

**Environmental Assessment of a Marine Geophysical Survey
by the R/V *Marcus G. Langseth*
in the Gulf of Alaska, 2019**

Prepared for

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ABSTRACT

Researchers from Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory (L-DEO), Cornell University, Colgate University, University of Washington, University of California Santa Cruz, University of Colorado Boulder, University of New Mexico, Washington University in St. Louis, and the United States Geological Survey (USGS) (herein collectively referred to as the Proposing Institutions), with funding from the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF), propose to conduct a high-energy seismic survey from the Research Vessel (R/V) *Marcus G. Langseth* (*Langseth*) in the Gulf of Alaska (GOA) during 2019. The NSF-owned *Langseth* is operated by Columbia University's L-DEO under an existing Cooperative Agreement. The proposed seismic survey would likely occur off the Alaska Peninsula and the eastern Aleutian islands during late spring 2019 and would use a 36-airgun towed array with a total discharge volume of ~6600 in³. The survey would take place within the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), in water ~15 to ~6184 m deep.

NSF, as the research funding and action agency, has a mission to “promote the progress of science; to advance the national health, prosperity, and welfare; to secure the national defense...”. The proposed seismic survey would collect data in support of research that would satisfy NSF program priorities. The primary goal of this survey is to better constrain the geometry and properties of this active plate tectonic boundary, which has produced large earthquakes and tsunamis that are damaging to the Alaska region and to the west coast of the US and Hawaii. Data collected through the survey would supplement data collected through the Alaska Amphibious Community Seismic Experiment (AACSE) currently deployed in the survey area. Although the proposed activity has independent utility, the addition of data collected through active sources (airguns) would contribute to the project goals of AACSE, which involve imaging the architecture for the Alaska Peninsula subduction zone and understanding the structures controlling how and where the planet's largest earthquakes occur. However, the information gained by the proposed activity would provide unique higher resolution constraints on the structure of the subduction zone that cannot be obtained by the AACSE data alone.

This Environmental Assessment (EA) addresses NSF's requirements under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) for the proposed NSF federal action within the Alaskan EEZ. As operator of the *Langseth*, L-DEO, on behalf of itself, the Proposing Institutions, and NSF is requesting an Incidental Harassment Authorization (IHA) from the U.S. National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to authorize the incidental (i.e., not intentional) harassment of small numbers of marine mammals should this occur during the seismic survey. The analysis in this document supports the IHA application process and provides additional information on marine species that are not addressed by the IHA application, including sea turtles, seabirds, fish, and invertebrates that are listed under the U.S. Endangered Species Act (ESA), including candidate species. As analysis on endangered/threatened species was included, this document will also be used to support ESA Section 7 consultations with NMFS and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Alternatives addressed in this EA consist of the Proposed Action with issuance of an associated IHA and the No Action alternative, with no IHA and no seismic surveys. This document tiers to the Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement/Overseas Environmental Impact Statement for Marine Seismic Research Funded by the National Science Foundation or Conducted by the U.S. Geological Survey (June 2011) and Record of Decision (June 2012), referred to herein as the PEIS. This document also tiers to an EA prepared for a similar seismic survey conducted by R/V *Langseth* in 2011 titled, “Environmental Assessment of a Marine Geophysical Survey by the R/V *Marcus G. Langseth* in the western Gulf of Alaska, July–August 2011” (referred to herein as the 2011 GOA EA).

Numerous species of marine mammals inhabit the GOA. Several of these are listed as ***endangered*** under the ESA, including North Pacific right, sperm, sei, fin, and blue whales, the Cook Inlet Distinct

Population Segment (DPS) of beluga whales, the Western North Pacific DPSs of humpback and gray whales, and the Western DPS of Steller sea lions. The Southwest Alaska DPS of northern sea otters and the Mexico DPS of humpback whales, which is known to feed in Alaska, are listed as *threatened*. Critical habitat for the North Pacific right whale, sea otter, and Steller sea lion is also found within the survey area. Other ESA-listed species that could occur in the area are the *endangered* short-tailed albatross, the *threatened* Steller's eider, the *endangered* leatherback turtle, and the *threatened* Central North Pacific DPS and East Pacific DPS of green turtle.

Potential impacts of the proposed seismic survey on the environment would be primarily a result of the operation of the airgun array. A multibeam echosounder and sub-bottom profiler would also be operated during the survey. Impacts from the Proposed Action would be associated with increased underwater anthropogenic sounds, which could result in avoidance behavior by marine mammals, sea turtles, seabirds, and fish, and other forms of disturbance. An integral part of the planned survey is a monitoring and mitigation program designed to minimize potential impacts of the proposed activities on marine animals present during the proposed survey, and to document, as much as possible, the nature and extent of any effects. Injurious impacts to marine mammals, sea turtles, and seabirds have not been proven to occur near airgun arrays or the other types of sound sources to be used. However, a precautionary approach would still be taken, and the planned monitoring and mitigation measures would reduce the possibility of effects.

