

Dated: October 8, 1998.

**Robert S. LaRussa,**

*Assistant Secretary for Import Administration.*

[FR Doc. 98-27667 Filed 10-14-98; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510-DS-P

## DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

### National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

#### Report of Right Whale Sighting; Proposed Collection; Comment Request

**SUMMARY:** The Department of Commerce, as part of its continuing effort to reduce paperwork and respondent burden, invites the general public and other Federal agencies to take this opportunity to comment on proposed and/or continuing information collections, as required by the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, Public Law 104-13 (44 U.S.C. 3506(c)(2)(A)).

**DATES:** Written comments must be submitted on or before December 14, 1998.

**ADDRESSES:** Direct all written comments to Linda Engelmeier, Departmental Forms Clearance Officer, Department of Commerce, Room 5327, 14th and Constitution Avenue, NW, Washington DC 20230.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Requests for additional information or copies of the information collection instrument(s) and instructions should be directed to Greg Silber, Office of Protected Resources, National Marine Fisheries Service, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, Maryland 20910; (phone 301-713-2322 or fax 301-713-4060).

#### SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

##### I. Abstract

The Marine Mammal Protection Act mandates the protection and conservation of marine mammals and makes the killing or serious injury of marine mammals a violation of the Act. The northern right whale (*Eubalaena glacialis*) has been recognized as the world's most endangered large whale species. Vessel interactions are identified as one of the major threats facing these whales especially collisions with and disturbances from, vessels. Human interactions with right whales are a very serious problem for right whales in the western North Atlantic. In particular, where human activities coincide with the distribution of right whales off the east coast of the United States, especially where vessel traffic

and similar activities occur, there is the potential that right whales may be disturbed or their behavior otherwise altered, or that they may be injured or killed. In addition to disturbances caused by vessel movement or noise, vessels may affect right whales indirectly. For example, feeding behavior may be interrupted or affected as a result of a vessel breaking up dense surface zooplankton patches in certain feeding areas. The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) issued regulations that prohibit all approaches within 500 yards (460m), whether by vessel, aircraft or other means, and requires whale avoidance measures under specified circumstances. Similarly, NMFS has recognized that approaches to marine mammals by aircraft below certain altitudes has the potential to harass marine mammals and has imposed restrictions on these types of approaches as conditions in various permits. If a right whale is positively identified, lookouts and/or vessel operators are encouraged to report the right whale sighting and location to the U.S. Coast Guard or other appropriate port authority, and request assistance if appropriate. Knowledge of the location of right whales may help prevent collisions and allow vessels to implement appropriate whale avoidance measures.

##### II. Method of Collection

If a right whale is positively identified and observed near a port, in a channel, in an established shipping lane, or in other areas with a high concentration of shipping activity, a vessel operator is encouraged to report the sighting to the U.S. Coast Guard or other appropriate port authority, and request assistance, if appropriate. Instructions from the Coast Guard or other port authority may require a collection of information. For example, the Coast Guard may require a vessel operator to respond on channel 16 of VHF radio.

##### III. Data

*OMB Number:* 0648-0322.

*Form Number:* N/A.

*Type of Review:* Regular submission.

*Affected Public:* Business or other for-profit; individuals, not-for profit institutions; Federal government; and state, local, or tribal governments (vessel operators).

*Estimated Number of Respondents:* 30.

*Estimated Time Per Response:* 15 minutes.

*Estimated Total Annual Burden Hours:* 8.

*Estimated Total Annual Cost to Public:* \$0.

## IV. Request for Comments

Comments are invited on: (a) Whether the proposed collection of information is necessary for the proper performance of the functions of the agency, including whether the information shall have practical utility; (b) the accuracy of the agency's estimate of the burden (including hours and cost) of the proposed collection of information; (c) ways to enhance the quality, utility, and clarity of the information to be collected; and (d) ways to minimize the burden of the collection of information on respondents, including through the use of automated collection techniques or other forms of information technology.

Comments submitted in response to this notice will be summarized and/or included in the request for OMB approval of this information collection; they also will become a matter of public record.

Dated: October 8, 1998.

**Linda Engelmeier,**

*Departmental Forms Clearance Officer, Office of the Chief Information Officer.*

[FR Doc. 98-27592 Filed 10-14-98; 8:45 am]

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## DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

### National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

#### Intent To Prepare a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement and Notice of Scoping Meetings for the Proposed Tortugas Ecological Reserve in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary

**AGENCY:** Department of Commerce (DOC), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), National Ocean Service (NOS), Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management (OCRM), Sanctuaries and Reserves Division (SRD).

**ACTION:** Notice of intent; Notice of scoping meetings.

**SUMMARY:** SRD has initiated the process to establish an Ecological Reserve within the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (FKNMS or Sanctuary) west of the Dry Tortugas National Park. The Sanctuary intends to prepare a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) and hold scoping meetings to receive public input.

