

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

RIN 0648–XB04

Endangered Species; File No. 1599

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

ACTION: Issuance of permit.

SUMMARY: Notice is hereby given that Inwater Research Group, Inc. (Michael J. Bresette-Responsible Party), 4160 NE Hyline Dr, Jensen Beach, FL 34957 has been issued a permit to take green (*Chelonia mydas*), loggerhead (*Caretta caretta*), hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricata*), and Kemp's ridley (*Lepidochelys kempii*) 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, 263 13th Ave South, St. Petersburg, FL 33701; phone (727)824–5312; fax (727)824–5309.

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

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: On March 21, 2007, notice was published in the *Federal Register* (72 FR 13250) that a request for a scientific research permit to take sea turtles had been submitted by the above-named organization. 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).

The purpose of the proposed research is to continue long term monitoring of sea turtles foraging in the Key West National Wildlife Refuge and surrounding waters. The applicant will net or hand capture up to 90 green, 135 loggerhead, 15 hawksbill, and 5 Kemp's ridley sea turtles per year. The turtles will be measured, weighed, flipper and Passive Integrated Transponder tagged, blood and tissue sampled, marked with paint, and released. A subset of green turtles would be lavaged and satellite tagged. The permit is valid for five 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 such endangered or threatened species, and (3) is consistent with the purposes and policies set forth in section 2 of the ESA.

Dated: June 27, 2007.

P. Michael Payne,

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

[FR Doc. E7–12871 Filed 7–2–07; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510–22–S

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

RIN 0648–XB15

Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement; Seismic Surveys in the Beaufort and Chukchi Seas, Alaska

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

ACTION: Notice of extension of comment period.

SUMMARY: On April 6, 2007, notice was published in the *Federal Register* that NMFS and the Minerals Management Service had released for public comment a Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (Draft PEIS) for Seismic Surveys in the Beaufort and Chukchi Seas, Alaska. Based on a written request, the comment period on this document has been extended.

DATES: Written comments must be postmarked by July 30, 2007.

ADDRESSES: Written comments on the Draft PEIS should be addressed to Mr. P. Michael Payne, Chief of the Permits, Conservation and Education Division, Office of Protected Resources, National Marine Fisheries Service, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910-3225. The mailbox address for providing email comments is PR1.ALASKAEIS@noaa.gov. Comments sent via e-mail, including all attachments, must not exceed a 10-megabyte file size.

A copy of the Draft PEIS may be obtained by writing to this address or by telephoning the contact listed here and is also available at: <http://www.mms.gov/alaska/>.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Kenneth R. Hollingshead, (301)713-2289, ext 128.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Additional information on the content

of the Draft PEIS can be found in the notice of availability (72 FR 17117, April 6, 2007). Notice of a previous extension of the comment period can be found at 72 FR 26788 (May 11, 2007).

Dated: June 27, 2007.

P. Michael Payne,

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

[FR Doc. E7–12880 Filed 6–28–07; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510–22–S

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

RIN 0648–XB06

Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act Provisions; Application for Exempted Fishing Permit Related to Horseshoe Crabs

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

ACTION: Notice; request for comments.

SUMMARY: NMFS announces that the Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, is considering issuing an Exempted Fishing Permit to Limuli Laboratories of Cape May Court House, NJ, to conduct the seventh year of an exempted fishing operation otherwise restricted by regulations prohibiting the harvest of horseshoe crabs in the Carl N. Schuster Jr. Horseshoe Crab Reserve (Reserve) located 3 nautical miles (nm) seaward from the mouth of the Delaware Bay. If granted, the EFP would allow the harvest of up to 10,000 horseshoe crabs for biomedical purposes and require, as a condition of the EFP, the collection of data related to the status of horseshoe crabs within the Reserve. This notice also invites comments on the issuance of the EFP to Limuli Laboratories.

DATES: Written comments on this action must be received on or before July 18, 2007.

