

NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION**Notice of Permit Applications Received Under the Antarctic Conservation Act of 1978**

AGENCY: National Science Foundation.

ACTION: Notice of permit applications received under the Antarctic Conservation Act of 1978, Public Law 95–541.

SUMMARY: The National Science Foundation (NSF) is required to publish a notice of permit applications received to conduct activities regulated under the Antarctic Conservation Act of 1978. NSF has published regulations under the Antarctic Conservation Act at title 45 part 671 of the Code of Federal Regulations. This is the required notice of permit applications received.

DATES: Interested parties are invited to submit written data, comments, or views with respect to this permit application by October 11, 2016. This application may be inspected by interested parties at the Permit Office, address below.

ADDRESSES: Comments should be addressed to Permit Office, Room 755, Division of Polar Programs, National Science Foundation, 4201 Wilson Boulevard, Arlington, Virginia 22230.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Nature McGinn, ACA Permit Officer, at the above address or ACAPermits@nsf.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The National Science Foundation, as directed by the Antarctic Conservation Act of 1978 (Pub. L. 95–541), as amended by the Antarctic Science, Tourism and Conservation Act of 1996, has developed regulations for the establishment of a permit system for various activities in Antarctica and designation of certain animals and certain geographic areas requiring special protection. The regulations establish such a permit system to designate Antarctic Specially Protected Areas.

Application Details

Permit Application: 2017–013

1. *Applicant:* Dr. George Watters, Director, AMLR Program, Southwest Fisheries Science Center, National Marine Fisheries Service, 8901 La Jolla Shores Drive, La Jolla, CA 92037.

Activity for Which Permit Is Requested

Waste Management Permit. This permit application pertains to ship and shore-based research and logistic activities conducted by the National

Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Antarctic Marine Living Resources (AMLR) Program. The AMLR Program conducts research from a vessel platform in the Antarctic Peninsula region, collecting environmental, oceanographic, primary productivity, finfish and prey data (zooplankton abundance and distribution, particularly Antarctic krill *Euphausia superba*). In addition, the applicant conducts krill-dependent, land-based predator investigations at two temporary field camps in the South Shetland Islands, Antarctica: Cape Shirreff and Copacabana.

Cape Shirreff is a temporary, multi-year field camp on Livingston Island, South Shetland Islands, Antarctica. During each year of the proposed permitting period (2016–2021), the field camp will typically be occupied for less than five months (≤150 days; normally around 120 days) during the austral spring/summers and will house 4–6 researchers. Semiannually for short durations only (usually less than two weeks), an additional group of two to four researchers may reside in a temporary tent structure; tent location will be setup to minimize impact on flora and fauna. In addition, the AMLR Program utilizes an all-terrain vehicle (ATV) that is stored at the Cape Shirreff field camp.

Copacabana field camp is located in Antarctic Specially Protected Area (ASPA) Number 8 (Western Shore of Admiralty Bay, King George Island, South Shetland Islands). The approximate coordinates of the camp are 62°10' South latitude by 58° 28' West longitude. The camp consists of four structures connected by walkways. All buildings and equipment are properly sealed and stored over the winters such that they are inaccessible to wildlife. The AMLR Program recognizes the status of Copacabana as an ASPA (No. 128) and adheres to all protection afforded as such. During the proposed permitting period (2016–2021), the field camp may be occupied for significantly shorter periods than historically, typically less than one month (≤30 days) during the austral summer of each year.

Research equipment deployed near both field will include a snow measurement gauge and remote, autonomous cameras and will be removed from the field at the conclusion of the work. The AMLR program will also continue their use of a vertical take-off and landing unmanned aerial vehicle (VTOL-UAV) for conducting census surveys of animal colonies. The VTOL-UAV that the applicant proposes to deploy has GPS

capability and will fly missions up to 30 minutes at altitudes between 75 and 300 feet. The aircraft are operated by trained, experienced pilots and flight crews. Observers will be used to maintain visual line-of-sight with the UAV any time the aircraft is more than 300 m from the pilot. Appropriate safety measures will be in place and best practices for operating in polar environments will be employed.

Wastes and designated pollutants associated with typical field camp operations will be generated, released, stored, and removed. The field camps will release wastes to air in the form of emissions resulting from the combustion of gasoline, propane, and charcoal. Releases of wastes to water will be limited to greywater and human sewage only. Sewage is disposed of directly into the sea with appropriate mixing. Wastes and designated pollutants resulting from scientific research include materials used to mark animals (e.g. paints, dyes, tags) and doubly-labeled water used to measure energetics and body condition in fur seals. All radioisotope materials will be handled to minimize the risk of inadvertent release.

Releases associated with camp logistics and operations occur daily throughout the period of camp occupation. Releases resulting from research activities occur episodically throughout the field season. Other than the above releases, all other wastes will be packaged (or otherwise contained) and removed from the site for proper disposal under approved guidelines. As far as possible, removal via transfer to the AMLR research vessel will occur annually. Waste awaiting retrograde will be stored under cover (e.g., in buildings, fish boxes, tents, or under tarps) to ensure that it is isolated from wildlife and is not scattered by wind.

