UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL OCEAN SERVICE
National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Record

FROM: Margo Schulze-Haugen
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REFERENCE: Environmental Review of the Assessing Long-term Trends and Processes Driving Variability in Cetacean Density throughout the Gulf of Mexico using Passive Acoustic Monitoring and Habitat Modeling 2025-2029

This memorandum summarizes the environmental compliance steps taken by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) National Ocean Service (NOS) National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science (NCCOS) for the referenced project. It serves as the Record of Environmental Consideration (REC) for the proposed project, as defined by NOS policy 0300-01. The information in Table 1 identifies the project under review. Table 2 indicates if the proposed project falls within the scope of the November 2022 *Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for Surveying and Mapping Projects in U.S. Waters for Coastal and Marine Data Acquisition* (PEIS) and its January 2023 Record of Decision (ROD), which were prepared pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Table 3 indicates how NCCOS has complied with requirements of the PEIS and other applicable environmental laws. Table 4 identifies the appropriate Best Management Practices (BMPs).

Table 1 identifies the project and provides basic information on its scope.

Table 1. Location and Timing of the Proposed Project

Item Number	Requested Project Characteristic	Response
1.1	**Name/location of project**	Assessing Long-term Trends and Processes Driving Variability in Cetacean Density throughout the Gulf of Mexico using Passive Acoustic Monitoring and Habitat Modeling 2025-2029
1.2	**Vessel(s) to be employed**	Louisiana Universities Marine Consortium (LUMCON) vessel the R/V Pelican (homeport: Cocodrie, LA) If the R/V Pelican is not available, researchers may use NOAA's Gordon Gunter
1.3	**Project number**	RSP-001 (Expanding and continuing efforts in project #2771969)

Item Number	Requested Project Characteristic	Response
1.4	**Origin of the incoming transit**	Cocodrie, LA or Pascagoula, MS
1.5	**Destination for outgoing transit**	4 historic long term reference PAM Sites 4 new (as of this proposal) long term sites 30 established short term sites 16 new (as of this proposal) short term sites
1.6	**Approximate dates of the project**	01/2025 - 12/2029

Note that, as with all activities at sea, the dates of the proposed project could be affected by poor weather, equipment difficulties, or other unforeseen circumstances.

Table 2-1. Components of the Proposed Project

Item Number	Question	Yes	No	Additional Notes
	Project Scope			
2.1	Would any part of the project (excluding transits) occur outside of U.S. waters?	X		For moored instrument work in Mexico, the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT) through the General Directorate of Wildlife, No. SGPA/DGVS/07430/23, granted permit number SPARN/DGVS/11531/23 to Dr. Arturo Serrano at the Universidad Veracruzana. Permits to operate international vessels in Mexican waters must be applied for annually, at least 7 months in advance of entering Mexican waters, once the cruise plan is known. Dr. Kate Frasier holds a permit to work in Mexican Waters in 2024 which is renewable in future years (Permit OPM00942-2024)
	Project Activities			
2.2	Would the project require operation of echo sounders at frequencies lower than 1 kilohertz (kHz)?		X	

Item Number	Question	Yes	No	Additional Notes
2.3	Would the project damage or otherwise affect submerged land (e.g., anchoring, sediment sampling, mooring, or instrument installation, etc.)? **If yes,** provide the locations, types (moorings, sediment sampling, instruments installed, etc.), the extent of the disturbance, and the length of time that the mooring or instrument will remain in place in the additional notes section.	X		Location(s): 54 locations Type(s): Moorings Passive Acoustic Monitoring (PAM) High frequency Acoustic Recording Packages (HARP) Extent: no deeper than 1000m in the water column Duration: 8 long term (2025-2029) and 36 short term sites (1 year deployment)
2.4	Would any part of the project require terrestrial land disturbance? **If yes,** provide the location, extent, and depth of any terrestrial land disturbance, and the length of time that the disturbance will persist in the additional notes section.		X	Location(s): Extent: Depth: Duration:
2.5	Would the project require any discharges (such as expendable bathythermographs), excluding those related to normal ship operation? **If yes,** provide the location, extent, volume/number of any discharges in the additional notes section.		X	Location: Extent: Volume/Number of Discharges:

Table 2-2: Summary of Project Activities

Activity	Page(s) in PEIS	To Be Conducted During the Project? (Yes or No)	(If Conducted) Approximate Linear Nautical Miles (lnm)	(If Conducted) Approximate Number of Times Activity to be Conducted During Project
Crewed Vessel Operations	40-42	Yes	~10,000	N/A
Anchoring	42	Yes	N/A	N/A
Operation of ROVs, USVs, and AUVs	42-43	No		N/A
Use of Echo Sounders	43-45	No		N/A
Use of mobile ADCPs	45-46	No		N/A
Installation of Stationary ADCPs	45-46	No	N/A	
Maintenance of Stationary ADCPs	45-46	No	N/A	
Removal of Stationary ADCPs	45-46	No	N/A	
Use of Acoustic Communication Systems	46	No	N/A	
Use of Sound Speed Data Collection Equipment	46-48	Yes	N/A	20
Operation of Drop/Towed Cameras and Magnetometers	48	No	N/A	
Collection of Bottom Grab Samples	48-49	No	N/A	
Use of Passive Listening Systems	49	Yes	N/A	20
SCUBA Operations	49	No	N/A	
Installation of Tide Gauges	49-53	No	N/A	
Maintenance of Tide Gauges	49-53	No	N/A	
Removal of Tide Gauges	49-53	No	N/A	
Installation of GPS Reference Stations	53	No	N/A	

