

Project Narrative

MA DMF is requesting the renewal of an EFP in support of a continuing study developing a genomic tool to evaluate the population structure of Atlantic herring. During the first year of sampling, two trips were taken to spawning areas in the GOM, and three trips were made to GB and the Great South Channel. Additional herring samples were acquired from tuna fishermen who had captured herring with hook and line. Sampling in the study's first year captured approximately 400 lb (181.4 kg) of herring and did not obtain the target sample size (970 lb (440.0 kg)), so a second year of sampling is requested to meet study objectives. The current system of herring management sets area-specific annual catch limits (ACL) that are based on estimates of spawning component abundance and seasonal mixing rates. These estimates have not been updated since implementation of the Atlantic Herring Fishery Management Plan in 2000. This study is intended to improve scientific understanding of the contributions of genetically distinct sub-populations to herring stocks in U.S. waters and, therefore, may allow fisheries managers to update area-specific ACLs to reflect their spawning components.

This EFP would authorize 3 fishing vessels to retain a total of 3,000 adult herring (approximately 970 lb (440.4 kg)) from 5 spawning grounds during the spring and fall spawning seasons. The vessel sampling Eastern GOM and Western GOM areas would primarily use midwater trawl gear with the option of switching to purse seine or bottom trawl. The two vessels fishing Jeffreys Ledge, the Great South Channel, and GB would use small-mesh bottom trawl gear. Spring sampling under the EFP issued for the first year of sampling will take place in April and May. A second round of fall sampling would occur under this renewed EFP from August to November. These vessels are expected to take 15 total trips, and trips to some nearby spawning areas may be combined. During each trip, the project team plans to conduct short, 5–60-minute tows to catch and retain 150–300 adult herring from each area sampled. Once the net is retrieved, the crew will retain herring and discard all other catch. If more than 150 herring are captured, the crew would continue to retain herring until they have no more space in their insulated cooler. The cooler would hold a maximum of approximately 300 herring, and any further captures would then be discarded.

After sampling, the research team would use low-coverage, whole-genome sequencing to identify a panel of small genetic differences that can reliably differentiate between herring sub-populations. Through a peer-reviewed publication on their genomic tool and their findings regarding Atlantic herring genomic population structure, the research team may enable fishery managers to update area-specific ACLs to support the sustainable harvest of each spawning component.

Genomic tools require relatively small sample sizes. The project team has already harvested approximately 400 lb (181.4 kg) of Atlantic herring in the first year of Fall sampling. In their Spring, 2025 and Fall, 2026 sampling, they propose to harvest an additional 570 lb (258.5 kg) of Atlantic herring over 15 sampling trips, which is less than 9 percent of the 6,600-lb (2993.7-kg) possession limit associated with an Open Access Category D Permit. Because the project requires sampling spawning herring, vessels would sample during the areas' fall spawning closures. The project team would work with knowledgeable captains who are skilled at capturing herring, so only a single tow is expected to take place per area sampled on most trips. Although the MA DMF plans to conduct tows between 30 and 60 minutes, vessel operators would plan to capture sufficient samples with the least amount of fishing effort possible, including tows as short as 5 minutes. Technologies such as net-mounted echosounders, for example, would be used to identify herring entering the net and, therefore, signal operators to end the tow. Because of the low amount of fishing effort that this sampling would require, discards of incidentally captured species are expected to be relatively low, around 10,000 lb (4,535.9 kg) total over 15 trips. Based on observer data from the same areas and gears, the highest volume of bycatch is expected to be of silver hake, with expected discards of around 7,000 lb (3,175.1 kg).

The applicants state that the exemption allowing vessels to fish in GOM Cod Protection Closure Areas is necessary for sampling herring in the Jeffreys Ledge spawning area. Based on existing observer data and the project team's knowledge of herring spawning locations, they are expecting to cause nearly-zero Atlantic cod bycatch mortality during their sampling. Based on observer data collected from vessels fishing in the same statistical areas using the same gear, the research team expects this sampling to catch a total of 4.4 lb (2.0 kg) cod. During the first year of sampling, no cod were captured. In

addition, the research team expects to catch herring in deeper water and softer substrate than where cod are abundant and/or spawning. Finally, the research team has previously measured a 93-percent survival rate for cod captured using short tows with bottom trawl gear (Zemeckis *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, although a very small amount of cod catch is possible, the applicant suggests that cod would be returned to the water as soon as possible and would be very likely to survive.

If approved, the applicant may request minor modifications and extensions to the EFP throughout the year. EFP modifications and extensions may be granted without further notice if they are deemed essential to facilitate completion of the proposed research and have minimal impacts that do not change the scope or impact of the initially approved EFP request. Any fishing activity conducted outside the scope of the exempted fishing activity would be prohibited.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: April 29, 2026.

Kelly Denit,

*Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries,
National Marine Fisheries Service.*

[FR Doc. 2026-08600 Filed 5-1-26; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510-22-P

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

Agency Information Collection Activities; Submission to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for Review and Approval; Comment Request; Reporting Requirements for Commercial Fisheries Authorization Under Section 118 of the Marine Mammal Protection Act

AGENCY: National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Notice of information collection, request for comment.

