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**NOAA REVIEWS COMPANY MEASURES TO PROTECT MARINE MAMMALS
WHILE CONSTRUCTING NATURAL GAS TERMINAL, COMMENTS SOUGHT**

NOAA Fisheries Service is seeking comments now through April 12, on a plan by Northeast Gateway Energy Bridge LLC, to protect marine mammals as it constructs and operates a liquefied natural gas (LNG) port in federal waters off Massachusetts. The agency has preliminarily determined the activities would have a negligible impact on marine mammals and is prepared to issue a permit allowing the company to incidentally disrupt animal behavior, but it is soliciting public comment beforehand.

Northeast Gateway is proposing to construct, own and operate the Northeast Gateway Deepwater Port to import LNG into the New England region. The port will be located in Massachusetts Bay, and will consist of a submerged buoy system to dock specifically designed LNG carriers approximately 13 miles off of Massachusetts in federal waters.

This facility will deliver regasified LNG to onshore markets through new and existing pipeline facilities owned and operated by Algonquin. The noise generated by construction of the port and pipeline, and continuing operations during unloading LNG at the facility has the potential to disrupt the behavior patterns of marine mammals in the vicinity of the port. Because of this, an Incidental Harassment Authorization under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) is warranted.

To reduce impacts on marine mammals, Northeast Gateway proposes to: (1) cease any construction vessel movement and/or stop any noise emitting activities that exceed 120 dB, if a North Atlantic right whale comes within 500 yards of any operating construction vessel, or if other marine mammals come within 100 yards of any operating construction vessel; (2) comply with standard reporting requirements while within the North Atlantic Right Whale Mandatory Ship Reporting Area; (3) use trained marine mammal/sea turtle observers onboard construction vessels; (4) train personnel onboard EBRVs on marine mammal sighting and reporting and vessel strike avoidance procedures; and (5) take appropriate actions to minimize the risk of striking whales, including reducing speeds to 10 knots or less in certain areas.

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NOAA Fisheries Service will accept comments on the application and proposed authorization through April 12, 2007. Comments should be addressed to: Michael Payne, Chief, Permits, Conservation and Education Division, Office of Protected Resources, NOAA Fisheries Service, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910.

A copy of the application and *Federal Register* notice may be obtained by contacting the same office, or online at:
<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/permits/incidental.htm>

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, is celebrating 200 years of science and service to the nation. From the establishment of the Survey of the Coast in 1807 by Thomas Jefferson to the formation of the Weather Bureau and the Commission of Fish and Fisheries in the 1870s, much of America's scientific heritage is rooted in NOAA.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and information service delivery for transportation, and by providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners, more than 60 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.

NOAA Fisheries Service is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources and their habitat through scientific research, management and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries Service provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public. To learn more about NOAA Fisheries Service, please visit: www.nmfs.noaa.gov.

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