Protection measures designed to mitigate the potential environmental impacts to marine mammals, sea turtles, and seabirds would include the following: ramp ups; typically two (but a minimum of one) dedicated observers maintaining a visual watch during all daytime airgun operations; two observers before and during ramp ups; no start ups during poor visibility or at night unless the exclusion zone and passive acoustic monitoring (PAM) system have been monitored for 30 min with no detections; PAM via towed hydrophones during both day and night to complement visual monitoring; and power downs (or if necessary shut downs) when marine mammals or sea turtles are detected in or about to enter designated exclusion zones. The acoustic source would be shut down for North Pacific Right whales observed at any distance from the vessel, and would only operate in North Pacific right whale critical habitat during daylight hours, to facilitate the ability of PSOs to observe any right whales that may be present. L-DEO would shutdown for a calf or aggregation of large whales (defined as 6 or more mysticetes or sperm whales) observed at any distance during operations. Operations would also avoid exposing sea otters and their critical habitat from ensonification levels of 160 dB re 1 μ Pa SPL or greater (Level B zone) to avoid take. The acoustic source would also be powered or shut down in the event an ESA-listed seabird were to be observed diving or foraging within the designated exclusion zones. Observers would also watch for any impacts the acoustic sources may have on fish. L-DEO and its contractors are committed to applying these measures in order to minimize effects on marine mammals, sea turtles, seabirds, and fish, and other potential environmental impacts. Survey operations would be conducted in accordance with all applicable U.S. federal and state regulations, including IHA and Incidental Take Statement (ITS) requirements.

With the planned monitoring and mitigation measures, unavoidable impacts to each species of marine mammal and sea turtle that could be encountered would be expected to be limited to short-term, localized changes in behavior and distribution near the seismic vessel. At most, effects on marine mammals would be anticipated as falling within the MMPA definition of "Level B Harassment" for those species managed by NMFS. No long-term or significant effects are expected on individual marine mammals, sea turtles, seabirds, or fish, the populations to which they belong, or their habitats. However, NSF is required to request, and NMFS may issue, Level A takes for some marine mammal species even though Level A takes are very unlikely. No significant impacts are expected on the populations of those species for which a Level A take is permitted.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

~	approximately
2-D	two-dimensional
3-D	three-dimensional
AACSE	Alaska Amphibious Community Seismic Experiment
ADCP	Acoustic Doppler Current Profiler
AEP	Auditory Evoked Potential
AMVER	Automated Mutual-Assistance Vessel Rescue
BIA	Biologically Important Areas
CA	California
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species
dB	decibel
DoN	US Department of the Navy
DPS	Distinct Population Segment
EA	Environmental Analysis
EBSA	Ecologically or Biologically Sensitive Marine Areas
EFH	Essential Fish Habitat
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
EO	Executive Order
ESA	(U.S.) Endangered Species Act
ESU	Evolutionarily significant unit
ETP	Eastern Tropical Pacific
EZ	Exclusion Zone
FM	Frequency Modulated
FMP	Fishery management plan
FONSI	Finding of no significant impact
GIS	Geographic Information System
GOA	Gulf of Alaska
GoM	Gulf of Mexico
h	hour
HAPC	Habitat Areas of Particular Concern
hp	horsepower
Hz	Hertz
ICR	(Japan) Institute of Cetacean Research
IHA	Incidental Harassment Authorization (under MMPA)
in	inch
IOC	Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO
IODP	International Ocean Discovery Program
ITS	Incidental Take Statement
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature
IWC	International Whaling Commission
JAMSTEC	Japan Agency for Marine-Earth Science and Technology
kHz	kilohertz
km	kilometer
kt	knot
L-DEO	Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory
LFA	Low-frequency Active (sonar)
LME	Large Marine Ecosystem
m	meter

MBES	Multibeam Echosounder
MCS	Multi-Channel Seismic
MFA	Mid-frequency Active (sonar)
min	minute
MLCD	Marine Life Conservation Districts
MMA	Marine Managed Areas
MMPA	(U.S.) Marine Mammal Protection Act
MPA	Marine Protected Area
ms	millisecond
MUS	Management Unit Species
NMFS	(U.S.) National Marine Fisheries Service
nmi	nautical mile
NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NPTZ	North Pacific Transition Zone
NRC	(U.S.) National Research Council
NSF	National Science Foundation
OAWRS	Ocean Acoustic Waveguide Remote Sensing
OBIS	Ocean Biogeographic Information System
OBS	Ocean Bottom Seismometer
OBSIP	Ocean Bottom Seismograph Instrument Pool
OEIS	Overseas Environmental Impact Statement
OPAREA	(U.S. Navy) Operating Area
p or pk	peak
PEIS	Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement
PI	Principal Investigator
PTS	Permanent Threshold Shift
PSO	Protected Species Observer
rms	root-mean-square
R/V	research vessel
s	second
SBP	Sub-bottom Profiler
SEL	Sound Exposure Level (a measure of acoustic energy)
SPL	Sound Pressure Level
SOSUS	(U.S. Navy) Sound Surveillance System
t	tonnes
TTS	Temporary Threshold Shift
U.K.	United Kingdom
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
U.S.	United States of America
USCG	U.S. Coast Guard
USGS	U.S. Geological Survey
USFWS	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
μPa	microPascal
vs.	versus
WCMC	World Conservation Monitoring Centre
WCPFC	Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission
WHOI	Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute
WPFMC	Western Pacific Fishery Management Council
y	year

