

Marine Mammal Protection Act Incidental Harassment Authorization Report

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

January 1 – December 31, 2023

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

Submitted to:

Permits, Conservation, and Education Division

National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS)

Office of Protected Resources

1315 East-West Highway

Silver Spring, Maryland 20910-3226

E-mail: PR.ITP.MonitoringReports@noaa.gov

February 28, 2024

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 each 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 nine times over the summer including eight visits for gull surveys and one visit to Lone Island for climate monitoring weather station maintenance. Harbor seals were observed hauled out on three 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 39 adult harbor seals hauled out our study sites in 2023, of which 9 adults flushed into the water at approximately 393 meters at Geikie on 8/3/23. 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. Thirty harbor seals at Lone were not visibly disturbed at distances greater than 500 meters on 8/3/23 and no survey was conducted at that time due to the large numbers. A single harbor seal pup was observed in the intertidal zone of Boulder Island on 6/8/23. The pup moved away from the gull survey team within the intertidal zone at about 20 meters but did not flush into the water.

Marked or tagged marine mammals

We did not observe branded Steller's sea lion at South Marble Island in 2023.

Offshore predators

We observed a large number (20+) of killer whales in the vicinity of Geikie Rock after our survey was completed on 5/30/2023. We did not observe any interaction with harbor seals.

Table 1. Location, date and observations of surveys and marine mammals observed during gull and climate monitoring in Glacier Bay, January 1 – December 31, 2023. Distance indicates the minimum approach distance to the marine mammals. SMI = South Marble Island, HASE = harbor seal, SSL = Steller sea lion, HO = hauled out.

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	5/30/23	1030	Low	Clear	HASE	0	0	-	-	-	-	-	Gull ground
Boulder	6/8/22	954	Low	Clear	HASE	0	1	HO	0	1	-	20 m	Gull ground
Boulder	8/2/23	1326	High	Clear	HASE	0	0	-	-	-	-	-	Gull vessel
Geikie	5/30/23	1230	Flood	Clear	HASE	0	0	-	-	-	-	-	Gull ground
Geikie	6/8/23	1428	Flood	Clear	HASE	0	0	-	-	-	-	-	Gull ground
Geikie	8/3/23	1507	High	Clear	HASE	9	0	HO	9	-	-	393 m	Gull vessel
Lone	4/25/23	1130	Low	Clouds	HASE	0	0	-	-	-	-	-	Climate
Lone	8/3/23	1600	High	Clear	HASE	30	0	HO	0	0	0	> 500 m	Gull vessel
SMI	8/2/23	1423	High	Clear	SSL	243	0	HO	0	0	0	> 100 m	Gull vessel
TOTAL					HASE	39	1		9	1	0		