SUMMARY: The Department of Commerce, in accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (PRA), invites the general public and other Federal agencies to comment on proposed, and continuing information collections, which helps us assess the impact of our information collection requirements and minimize the public's reporting burden. The purpose of this notice is to allow for 60 days of public comment preceding submission of the collection to OMB.

DATES: To ensure consideration, comments regarding this proposed information collection must be received on or before July 6, 2026.

ADDRESSES: Interested persons are invited to submit written comments to Adrienne Thomas, NOAA PRA Officer, at NOAA.PRA@noaa.gov. Please reference OMB Control Number 0648–0292 in the subject line of your comments. All comments received are part of the public record and will generally be posted on <https://www.regulations.gov> without change. Do not submit Confidential Business Information or otherwise sensitive or protected information.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Requests for additional information or specific questions related to collection activities should be directed to Jaclyn Taylor, NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service, 1315 East West Hwy., Silver Spring, MD 20910–3282, (301) 427–8402 or Jaclyn.Taylor@noaa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

I. Abstract

This request is for the renewal of a currently approved information collection and is sponsored by National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Office of Protected Resources (OPR).

Reporting injury to and/or mortalities of marine mammal's incidental to commercial fishing activities is mandated under Section 118 of the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA). This information is required to determine the impacts of commercial fishing on marine mammal populations. This information is also used to classify commercial fisheries into Categories I, II, or III on the annual Marine Mammal Protection Act List of Fisheries. Participants in the first two categories must be authorized to take marine mammals, while those in Category III are exempt from that requirement. All three categories must report injuries or mortalities to the NMFS using the OMB approved form.

II. Method of Collection

Respondents have a choice of either electronic or paper forms. Methods of submittal include online forms, email of electronic or scanned forms, mail and facsimile transmission of paper forms.

III. Data

OMB Control Number: 0648–0292.

Form Number(s): None.

Type of Review: Regular submission (extension of currently approved collection).

Affected Public: Business or other for-profit organizations; Individuals or

households; State, local, or tribal government.

Estimated Number of Respondents: 200.

Estimated Time per Response: 15 minutes per response.

Estimated Total Annual Burden Hours: 50 hours.

Estimated Total Annual Cost to Public: \$0.

Respondent's Obligation: Mandatory.

Legal Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1387 Sec. 118.

IV. Request for Comments

We are soliciting public comments to permit the Department/Bureau to: (a) Evaluate whether the proposed information collection is necessary for the proper functions of the Department, including whether the information will have practical utility; (b) Evaluate the accuracy of our estimate of the time and cost burden for this proposed collection, including the validity of the methodology and assumptions used; (c) Evaluate ways to enhance the quality, utility, and clarity of the information to be collected; and (d) Minimize the reporting burden on those who are to respond, including the use of automated collection techniques or other forms of information technology.

Comments that you submit in response to this notice are a matter of public record. We will include or summarize each comment in our request to OMB to approve this information collection request. Before including your address, phone number, email address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment—including your personal identifying information—may be made publicly available at any time. While you may ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

Sheleen Dumas,

Departmental PRA Compliance Officer, Office of the Under Secretary for Economic Affairs, Commerce Department.

[FR Doc. 2026–08642 Filed 5–1–26; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510–22–P

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[RTID 0648–XF661]

Takes of Marine Mammals Incidental to Specified Activities; Taking Marine Mammals Incidental to Robert Storrs Harbor Floats A&B Replacement Project in Unalaska, Alaska

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Notice; issuance of incidental harassment authorization.

SUMMARY: In accordance with regulations implementing the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) as amended, notification is hereby given that NMFS has issued an incidental harassment authorization (IHA) to the City of Unalaska (COU) for authorization to take marine mammals incidental to the Robert Storrs Harbor Floats A&B Replacement Project in Unalaska, Alaska.

DATES: This authorization is effective for 1 year from the date of notification by the IHA-holder, not to exceed 1 year from the date of issuance (April 30, 2026).

ADDRESSES: Electronic copies of the application and supporting documents, as well as a list of the references cited in this document, may be obtained online at: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/marine-mammal-protection/incidental-take-authorizations-construction>. In case of problems accessing these documents, please call the contact listed below.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Jennifer Gatzke, Office of Protected Resources, NMFS, (301) 427–8401.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

MMPA Background and Determinations

The MMPA prohibits the “take” of marine mammals, with certain exceptions. Among the exceptions is section 101(a)(5)(D) of the MMPA (16 U.S.C. 1361 *et seq.*) which directs the Secretary of Commerce (as delegated to NMFS) to allow, upon request, the incidental, but not intentional, taking by harassment of small numbers of marine mammals by U.S. citizens who engage in a specified activity (other than commercial fishing) within a specified geographical region if certain findings are made and the public has an opportunity to comment on the proposed IHA.