ADDRESSES: Written comments should be sent to Alan Risenhoover, Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, NMFS, 1315 East-West Highway, Room 13362, Silver Spring, MD 20910. Mark the outside of the envelope "Comments on Horseshoe Crab EFP Proposal." Comments may also be sent via fax to (301) 713–0596. Comments on this notice may also be submitted by e-mail to: Horseshoe-Crab.EFP@noaa.gov. Include in the subject line of the e-mail comment the following document identifier: Horseshoe Crab EFP Proposal.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Tom Meyer, Fishery Management Biologist, (301) 713-2334 x173.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

The regulations that govern exempted fishing, at 50 CFR 600.745(b) and 50 CFR 697.22, allow a Regional Administrator or the Director of the Office of Sustainable Fisheries to authorize for limited testing, public display, data collection, exploration, health and safety, environmental clean-up and/or hazardous removal purposes, the targeting or incidental harvest of managed species that would otherwise be prohibited. Accordingly, 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 the fishery management plan are not compromised, and issuance of the EFP is beneficial to the management of the species.

The Reserve was established on March 7, 2001, to protect the Atlantic coast stock of horseshoe crabs and to support the effectiveness of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's (Commission) Interstate Fishery Management Plan (ISFMP) for horseshoe crabs. The final rule (66 FR 8906; February 5, 2001) prohibited fishing for and possession of horseshoe crabs in the Reserve on a vessel with a trawl or dredge gear aboard while in the Reserve. While the rule did not allow for any biomedical harvest or the collection of fishery dependent data, NMFS stated in the comments and responses section that it would consider issuing EFPs for the biomedical harvest of horseshoe crabs in the Reserve.

The biomedical industry collects horseshoe crabs, removes approximately 30 percent of their blood, and returns them alive to the water. Approximately 10 percent do not survive the bleeding process. The blood contains a reagent called *Limulus* Amebocyte Lysate (LAL) that is used to test injectable drugs and medical devices for bacteria and bacterial by-products. Presently, there is no alternative to the LAL derived from horseshoe crabs.

NMFS manages horseshoe crabs in the exclusive economic zone in close cooperation with the Commission and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The Commission's Horseshoe Crab Management Board met on April 21, 2000, and again on December 16, 2003, and recommended to NMFS that biomedical companies with a history of collecting horseshoe crabs in the Reserve be given an exemption to continue their historic levels of

collection not to exceed a combined harvest total of 10,000 crabs annually. In 2000, the Commission's Horseshoe Crab Plan Review Team reported that biomedical harvest of up to 10,000 horseshoe crabs should be allowed to continue in the Reserve given that the resulting mortality should be only about 1,000 horseshoe crabs (10 percent mortality during bleeding process). Also in 2000, the Commission's Horseshoe Crab Stock Assessment Committee Chairman recommended that, in order to protect the Delaware Bay horseshoe crab population from over-harvest or excessive collection mortality, no more than a maximum of 20,000 horseshoe crabs should be collected for biomedical purposes from the Reserve. In addition to the direct mortality of horseshoe crabs that are bled, it can be expected that more than 20,000 horseshoe crabs will be trawled up and examined for LAL processing. This is because horseshoe crab trawl catches usually include varied sizes and sexes of horseshoe crabs and large female horseshoe crabs are the ones usually selected for LAL processing. The remaining horseshoe crabs are released at sea with some unknown amount of mortality. Although unknown, this mortality is expected to be negligible.

Collection of horseshoe crabs for biomedical purposes from the Reserve is necessary because of the low numbers of horseshoe crabs found in other areas along the New Jersey Coast from July through early November and because of the critical role horseshoe crab blood plays in health care. In conjunction with the biomedical harvest, NMFS is considering requiring that scientific data be collected from the horseshoe crabs taken in the Reserve as a condition of receiving an EFP. Since the Reserve was first established, the only fishery data from the Reserve were under EFPs issued to Limuli Laboratories for the past five years, and under Scientific Research Activity Letter of Acknowledgment issued Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University's Department of Fisheries and Wildlife Science on September 4, 2001 (for collections from September 1–October 31, 2001), on September 24, 2002 (for collections from September 24–November 15, 2002), on August 14, 2003 (for collections from September 1–October 31, 2003), on September 15, 2004 (for collections from September 15–October 31, 2004), on September 9, 2005 (for collections from September 9–October 30, 2005), and on May 3, 2006 (for collections from June 1–November 30, 2006). Further data are needed to improve the understanding of the

horseshoe crab population in the Delaware Bay area and to better manage the horseshoe crab resource under the cooperative state/Federal management program. The data collected through the EFP will be provided to NMFS, the Commission, and to the State of New Jersey.

