

**Marine Mammal Protection Act Incidental Harassment Authorization Report**

**Glaucous-winged Gull Monitoring & Research in Glacier Bay National Park, Alaska**

**May 15, 2015 – September 30, 2015**

Submitted by:

Tania Lewis, Wildlife Biologist

Resource Management, Glacier Bay National Park

P.O. Box 140, Gustavus, Alaska 99826

Phone: 907-697-2668

E-mail: [Tania\\_Lewis@nps.gov](mailto:Tania_Lewis@nps.gov)

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Permits, Conservation, and Education Division

National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS)

Office of Protected Resources

1315 East-West Highway

Silver Spring, Maryland 20910-3226

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## **Background**

Glacier Bay National Park applied for an Incidental Harassment Authorization permit to effectively access island study sites for gull monitoring in Glacier Bay National Park (GLBA), in southeastern Alaska. The gull monitoring studies are mandated by a Record of Decision of an Legislative Environmental Impact Statement (NPS 2010) which states that Glacier Bay National Park must initiate a monitoring program for glaucous-winged gulls (*Larus glaucescens*) to inform future native egg harvest by the Hoonah Tlingit in Glacier Bay, Alaska. To effectively access the islands for gull monitoring, occasional minimal disturbance (or Level B harassment) of harbor seals may occur. We requested an Incidental Harassment permit to access four study sites up to five times per year for gull research and monitoring activities. We expected that the disturbance to harbor seals would be minimal and limited to Level B harassment and would not result in serious injury or death.

## **Pre-survey monitoring**

Study sites were accessed a total of 15 times over the summer (Table 1). Each site was monitored for harbor seals at a distance of >500 m before approach. Sites were accessed for gull surveys 13 times, and two times we did not conduct surveys due to the presence of >25 hauled out harbor seals.

## **Harbor seal disturbance**

We encountered a total of 156 adult harbor seals hauled out at our study sites, of which 57 flushed in to the water, 25 became alert but did not move >1 m, and zero moved >1 m but did not flush into the water (Table 1). No pups were observed. On two occasions harbor seals were observed at the study sites in numbers <25 and the islands were accessed for gull surveys. In these instances, the vessel approached the island at very slow speed and most of the harbor seals flushed into water at approximately 200 m (Geikie 8/5/15) and 280 m (Lone, 8/5/15). In one instance, (Lone, 6/11/15) we counted 20 harbor seals hauled out during our initial vessel-based monitoring, but once on the island, we observed 33 hauled out seals. When we realized the number of seals present, we ceased our survey and left the area, flushing 13 seals into the water.

## **Marked or tagged marine mammals**

We observed two branded Steller sea lions outside of our study area. We took high resolution photos of these animals and have sent them to pinniped biologists at the National Park Service as well as the Alaska Department of Fish and Game.

## **Offshore predators**

No marine mammal predators were observed offshore of our study sites during any of the surveys.

**Table 1. Location, date and observations of harbor seals during gull monitoring in Glacier Bay, May 15 – September 30 2015. Distance indicates the minimum approach distance to the harbor seals and gull survey status indicates whether or not a gull survey occurred.**

**\* We counted 20 harbor seals on shore before landing, but once on shore saw more and left area flushing 13 into the water**

Location	Date	Number of Adults	Number of Pups	Original behavior	Flushed into water	Moved >1 m but did not flush	Alert but did not move >1 m	Approximate Distance	Tidal Stage	Gull Survey Status
Boulder	5/26/2015	0	0	-	0	0	0	-	High	Survey
Boulder	6/9/2015	2	0	Hauled out	0	0	0	>500 m	Low	Survey
Boulder	8/6/2015	11	0	Hauled out	11	0	0	300 m	High	Survey
Flapjack	5/26/2015	0	0	-	0	0	0	-	Ebb	Survey
Flapjack	6/9/2015	0	0	-	0	0	0	-	Flood	Survey
Flapjack	6/16/2015	0	0	-	0	0	0	-	High	Survey
Flapjack	8/19/2015	0	0	-	0	0	0	-	Flood	Survey
Geikie	5/28/2015	0	0	-	0	0	0	-	Ebb	Survey
Geikie	6/11/2015	0	0	-	0	0	0	-	High	Survey
Geikie	8/5/2015	30	0	Hauled out	0	0	0	>500 m	Flood	Did not survey
Geikie	8/5/2015	15	0	Hauled out	14	0	1	200 m	Flood	Survey
Lone	5/28/2015	7	0	Hauled out	0	0	0	>500 m	Ebb	Survey
Lone	6/11/2015	33	0	Hauled out	13	0	20	50 m	Low	Survey*
Lone	8/5/2015	35	0	Hauled out	0	0	0	>500 m	Flood	Did not survey
Lone	8/5/2015	23	0	Hauled out	19	0	4	280 m	Flood	Survey
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>156</b>	<b>0</b>		<b>57</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>25</b>			