

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

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

**May 1, 2017 – September 30, 2017**

Submitted by:

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Permits, Conservation, and Education Division

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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 a 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 11 times over the summer (Table 1). Each site was monitored for harbor seals at a distance of >500 m before approach. Gull surveys were conducted 9 times, and twice we did not conduct surveys due to the presence of large groups (23-26) of hauled out harbor seals.

## **Harbor seal disturbance**

We encountered a total of 86 adult harbor seals hauled out at our study sites, of which 33 flushed in to the water, none became alert but did not move >1 m, and none moved >1 m but did not flush into the water (Table 1). No pups were observed. On two occasions harbor seals were flushed into the water when 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 the water at approximately 150 - 185 m. In two instances harbor seals were observed hauled out on Boulder Island and not disturbed due to their distance from the survey area. In two instances on Lone Island, harbor seals were observed hauled out and the survey was not conducted to prevent disturbance of harbor seals.

## **Marked or tagged marine mammals**

We did not observe branded Steller's sea lions at any of our study areas. We did however observe an injured Steller's sea lion and took high resolution photos of this animal and forwarded to pinniped biologists at the National Park Service.

## **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 surveys and harbor seals during gull monitoring in Glacier Bay, May 1 – September 30 2017. Distance indicates the minimum approach distance to the harbor seals and gull survey status indicates whether or not a gull survey occurred.**

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	5/25/2017	0	0	-	0	0	0	-	Flood	Ground
Boulder	6/2/2017	0	0	-	0	0	0	-	Ebb	Ground
Boulder	6/21/2017	1	0	Hauled out	0	0	0	463 m	Flood	Ground
Boulder	8/8/2017	3	0	Hauled out	0	0	0	463 m	High	Vessel
Flapjack	6/21/2017	0	0	-	0	0	0	-	High	Ground
Geikie	5/24/2017	0	0	-	0	0	0	-	Flood	Ground
Geikie	6/2/2017	0	0	-	0	0	0	-	Ebb	Ground
Geikie	6/21/2017	12	0	Hauled out	12	0	0	150 m	High	Ground
Geikie	8/7/2017	21	0	Hauled out	21	0	0	185 m	High	Vessel
Lone	8/7/2017	26	0	Hauled out	0	0	0	463 m	High	Did not survey
Lone	8/8/2017	23	0	Hauled out	0	0	0	463 m	High	Did not survey
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>86</b>	<b>0</b>		<b>33</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>			