I PURPOSE AND NEED

This environmental assessment (EA) was prepared under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The EA tiers to the Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS)/Overseas Environmental Impact Statement (OEIS) for Marine Seismic Research funded by the National Science Foundation or Conducted by the U.S. Geological Survey (NSF and USGS 2011) and Record of Decision (NSF 2012), referred to herein as the PEIS. The EA also tiers to an EA prepared for a similar seismic survey conducted by R/V *Langseth* in 2011 titled, “Environmental Assessment of a Marine Geophysical Survey by the R/V *Marcus G. Langseth* in the western Gulf of Alaska, July–August 2011” (referred to herein as the 2011 GOA EA). This EA evaluates the specific geographic location and different energy source level and configuration associated with this proposed survey, and includes relevant research and publications since the 2011 GOA EA. The purpose of this EA is to provide the information needed to assess the potential environmental impacts associated with the Proposed Action, including the use of an airgun array during the proposed seismic survey.

The EA provides details of the Proposed Action at the site-specific level and addresses potential impacts of the proposed seismic survey on marine mammals, sea turtles, seabirds, fish, and invertebrates. The Draft EA was used in support of an application for an Incidental Harassment Authorization (IHA) from the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and Section 7 consultations under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The IHA would allow the non-intentional, non-injurious “take by harassment” of small numbers of marine mammals¹ during the proposed seismic survey by Columbia University’s Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory (L-DEO) in the Gulf of Alaska (GOA) during 2019. Per NMFS requirement, small numbers of Level A takes were requested for the remote possibility of low-level physiological effects; however, because of the characteristics of the Proposed Action and proposed monitoring and mitigation measures, in addition to the general avoidance by marine mammals of loud sounds, Level A takes are considered highly unlikely.

1.1 Mission of NSF

The National Science Foundation (NSF) was established by Congress with the *National Science Foundation Act* of 1950 (Public Law 810507, as amended) and is the only federal agency dedicated to the support of fundamental research and education in all scientific and engineering disciplines. Further details on the mission of NSF are described in § 1.2 of the PEIS.

1.2 Purpose of and Need for the Proposed Action

As noted in the PEIS, § 1.3, NSF has a continuing need to fund seismic surveys that enable scientists to collect data essential to understanding the complex Earth processes beneath the ocean floor. The study area is a seismically active plate tectonic boundary that has produced large earthquakes and tsunamis in the past. However, many questions remain about the 3D geometry and properties of the subduction zone that creates these earthquakes; the proposed activity would provide unique new constraints that can be used to address those questions. The proposed survey would take advantage of passive seismic equipment already deployed in support of the Alaska Amphibious Community Seismic Experiment (AACSE). The survey

¹ To be eligible for an IHA under the MMPA, the proposed “taking” (with mitigation measures in place) must not cause serious physical injury or death of marine mammals, must have negligible impacts on the species and stocks, must “take” no more than small numbers of those species or stocks, and must not have an unmitigable adverse impact on the availability of the species or stocks for legitimate subsistence uses.

would employ active sources (airguns), and data collected would supplement the overall project goals of AACSE, which involve imaging the architecture of the subduction zone and understanding variability in slip behavior of the Alaska Peninsula subduction zone. The proposed activity, however, has independent utility from the AACSE and would provide unique higher resolution imaging of the subduction zone that is not possible with the AACSE data alone. Data collected would be in support of research that meets NSF program priorities and NSF's critical need to foster an understanding of Earth processes.

1.3 Background of NSF-funded Marine Seismic Research

The background of NSF-funded marine seismic research is described in § 1.5 of the PEIS.

1.4 Regulatory Setting

The regulatory setting of this EA is described in § 1.8 of the PEIS, including the

- National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA);
- Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA);
- Endangered Species Act (ESA); and
- Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act – Essential Fish Habitat (EFH).

II ALTERNATIVES INCLUDING PROPOSED ACTION

In this EA, two alternatives are evaluated: (1) the proposed seismic survey and associated issuance of an associated IHA and (2) No Action alternative. Additionally, two alternatives were considered but were eliminated from further analysis. A summary of the Proposed Action, the alternative, and alternatives eliminated from further analysis is provided at the end of this section.