Table 3. Environmental Impacts of the Proposed Project

Item Number	Question	Yes	No	Additional Notes
	Endangered Species Act (ESA)			
3.1	Have you prepared an Information for Planning and Consultation (IPaC) report?		X	N/A - no effect to USFWS managed species
3.1-1	**If yes,** have you contacted the USFWS Region in which the proposed project would occur to initiate a Section 7 ESA consultation?			
3.1-b	**If yes,** have you added BMPs proposed by USFWS to the list created in Section 4 below?			
	National Marine Sanctuaries Act (NMSA)			
3.2	Would the proposed project take place in, or within 2.0 lnm of, a national marine sanctuary? This can be determined using the NOAA Sanctuaries Mapper. **If yes,** please list identified sanctuaries in the additional notes section.		X	
3.2-a	**If yes,** have you contacted the sanctuary to determine whether a Sanctuary permit is necessary?			
3.2-b	**If yes,** have you received the required sanctuary permit?			
3.2-c	**If yes,** have you added BMPs proposed by the sanctuary to the list created in Section 4 below?			
	National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)			

Item Number	Question	Yes	No	Additional Notes
3.3	Some projects may have the potential to affect historic properties through ground disturbance, seafloor disturbance, or viewshed impacts. Activities that may have the potential to affect historic properties include: anchoring, use of sub-bottom profilers, installation/maintenance/removal of ADCPs, collection of bottom grab samples, installation/maintenance/removal of tide gauges, and installation of GPS reference stations. If your project will involve activities with potential to affect historic properties, have you identified and contacted the State or Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO/THPO) for Section 106 consultation? SHPO contact information can be found on the National Conference of SHPOs (NCSHPO) online directory or on individual state websites. THPO contact information can be found on the National Association of THPOs (NATHPO) online directory or tribe websites. **If yes,** please list the SHPOs and THPOs contacted in the additional notes section.		X	
3.3-a	**If yes,** have you added any BMPs that resulted from SHPO/THPO consultation to the BMP list in Section 4?			
	Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA)			
3.4	Would the proposed project take place in, or within state waters or on state land? **If yes,** please list the state(s) in the additional notes section and remember to identify any relevant state-specific BMPs in Section 4. Note that pre-survey notifications are required for some work in Maine, New Hampshire, and New Jersey.		X	
	Clean Water Act (CWA)			

Item Number	Question	Yes	No	Additional Notes
3.5	Will the project require the installation of instruments or equipment (ADCPs, buoy moorings, etc) that may disturb the lakebed, seafloor, or soil?	X		
3.5-a	Will the instrument be installed within three nautical miles of shore?		X	
3.5-b	**If yes to both questions 3.5 and 3.5-a,** have you completed the steps outlined in *CWA Section 404 Permitting for NOS Projects Using Scientific Measurement Devices Guidance*?			
	Other Permits Requirements			
3.6	Is the proposed project located in a National Forest, Wildlife Refuge, Park, or other federally-protected area (excluding National Marine Sanctuaries)?		X	
3.6-a	**If yes,** have the necessary required special use permit(s) been obtained? Please list the permits required and obtained in the additional notes section.			
3.6-b	Are any of the permit conditions or other restrictions identified through the environmental compliance process not possible for the field crews to implement? **If yes,** please list any permit conditions, mitigation measures, or other restrictions that would not be feasible and explain why in the additional notes section.		X	

Table 4. Identification of Appropriate BMPs

Item Number	Question	Yes	No	Additional Notes
4.1	Using the attached BMP document, have you identified the applicable BMPs using the activities to be conducted, project location, and protected species that could be encountered and communicated to project staff?	X		ESA Programmatic Biological Opinion from NMFS
4.2	Have any additional BMPs proposed through consultation with USFWS, NMFS, SHPO, THPO, or other permitting authority been added to the BMP list and communicated to project staff?	X		
4.3	Are any of the BMPs identified through the environmental compliance process not possible for the field crews to implement? **If yes,** please list any BMPs that would not be feasible and explain why in the additional notes section.		X	

Conclusion

☒ **NEPA COMPLETED**

Based on the information in Sections 1, 2, and 3 above, NCCOS has determined that the proposed project falls within the scope of the November 2022 *Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for Surveying and Mapping Projects in U.S. Waters for Coastal and Marine Data Acquisition* and its January 2023 Record of Decision. Therefore, no additional NEPA analysis for the proposed project is required.

☐ **ADDITIONAL NEPA ANALYSIS NEEDED**

Based on the information in Sections 1, 2, and 3 above, NCCOS has determined that the proposed project **DOES NOT** fall within the scope of the November 2022 *Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for Surveying and Mapping Projects in U.S. Waters for Coastal and Marine Data Acquisition* and its January 2023 Record of Decision. Therefore, additional NEPA analysis for the proposed project is required and will be performed.

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Date: *12/17/24*