chukchi seas**

NOAA's Fisheries Service is issuing two incidental harassment authorizations to Shell for energy exploration activities in shallow waters in the Arctic during a limited period this summer. The authorizations specify measures to protect marine mammals and the subsistence interests of Alaskan Natives, and are informed by the latest science as well as lessons learned from the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill.

While the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) has primary responsibility to authorize exploratory activities on the Outer Continental Shelf, DOI's conditional approvals of two Shell exploration plans for activities beginning in 2012 in the Beaufort and Chukchi seas each required Shell to seek incidental harassment authorizations under the Marine Mammal Protection Act from NOAA as one of a series of conditions prior to commencing any activity.

"We're issuing these authorizations to Shell after conducting extensive scientific review and considering public comments," said Sam Rauch, acting assistant administrator of NOAA's Fisheries Service. "Shell will be required to put in place a number of mitigation measures that reduce or eliminate direct impacts to these animals and any negative effects on the ability of Alaskan Natives to conduct subsistence hunts for marine mammals."

NOAA's role in granting incidental harassment authorizations is to ensure that authorized activities do not harm or kill marine mammals, such as bowhead whales, beluga whales, and ice seals. Upon review of Shell's application, NOAA does not expect Shell's exploratory drilling activities to result in serious injury or death to marine mammals if mitigation measures are implemented. Additionally, NOAA does not expect these activities to alter the availability of marine mammals for Alaska Native subsistence hunters.

Under the authorization, Shell is required to follow measures to minimize effects to marine mammals, including:

- Using trained observers to monitor and record animal behavior.
- Lowering ship speeds when marine mammals are spotted during aerial surveys or by observers on deck, and flying helicopters at higher altitudes to minimize noise.
- Communicating with Alaskan Native communities about exploratory activities and vessel routes.
- Suspending operations in certain areas during certain times, so Native subsistence hunters can conduct their hunts.

These measures are intended to minimize the potential for marine mammals to be harmed and to significantly reduce the number of marine mammals exposed to activities that could adversely affect their behavior. Additionally, NOAA will review Shell's monitoring results to use new information to modify mitigation or monitoring measures in future authorizations.

For more information on the authorizations, the federal register notice and the biological opinions, please go to: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/permits/incidental.htm#shell2012>.

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