2.1 Proposed Action

The Proposed Action, including project objectives and context, activities, and monitoring/ mitigation measures for the proposed seismic survey, is described in the following subsections.

2.1.1 Project Objectives and Context

Researchers from L-DEO, Cornell University, Colgate University, University of Washington, University of California Santa Cruz, University of Colorado Boulder, University of New Mexico, Washington University in St. Louis, and USGS (herein collectively referred to as the Proposing Institutions), have proposed to conduct a seismic survey using the Research Vessel (R/V) Marcus G. Langseth (Langseth) in the western GOA in the Northeast Pacific Ocean (Fig. 1).

AACSE deployed 75 ocean bottom seismometers (OBSs) offshore of the Alaska Peninsula in spring 2017, and this array will remain on the seafloor for 15 months until the end of summer 2019. The proposed study consists of a 19-day cruise to collect a wide-angle reflection/refraction dataset using a subset of the AACSE array. This project focuses on two subduction zone segments — the Semidi segment and the SW Kodiak Aperity. The addition of active sources (airguns) to the AACSE would directly contribute to the overall project goals of imaging the architecture for the subduction zone and understanding the structures controlling how and where the planet's largest earthquakes occur. In particular, the 3D P-wave velocity model derived from this seismic experiment would be beneficial for future AACSE passive array studies by providing the structure underneath a subset of the AACSE ocean bottom seismometer array. Data from this project would be made available for general scientific community use, referred to as "open access". The seismic data could be used to evaluate earthquake and tsunami hazards.

Another major objective of the cruise is educational. Early career scientists would participate in the cruise and receive training in marine geophysics and subduction zone processes. The open access data obtained by this project would also be very useful for educational purposes after the cruise, since this cutting edge data would be openly available.

