



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

National Marine Fisheries Service

P.O. Box 21668

Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668

November 17, 2010

Dear Southeast Alaska Drift Gillnet Permit Holder:

In fulfillment of requirements of the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Alaska Marine Mammal Observer Program (AMMOP) plans to implement a study monitoring the level and nature of interactions between the Southeast Alaska drift gillnet fishery and marine mammals. The MMPA requires NMFS to measure and report on the impact of commercial fisheries on marine mammal stocks in annual marine mammal Stock Assessment Reports. Additionally, NMFS is required by the MMPA to publish an annual List of Fisheries in which commercial fisheries are categorized according to their relative impact on marine mammal stocks. The purpose of this Southeast Alaska study is to obtain the data to meet these requirements and otherwise manage marine mammal stocks that interact with commercial fisheries. The AMMOP is fully supported by federal funds, and no fees related to this program will be charged to fishermen who participate in the observed fisheries.

The initial phase of the study will cover ADFG Southeast Alaska Salmon Management Areas 6 and 8. This will entail an initial survey of fishery operations and logistics during the 2011 fishing season to assist in the development of a sampling design for data collection. This phase is expected to be of minimal impact to fishermen and will involve two to four AMMOP staff and contracted personnel sporadically over the season. Data collection by observers is scheduled for the 2012 and 2013 fishing seasons. In subsequent years the remaining ADFG Southeast Alaska Salmon Management Areas are expected to be monitored each for two years. Program operations will be based on random, stratified sample selection. *Because of the small size of many drift gillnet boats in the fleet, observers will not be placed directly on board fishing vessels. Observers will collect data from nearby, independent work vessels.* Complete logistics for vessel selection and observer deployment for data collection will be finalized during the 2011 scoping work.


NMFS intends to hold public meetings with interested permit holders prior to and throughout the development and implementation phases of the study. These meetings are intended to explain the goals and needs of the program and to solicit input from fishermen for information that will help ensure collection of high quality data, while minimizing the impact of the study on fishing operations. The first public meeting/workshop regarding this study is expected to be held in early 2011. Notice of the meeting, including the time and place, will be mailed to you. The AMMOP would like to work closely and cooperatively with permit holders in an ongoing, open dialogue to ensure the success of the study for the benefit of fishermen and the resources we share.



The observer provider company, Saltwater, Inc. of Anchorage, has been granted the contract for this study, and Kathy Robinson will be Saltwater's program manager throughout the study. Kathy and Saltwater have a long and successful history in providing observer services in Alaskan fisheries. They currently provide observers in the Alaska groundfish and crab fisheries, conducted AMMOP studies in Prince William Sound and South Unimak in the early 1990s, and most recently worked with the Yakutat set gillnet fishery (2006-2008). We are happy to be working with them once again in this program.

Enclosed with this letter is further information about the AMMOP, the type of information collected by observers, and background on the annual List of Fisheries and fishery categorization. Additional information may be found on the AMMOP website at: <http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/protectedresources/observers/mmop.htm>. For further information, please call Bridget Mansfield, AMMOP coordinator, at (907) 586-7642.

Sincerely,

  
for James W. Balsiger, PhD.  
Administrator, Alaska Region

Enclosure