Results From 2006 EFP

Limuli Laboratories applied for an EFP to collect horseshoe crabs for biomedical and data collection purposes from the Reserve in 2006. The EFP application specified that: (1) the same methods would be used in 2006 that were used in years 2001–2005, (2) 15 percent of the bled horseshoe crabs would be tagged, and (3) there had not been any sighting or capture of marine mammals or endangered species in the trawling nets of fishing vessels engaged in the collection of horseshoe crabs since 1993. In 2005, a Supplemental Environmental Assessment was completed and found that there was no significant impacts in conducting the EFP.

An EFP was issued to Limuli Laboratories on August 4, 2006, which allowed them to collect horseshoe crabs in the Reserve until November 30, 2006. A total of 2,720 horseshoe crabs were collected in the Reserve in late September and October of 2006. Of these, 2,460 animals were used for the manufacture of LAL. Female horseshoe crab activity levels were active and very active; no males were used for the manufacture of LAL. The remaining 260 animals were rejected; 190 crabs (6.99 percent) were injured horseshoe crabs (a slight decrease from 7.8 percent last year), and 57 crabs (2.1 percent) were unresponsive and presumed dead due to collecting, transporting and handling (a decrease from 6.81 percent last year). In addition, 13 horseshoe crabs (0.48 percent) were rejected due to small size and not utilized in the manufacturing process. Horseshoe crabs were collected during 11 days in late September and October of 2006 (2 days in September and 9 days in October), and were transported to the laboratory for the bleeding operation and inspected for sex, size, injuries and responsiveness. Three to four tows were conducted during each fishing trip with the tows lasting no more than 30 minutes to avoid impacting loggerhead turtles. Horseshoe crabs were unloaded at Two Mile Dock, Wildwood Crest, New Jersey and at County Dock, Ocean City, Maryland and transported to the laboratory by truck. Since large horseshoe crabs, which are generally females, are used for LAL processing, all of the crabs transported to the laboratory

were females. Of those 2,460 processed for LAL, 200 female crabs were measured (inter-ocular distances and prosoma widths), weighed, aged, and tagged to establish baseline morphometrics and ages, prior to being released. An additional 225 female bled animals were tagged for a total of 425 animals or 17.3 percent. The average measurements for the female horseshoe crabs were 167.69 mm for the inter-ocular distance (161.64 mm in 2005); 268.74 mm for the prosoma width (260.4 mm in 2005); and 2.51 kg for the weight (2.08 kg in 2005). The most common encrusting organism observed this year was the slipper shell. Sand tube worms were also noted on many of the animals. Only one crab had a barnacle and bryozoans were not found on any of the shells. It should be noted that many organisms may be removed during the washing/cleaning process prior to blood collection.

Horseshoe crabs were aged in 2006 using Dr. Carl N. Schuster Jr.'s criteria of aging by appearance: female horseshoe crabs - virgin (1.5 percent), young (7.0 percent), young-medium (11.5 percent), medium (75 percent); medium-old (4.5 percent); and old (0.5 percent). Last year's percentages showed the majority of crabs were virgins (65 percent), while this year the majority were medium age (75 percent). This may have occurred because the horseshoe crab specimens were trawled off the coast of Sea Isle City, New Jersey and later in the season than in 2005. The specimens studied last year were trawled in deeper waters off Ocean City, Maryland in August and early September.

In 2006, a total of 425 horseshoe crabs from the Reserve were tagged and released at the water's edge on Highs Beach, New Jersey. The beach was checked frequently, following release, to ensure the crabs had returned to the water. Sixteen live recoveries occurred; two animals from 2003 releases, two from 2004 and 12 from the 2005 releases. Thirteen of the recaptures were observed along the shores of Delaware Bay. Three horseshoe crabs migrated to the Atlantic Ocean. One was observed on the beach in Avalon, New Jersey, another within the Great Bay Inlet, New Jersey and the third crab was found in deep water off the coast of Ocean City, Maryland.