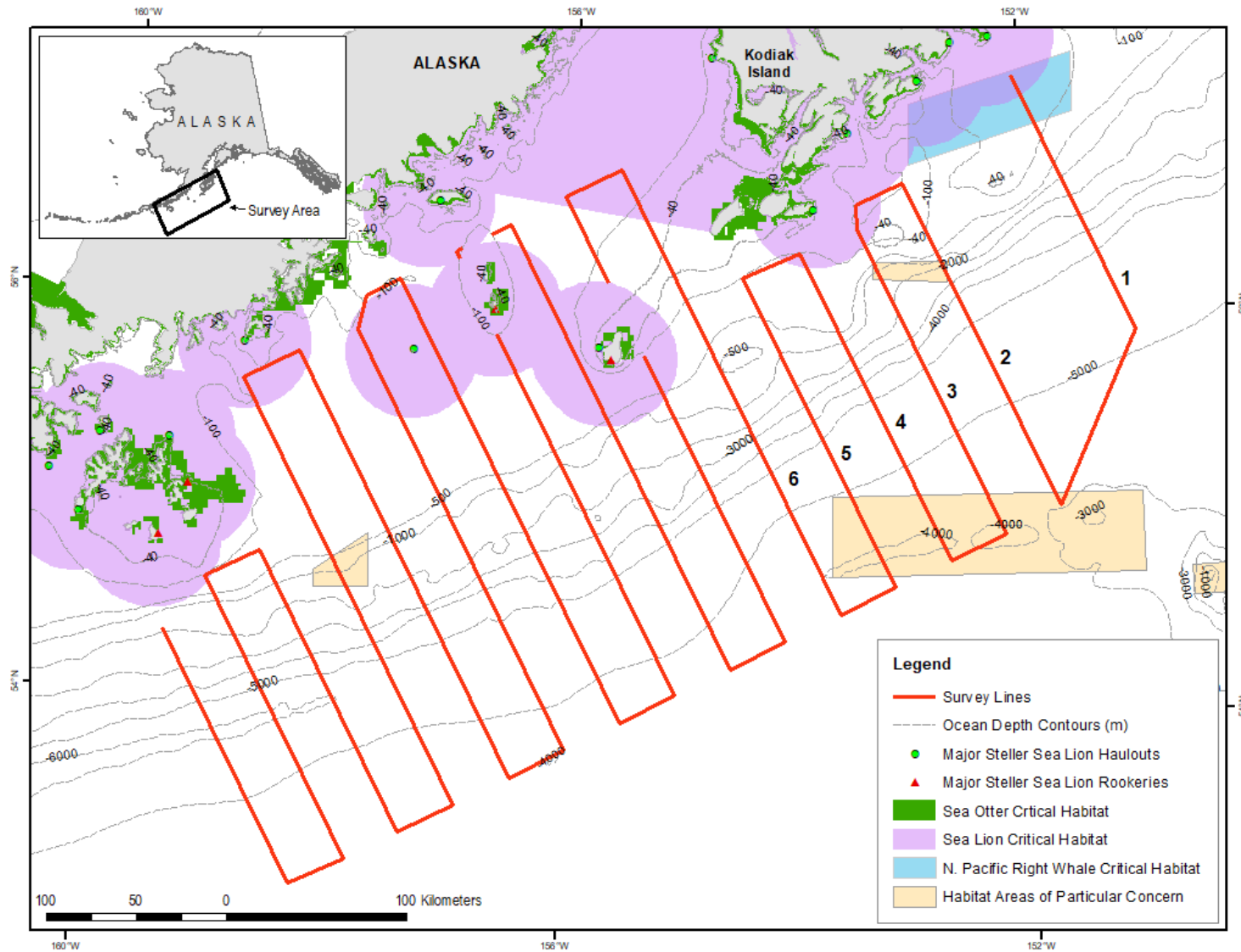


FIGURE 1. Map of the proposed 2019 seismic survey off the Alaskan Peninsula showing representative survey lines.

The main goal of the seismic program is to conduct a 2D survey along the Alaska Peninsula subduction zone using airguns. A 4-km long streamer would be used for a portion of the survey to collect seismic reflection data. To achieve the project goals, the Principal Investigator (PI) Dr. G. Abers (Cornell University) and co-PIs Drs. A. Adams (Colgate University), E. Roland (University of Washington), S. Schwartz (University of California Santa Cruz), A. Sheehan (University of Colorado Boulder), D. Shillington (L-DEO), S. Webb (L-DEO), L. Worthington (University of New Mexico), D. Wiens (Washington University in St. Louis), and P. Haeussler (USGS) propose to collect 2D wide-angle seismic reflection/refraction data off the Alaska Peninsula. Dr. A. Bécél would be Chief Scientist.

2.1.2 Proposed Activities

2.1.2.1 Location of the Survey Activities

The proposed survey would occur within the area of ~52–58°N, ~150–162°W, within the EEZ of Alaska in water depths ranging from ~15 to ~6184 m. Representative survey tracklines are shown in Figure 1. These representative lines reflect modifications made to reduce the potential acoustic exposure of nearshore habitats in areas occupied by sea otters. As described further in this document, however, deviation in actual track lines, including order of survey operations, could be necessary for reasons such as science drivers, poor data quality, inclement weather, or mechanical issues with the research vessel and/or equipment. Thus, within the constraints of any federal authorizations issued for the activity, tracklines may shift from those shown in Figure 1 and could occur anywhere within the coordinates noted above and illustrated by the box in the inset map on Figure 1.

2.1.2.2 Description of Activities

The procedures to be used for the proposed marine geophysical survey would be similar to those used during previous surveys by L-DEO and would use conventional seismic methodology. The survey would involve one source vessel, the *Langseth*. The *Langseth* would tow an array of 36 airguns at a depth of 12 m as an energy source with a total volume of ~6600 in³. The receiving system would consist of previously deployed OBSs and onshore seismometers (Figure 2). A 4-km long hydrophone streamer would be towed through approximately the first third of survey consisting of the first 6 NW-SE trending lines and connecting lines between them. As the airgun arrays are towed along the survey lines, the OBS and seismometers would receive and store the returning acoustic signals internally for later analysis. The shot interval would be 399.3 m (~155 s) at a speed of 5 kts.

The project consists of a number of tracklines that cross the trench onto the Pacific plate and shorter connecting tracklines. The representative tracklines shown in Figure 1 have a total length of 4400 km. There could be additional seismic operations associated with turns, airgun testing, and repeat coverage of any areas where initial data quality is sub-standard. In the calculations for all areas (see § 4.1.1.5), 25% has been added in the form of operational days, which is equivalent to adding 25% to the proposed line km to be surveyed. During the survey, approximately 13% of the line km would take place in shallow water (<100 m), 27% would occur in intermediate water depths (100–1000 m), and the rest (60%) would occur in deep water (>1000 m). For the purposes of calculating potential takes, however, habitat-based stratified marine mammal density areas developed by the U.S. Navy for assessing potential impacts of training activities in the GOA (DoN 2014) were used. Consistent with Rone et al. (2014), four strata were defined: Inshore: all waters <1000 m deep; Slope: from 1000 m water depth to the Aleutian trench/subduction zone; Offshore: waters offshore of the Aleutian trench/subduction zone; Seamount: waters within defined seamount areas (see § IV). Approximately 40% of the line km would take place in the Inshore zone, 21% in the Slope zone, 35% in the Offshore zone, and 4% in the Seamount zone.