**DATES AND ADDRESSES:** Interested parties are invited to submit written comments by December 17, 1998, to assure full consideration during the scoping process. Written comments may be sent to Billy D. Causey, Superintendent,

Florid Key National Marine Sanctuary, Post Office Box 500368, Marathon, Florida 33050. Comments will be available for public review at the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary office at 5550 Overseas Highway in Marathon during normal business hours.

Scoping meetings are being held as follows:

October 27, 1998: 2–5 p.m.—

Washington D.C., Department of Commerce Main Auditorium, 14th Street and Constitution Avenue.

October 29: 3–8 p.m.—Ft. Myers Convention Center.

November 9: 3–8 p.m.—Key West Holiday Inn Beachside.

November 10: 3–8 p.m.—Marathon High School.

November 17: 3–8 p.m.—Miami, location to be determined and announced through local media outlets.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:**

Billy D. Causey at (305) 743–2437 ext. 26.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** The Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary was designated by an act of Congress entitled the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary and Protection Act (FKNMSPA, Pub. L. 101–605) which was signed into law on November 16, 1990. The Sanctuary was designated to protect the 2800 square nautical mile ecosystem surrounding the Florida Keys, including the third largest barrier reef system in the world. A Final Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement for the Sanctuary was issued in 1996 and final regulations to implement the plan went into effect in July 1997.

The Final Management Plan and regulations established one Ecological Reserve (ER) in the Middle Keys (Western Sambo Ecological Reserve). An ER is defined as an area of the Sanctuary consisting of contiguous, diverse habitats, within which uses are subject to conditions, restrictions and prohibitions, including access restrictions, intended to minimize human influences, to provide natural spawning, nursery, and permanent residence areas for the replenishment and genetic protection of marine life, and also to protect and preserve natural assemblages of habitats and species within areas representing a broad diversity of resources and habitats found within the Sanctuary (15 CFR 922.162). Consumptive uses such as removing, taking or damaging coral, fish or seagrass are prohibited in an ER. During the development of the Draft

Management Plan, NOAA had proposed an additional ER in the Tortugas area within the Sanctuary but deferred the process to establish a boundary or regulations for the Tortugas ER until after implementation of the Final Management Plan. This process, estimated to take approximately two years and referred to as “Tortugas 2000,” will include coordination with the National Park Service, fishing representatives, scientists, and others. There will also be extensive opportunity for public input.

This notice announces NOAA’s intent to prepare a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement and hold scoping meetings on the proposed project. Formal scoping meetings are scheduled as detailed above. The public is invited to attend the scoping meetings to provide oral or written comments. Interested persons may also submit written comments to the address above.

(Federal Domestic Assistance Catalog Number 11.429 Marine Sanctuary Program)

Dated: October 8, 1998.

**John Oliver,**

*Policy, Management, and Information Officer  
National Ocean Service.*

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## DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

### National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[I.D. 100698C]

#### **Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Public Scoping Meeting; Avoiding Interactions Between Steller Sea Lions and Pollock Fisheries in the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Region**

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

**ACTION:** Notice of scoping meetings.

**SUMMARY:** Under the Endangered Species Act, section 7 consultations are being conducted on the pollock fisheries in the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands region and their potential effect(s) on the endangered western population of Steller sea lions and on their critical habitat. If the consultations result in a determination that the pollock fisheries jeopardize the survival and recovery of the western population or adversely modify their critical habitat, then reasonable and prudent alternatives will be required to

avoid these effects. NMFS announces two public scoping meetings to discuss the fisheries’ potential impact on Steller sea lions and on their critical habitat and possible mechanisms for implementing any necessary reasonable and prudent alternatives.

**DATES:** The meetings are scheduled as follows:

1. October 23, 1998, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Seattle, WA

2. October 26, 1998, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Anchorage, AK

**ADDRESSES:** The meetings will be held at the following locations:

1. Seattle—Alaska Fisheries Science Center, (Room 2039, Building 4), 7600 Sand Point Way, NE, Seattle, WA 98115

2. Anchorage—Anchorage Federal Building, (Room 154), 222 West 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Anchorage, AK 99513

To request special accommodations, contact Ursula Jorgenson, Protected Resources, Alaska Region, NMFS, P.O. Box 21668, Juneau, AK 99802, 907–586–7235.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Tim Ragen, 907–586–7248.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** Pollock fishing in the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands region may affect the status and trends of the endangered western population of Steller sea lions or its critical habitat and may impede the recovery and conservation of this population. If NMFS determines that the pollock fisheries jeopardize the continued existence of this population or adversely modify its critical habitat, then reasonable and prudent alternatives will be required. NMFS has scheduled the scoping meetings specified to provide the public an opportunity to discuss possible interactions between the fisheries and sea lions and measures to avoid such interactions.

#### **Special Accommodations**

The meetings are physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to Ursula Jorgenson at the NMFS Regional Office at least 5 days prior to the hearing date (see **ADDRESSES**).

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

Dated: October 7, 1998.

**Bruce C. Morehead,**

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