Data collected under the EFP were supplied to NMFS, the Commission, and the State of New Jersey.

Proposed 2006 EFP

Limuli Laboratories proposes to conduct an exempted fishery operation using the same means, methods, and

seasons utilized during the EFPs in 2001–2006, as described below under terms and conditions. Limuli proposes to continue to tag 15 percent of the bled horseshoe crabs as they did in 2006.

The proposed EFP would exempt three commercial vessels from regulations at 50 CFR 697.7(e), which prohibit fishing for horseshoe crabs in the Reserve under § 697.23(f)(1) and prohibit possession of horseshoe crabs on a vessel with a trawl or dredge gear aboard in the same Reserve.

Limuli Laboratories, in cooperation with the State of New Jersey's Division of Fish and Wildlife, submitted an application for an EFP on June 16, 2007. NMFS has made a preliminary determination that the subject EFP contains all the required information and warrants further consideration. NMFS has also made a preliminary determination that the activities authorized under the EFP would be consistent with the goals and objectives of the Federal horseshoe crab regulations and the Commission's Horseshoe Crab ISFMP.

Regulations at 50 CFR 600.745(b)(3)(v) authorize NMFS to attach terms and conditions to the EFP consistent with: the purpose of the exempted fishery, the objectives of horseshoe crab regulations and fisheries management plan, and other applicable law. NMFS is considering adding the following terms and conditions to the EFP:

1. Limiting the number of horseshoe crabs collected in the Reserve to no more than 500 crabs per day and to a total of no more than 10,000 crabs per year;

2. Requiring collections to take place over a total of approximately 20 days during the months of July, August, September, October, and November. Horseshoe crabs are readily available in harvestable concentrations nearshore earlier in the year, and offshore in the Reserve from July through November;

3. Requiring that a 5 1/2 inch (14.0 cm) flounder net be used by the vessel to collect the horseshoe crabs. This condition would allow for continuation of traditional harvest gear and adds to the consistency in the way horseshoe crabs are harvested for data collection;

4. Limiting trawl tow times to 30 minutes as a conservation measure to protect sea turtles, which are expected to be migrating through the area during the collection period, and are vulnerable to bottom trawling;

5. Restricting the hours of fishing to daylight hours only, approximately from 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. to aid law enforcement. NMFS also is considering a requirement that the State of New Jersey Law Enforcement be notified

daily as to when and where the collection will take place;

6. Requiring that the collected horseshoe crabs be picked up from the fishing vessels at docks in the Cape May Area and transported to local laboratories, bled for LAL, and released alive the following morning into the Lower Delaware Bay; and

7. Requiring that any turtle take be reported to NMFS, NERO Assistant Regional Administrator of Protected Resources Division (phone, (978) 281–9328) within 24 hours of returning from the trip in which the incidental take occurred.

Also as part of the terms and conditions of the EFP, for all horseshoe crabs bled for LAL, NMFS is considering a requirement that the EFP holder provide data on sex ratio and daily numbers, and tag 15 percent of the horseshoe crabs harvested. Also, the EFP holder may be required to examine at least 200 horseshoe crabs for: morphometric data, by sex (e.g., interocular (I/O) distance and weight), and level of activity, as measured by a response or by distance traveled after release on a beach.

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

Dated: June 27, 2007.

Alan D. Risenhoover,

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

[FR Doc. E7–12879 Filed 7–2–07; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

RIN 0648–XB08

Marine Mammals; File Nos. 808–1735 and 1058–1733

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

ACTION: Notice; issuance of permits.

SUMMARY: Notice is hereby given that Andrew Read, Ph.D., Duke University Marine Laboratory, 135 Pivers Island Road, Beaufort, North Carolina 28516 and Mark Baumgartner, Ph.D., MS #33, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute, Woods Hole, Massachusetts, 02543 have been issued permits to conduct research on humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*), blue whales (*Balaenoptera musculus*), fin whales (*Balaenoptera physalus*), sei whales (*Balaenoptera borealis*), and Antarctic minke whales (*Balaenoptera bonaerensis*).