In addition to the operations of the airgun array, a multibeam echosounder (MBES), a sub-bottom

profiler (SBP), and an Acoustic Doppler Current Profiler (ADCP) would be operated from the *Langseth* continuously during the seismic surveys, but not during transit to and from the survey areas. All planned geophysical data acquisition activities would be conducted by L-DEO with on-board assistance by the scientists who have proposed the studies. The vessel would be self-contained, and the crew would live aboard the vessel. Adjustments to the survey procedures and plans described in this and other sections may be determined necessary during operations for reasons such as science drivers, poor data quality, inclement weather, or mechanical issues with the research vessel and/or equipment.

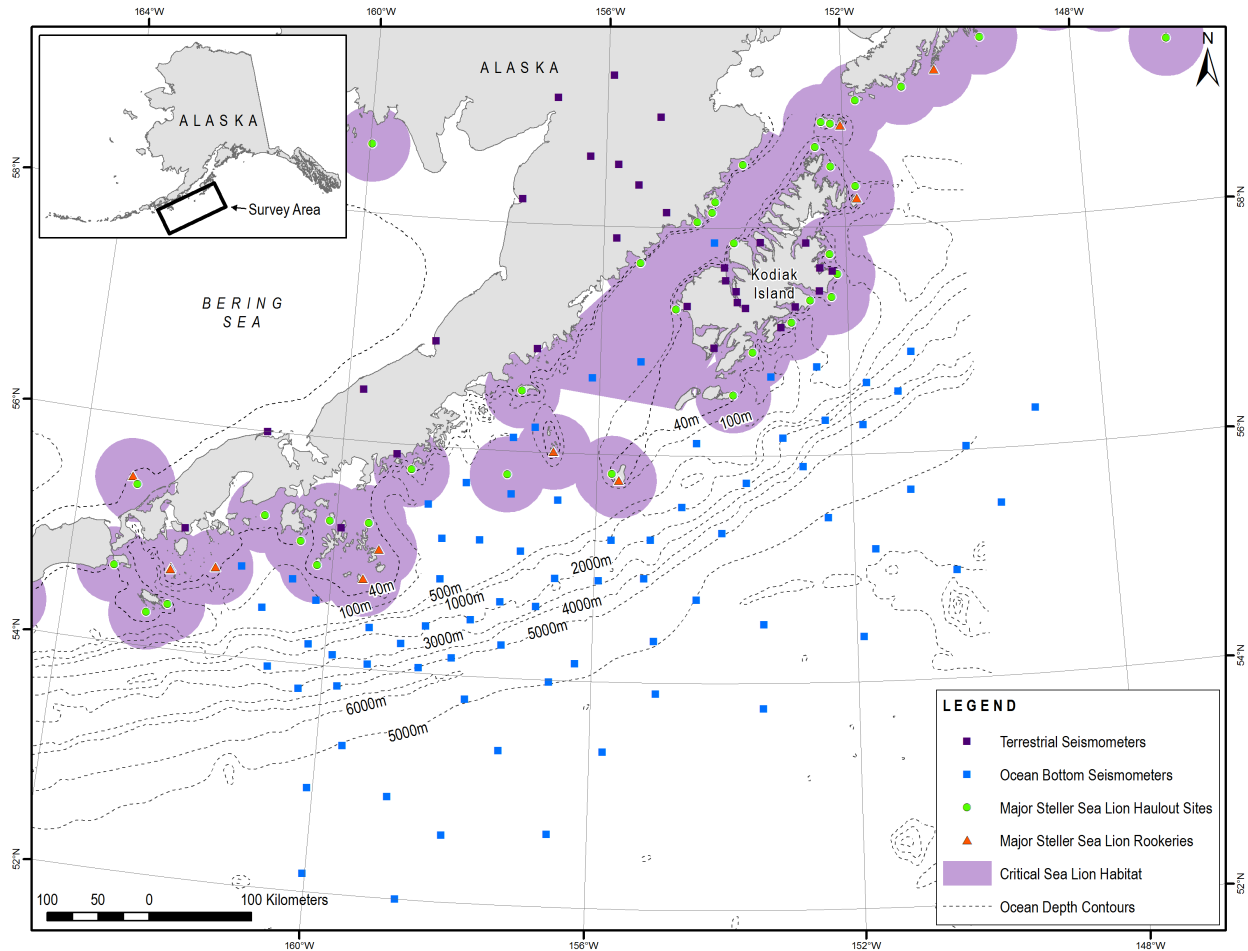


FIGURE 2. Map of previously deployed seismic receiver locations along the Alaskan Peninsula, including both terrestrial and ocean bottom seismometers.

