

Marine Mammal Protection Act Incidental Harassment Authorization Report

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

January 1 – December 31, 2022

Submitted by:

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Background

The National Marine Fisheries Service issued Glacier Bay National Park a Letter of Authorization (LOA) permit to effectively access island study sites for gull and climate monitoring in Glacier Bay National Park (GLBA), in southeastern Alaska from 2019 - 2024. 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. Additionally, the National Park Service Inventory and Monitoring Program maintains a weather/climate station on Lone Island where harbor seals haul out seasonally. Our Letter of Authorization permit allows us to access five study sites up to five times per year for gull and climate 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

Four study sites were accessed a total of six times over the summer including five gull surveys and one visit to Lone Island for climate monitoring weather station maintenance. Harbor seals were observed hauled out on two of these occasions (Table 1). Each site was monitored for harbor seals at a distance of >500 m before approach. Steller sea lions were observed and counted on a single survey of South Marble Island and a distance of 100 yards was maintained at all times with no disturbance.

Harbor seal disturbance

We encountered a total of 17 adult harbor seals hauled out our study sites in 2022, of which 1 adult flushed into the water at approximately 300 meters at Geikie. During this interaction our vessel approached slowly and steadily in a manner that did not appear to cause panic or stampede as per the conditions of our LOA. The remaining 16 harbor seals at Lone were not visibly disturbed at distances greater than 500 meters. No survey was conducted at Lone when harbor seals were hauled out.

Marked or tagged marine mammals

We did not observe branded Steller's sea lion at South Marble Island in 2022.

Offshore predators

We did not observe predators such as killer whales near any of our study sites.

Table 1. Location, date and observations of surveys and marine mammals observed during gull and climate monitoring in Glacier Bay, January 1 – December 31, 2022. Distance indicates the minimum approach distance to the marine mammals. SMI = South Marble Island, HASE = harbor seal, SSL = Steller sea lion, HO = hauled out, * indicates that a full count of marine mammals was not conducted.

Location	Date	Time	Tide	Weather	Species	# of Adult	# of Pups	Original behavior	Level 3 Flush	Level 2 Move	Level 1 Alert	Approximate Distance (m)	Survey Type
Boulder	8/9/2022	1120	High	Clear	HASE	0	0	-	-	-	-	-	Gull vessel
Geikie	6/8/2022	1330	Low	Clear	HASE	1	0	HO	1	-	-	300m	Gull ground
Geikie	8/11/2022	1200	High	Clear	HASE	0	0	-	-	-	-	-	Gull vessel
Lone	4/19/2022	900	Low	Clear	HASE	0	0	-	-	-	-	-	Climate
Lone	6/8/2022	1515	Low	Clear	HASE	16	0	HO	0	0	0	> 500 m	Gull ground
SMI	8/9/2022	1230	High	Clear	SSL	587	0	HO	0	0	0	> 100 m	Gull vessel
TOTAL					HASE	17	0		1	0	0		