Over the period 2017–2021, the AMLR Program plans to conduct three surveys including 30–90 days of vessel operations in the Antarctic Peninsula region annually during the austral summer. The vessel follows a standardized survey grid, and depending on the focus any given year, additional smaller sections of the region are surveyed. During the surveys, the Program deploys drifters and expendable bathythermographs (XBTs) and expendable conductivity-temperature and depth (XCTDS) probes to collect hydrographic data within the study area to better understand the relationship between the target species and their environment, and to help partner programs (NOAA Global Drifter Program) with deployment of their instruments. The applicant plan annual

deployments up to 150 XBTs, 20 XCTDS and 55 drifters. The U.S. AMLR Program may deploy upwards of three mooring arrays which will release up to 6 ferrous weights (train wheels), at the recovery of the mooring(s). Each mooring weight set will weigh between 750 and 1500lbs, depending on the magnitude of the current speed in the vicinity of the mooring locations. These mooring weights will not be recovered. In addition to drifters and XBTs, the AMLR Program also deploys and recovers a variety of gears that are not intentionally released into the environment. These may include both oceanographic instruments and fishing gears, for example: Conductivity-temperature-depth profilers (CTD), plankton nets, commercial bottom trawls, continuous plankton records, winged optical particle counters, towed current profilers, and acoustic buoys.

Location

Cape Shirreff, Livingston Island; Copacabana, western shore of Admiralty Bay; Western Antarctic Peninsula

Dates: October 1, 2016–July 30, 2021.

Nadene G. Kennedy,

Polar Coordination Specialist, Division of Polar Programs.

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Application Details

Permit Application: 2017-012

Applicant: Dr. George Watters, Director, AMLR Program, Southwest Fisheries Science Center, National Marine Fisheries Service, 8901 La Jolla Shores Drive, La Jolla, CA 92037.

Activity for Which Permit Is Requested

Take, Harmful Interference, Enter Antarctic Specially Protected Areas, Import into USA. This permit application pertains to research activities conducted by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Antarctic Marine Living Resources (AMLR) Program. The U.S. AMLR Program proposes to take pinniped species in the Antarctic Peninsula region, primarily at Cape Shirreff, Livingston Island, as part of a long-term ecosystem monitoring program established in 1986. Permission is requested to take Antarctic fur seals (*Arctocephalus gazelle*; 1203 adult/juvenile; 6005 pups), southern elephant seals (*Mirounga leonine*; 102 adult/juvenile; 102 pups), crabeater seals (*Lobodon carcinophaga*; census only), leopard seals (*Hydrurga leptonyx*; 202 adult/juvenile), Ross seals (*Ommatophoca rossii*; census only), and Weddell seals (*Leptonychotes weddellii*; 62 adult/juvenile; 42 pups) by harassment associated with life-history studies and surveys to census or estimate abundance and distribution of pinnipeds. Specific take activities include capture/handling/release of animals for studies of attendance behavior (radio transmitter (VHF)), diving (time-depth recorders; TDRs), at-sea foraging locations (platform terminal transmitter (PTT), geo-location light loggers (GLS), or global positioning system (GPS) instruments), energetics

(doubly-labeled water studies using stable and or radio-isotopes), diet (including enema, milk collection for fatty acid signature analysis, or tissues for stable isotope analysis), age determination (post-canine tooth extraction), pathology (blood collection), and population dynamics (tagging). The U.S. AMLR Program does not plan any lethal take; however, accidental mortality as a direct result of the studies is possible and thus included as part of this application. All methods to be used in the conduct of the proposed studies have been used extensively by U.S. AMLR researchers and the marine mammal research community, generally. All studies of foraging ecology, population dynamics, mark-recapture, census, reproductive success and energetics are part of a long-term monitoring effort coordinated with other Antarctic treaty nations under the auspices of Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR).

The U.S. AMLR Program also proposes continue studies of the behavioral ecology and population biology of the Adélie, gentoo, and chinstrap penguins, as well as interactions among these species and their principal avian predators (skuas, gulls, sheathbills and giant petrels). These studies make use of permanent marks (including flipper banding, pit tagging, and genetic markers) to identify individuals and track them accurately over time. The applicant will continue to study penguins' foraging habits, involving the use of VHF, PTT, GPS, TDRs and GLS tags. These instruments may be deployed on adults of all species at any time during the breeding season and on chicks of all species during the fledging period. Another component of the foraging behavior studies will involve diet collections using the wet offloading technique. The applicant plans to stomach lavage adult penguins at each site. The applicant will also collect data on egg sizes and adult weights of each species and weigh and measure chicks at crèche age (ca. 21 days of age) and fledging for comparative annual growth indices in all species. In addition, penguin uropygial gland oil may be collected for contaminant studies and unhatched penguin eggs may be collected for lipid analysis. Empty egg shells and feathers (breast and tail) may also be collected for isotopic and genetic studies. Morphometric information to be recorded includes bill (culmen) depth and length and tarsus length. These measurements are usually taken during tag deployment, diet collection, or