2.1.2.3 Schedule

The survey is expected to consist of up to 18 days of seismic operations and ~1 day of transit. The *Langseth* would leave from and return to port in Kodiak, likely during late spring (end of May/early June) 2019. Tentative sail dates are 1–19 June 2019. As the *Langseth* is a national asset, NSF and L-DEO strive to schedule its operations in the most efficient manner possible; schedule efficiencies are achieved when regionally occurring research projects are scheduled consecutively and non-operational transits are minimized. Because of the nature of the NSF merit review process and the long timelines associated with the ESA Section 7 consultation and IHA processes, not all research projects or vessel logistics will have been identified at the time the consultation documents are submitted to federal regulators; typically, however, these

types of details, such as port arrival/departure locations, are not a substantive component of the consultations.

Seasonality of the proposed survey operations does not affect the ensuing analysis (including take estimates), because the best available species densities for any time of the year have been used.

2.1.2.4 Vessel Specifications

The *Langseth* is described in § 2.2.2.1 of the PEIS. The vessel speed during all seismic operations would be ~5 kts (~9.3 km/h).

2.1.2.5 Airgun Description

The *Langseth* would tow the full array, consisting of four strings with 36 airguns (plus 4 spares) and a total volume of ~6600 in³. The airgun array is described in § 2.2.3.1 of the PEIS, and the airgun configuration is illustrated in Figures 2-11 to 2-12 of the PEIS. The 4-string array would be towed at a depth of 12 m, and the shot interval would be 399.3 m.

2.1.2.6 Additional Acoustical Data Acquisition Systems

Along with the airgun operations, three additional acoustical data acquisition systems (an MBES, SBP, and ADCP) would be operated from the *Langseth* during the proposed survey, but not during transits to/from the survey site and port. The ocean floor would be mapped with a Kongsberg EM 122 MBES and a Knudsen Chirp 3260 SBP. A Teledyne RDI 75 kHz Ocean Surveyor ADCP would be used to measure water current velocities. These sources are described in § 2.2.3.1 of the PEIS.

2.1.3 Monitoring and Mitigation Measures

Standard monitoring and mitigation measures for seismic surveys are described in § 2.4.1.1 and 2.4.2 of the PEIS and would occur in two phases: pre-cruise planning and operations. The following sections describe the efforts during both stages for the proposed activities. Numerous papers have been published recently with recommendations on how to reduce anthropogenic sound in the ocean (e.g., Simmonds et al. 2014; Wright 2014; Dolman and Jasny 2015). Some of those recommendations have been taken into account here.

2.1.3.1 Planning Phase

As discussed in § 2.4.1.1 of the PEIS, mitigation of potential impacts from the proposed activities begins during the planning phase. Several factors were considered during the planning phase of the proposed activities, including:

Energy Source.—Part of the considerations for the proposed marine seismic survey was to evaluate whether the research objectives could be met with a smaller energy source. The scientific objectives for the proposed survey could not be met using smaller sources, as the primary aim of the project is deep imaging of the megathrust from 0–40 km depth, the crust-mantle boundary (Moho) of the overriding continental plate (~35 km depth), and downgoing oceanic plate (~12 km depth, including water column), and to explore the upper-most mantle anisotropy of the oceanic plate, for which a large, low-frequency airgun array is required.

Survey Location and Timing.—The survey needs to be conducted while the AACSE OBSs are on the sea floor (before 6 August 2019). The most value-added time window is mid-May through mid-June, when an on-shore, 400–450 element nodal seismic array will also be deployed on Kodiak Island and which could record an unprecedented ship-to-shore dataset.

When considering potential times to carry out the proposed survey, key factors taken into consideration included environmental conditions (i.e., the seasonal presence of marine mammals, sea turtles, and seabirds), weather conditions, equipment, and optimal timing for other proposed seismic surveys using the *Langseth*. Many marine mammal species occur in the area year-round. However, baleen

whale presence in the area is highest on a seasonal basis (summer and fall, beginning in June). Thus, the likely timing (i.e., late spring) for the proposed survey in late May or early June is advantageous for reducing potential impacts on baleen whales. In addition, subsistence hunting of marine mammals off Kodiak Island is generally low during June and July, thus minimizing the impact of the survey on subsistence hunting.

Mitigation Zones.—During the planning phase, mitigation zones for the proposed marine seismic survey were not derived from the farfield signature but calculated based on modeling by L-DEO for both the exclusion zones (EZ) for Level A takes and safety zones (160 dB re 1 μ Pa_{rms}) for Level B takes. The background information and methodology for this are provided in Appendix A.

The proposed survey would acquire data with the 36-airgun array at a maximum tow depth of 12 m. L-DEO model results are used to determine the 160-dB_{rms} radius for the 36-airgun array and 40-in³ airgun at a 12-m tow depth in deep water (>1000 m) down to a maximum depth of 2000 m. The radii for intermediate water depths (100–1000 m) are derived from the deep-water ones by applying a correction factor of 1.5. For shallow water (<100 m), radii are based on empirically derived measurements in the Gulf of Mexico (GoM) with scaling applied to account for differences in tow depth (see Appendix A). Table 1 shows the distances at which the 160-dB re 1 μ Pa_{rms} sound levels are expected to be received for the 36-airgun array and the single (mitigation) airgun. The 160-dB level is the behavioral disturbance criterion (Level B) that is used by NMFS to estimate anticipated takes for marine mammals.

TABLE 1. Level B. Predicted distances to which sound levels \geq 160-dB re 1 μ Pa_{rms} could be received during the proposed survey in the GOA. The 160-dB criterion applies to all hearing groups of marine mammals.

Source and Volume	Tow Depth (m)	Water Depth (m)	Predicted distances (in m) to the 160-dB Received Sound Level
Single Bolt airgun, 40 in ³	12	>1000 m	431 ¹
		100–1000 m	647 ²
		<100 m	1,041 ³
4 strings, 36 airguns, 6600 in ³	12	>1000 m	6,733 ¹
		100–1000 m	10,100 ²
		<100 m	25,494 ³

¹ Distance is based on L-DEO model results.

² Distance is based on L-DEO model results with a 1.5 \times correction factor between deep and intermediate water depths.

³ Distance is based on empirically derived measurements in the GoM with scaling applied to account for differences in tow depth.

The thresholds for permanent threshold shift (PTS) onset or Level A Harassment (injury) for marine mammals for impulsive sounds use dual metrics of cumulative sound exposure level (SEL_{cum} over 24 hours) and peak sound pressure levels (SPL_{flat}). Different thresholds are provided for the various hearing groups, including low-frequency (LF) cetaceans (e.g., baleen whales), mid-frequency (MF) cetaceans (e.g., most delphinids), high-frequency (HF) cetaceans (e.g., harbor porpoise and *Kogia* spp.), phocids underwater (PW), and otariids underwater (OW). As required by the *Technical Guidance for Assessing the Effects of Anthropogenic Sound on Marine Mammal Hearing* (NMFS 2016a, 2018a), the largest distance of the dual criteria (SEL_{cum} or Peak SPL_{flat}) was used to calculate takes and Level A threshold distances. Here, SEL_{cum} is used for LF cetaceans, and Peak SPL is used for all other hearing groups (Table 2).

Table 3 shows the distances at which the 175- and 195-dB re 1 μ Pa_{rms} sound levels are expected to be received for the 36-airgun array and a single airgun, based on L-DEO modeling; the 195-dB distance

would be used as the EZ for sea turtles, as required by NMFS, and the 175-dB level is used by NMFS, as well as USN (2017), to determine behavioral disturbance for turtles.

TABLE 2. Level A threshold distances for different marine mammal hearing groups. As required by NMFS (2016a), the largest distance (in bold) of the dual criteria (SEL_{cum} or Peak SPL_{flat}) was used to calculate takes and Level A threshold distances.

Level A Threshold Distances (m) for Various Hearing Groups					
36-airgun array; 6600 in ³	Low-Frequency Cetaceans	Mid-Frequency Cetaceans	High-Frequency Cetaceans	Phocid Pinnipeds	Otariid Pinnipeds
PTS SEL_{cum}	40.1	0	0.1	1.3	0
PTS Peak	38.9	13.6	268.3	43.7	10.6

TABLE 3. Sea turtle thresholds recommended by NMFS. Predicted distances to which sound levels ≥195- and 175-dB re 1 μPa_{rms} could be received during the proposed survey in the GOA.

Source and Volume	Tow Depth (m)	Water Depth (m)	Predicted distances (in m) to Received Sound Levels	
			195 dB	175 dB
Single Bolt airgun, 40 in ³	12	>1000 m	8 ¹ (100 ³)	77 ¹
		100–1000 m	11 ² (100 ³)	116 ²
		<100 m	14 ⁴ (100 ³)	170 ⁴
4 strings, 36 airguns, 6600 in ³	12	>1000 m	181 ¹	1,864 ¹
		100–1000 m	272 ¹	2,796 ²
		<100 m	344 ⁴	4,123 ⁴

¹ Distance is based on L-DEO model results.

² Distance is based on L-DEO model results with a 1.5 × correction factor between deep and intermediate water depths.

³ An EZ of 100 m would be used as the shut-down distance for sea turtles, consistent with PEIS low-energy source requirements.

⁴ Distance is based on empirically derived measurements in the GoM with scaling applied to account for differences in tow depth.

This document has been prepared in accordance with the current National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) acoustic practices, and the monitoring and mitigation procedures are based on best practices noted by Pierson et al. (1998), Weir and Dolman (2007), Nowacek et al. (2013a), Wright (2014), Wright and Cosentino (2015), and Acosta et al. (2017). At the time of preparation of this document, how the technical guidance would be implemented operationally, along with other potential monitoring and mitigation measures, remains somewhat uncertain. For other recent high-energy seismic surveys conducted by L-DEO, NMFS required protected species observers (PSOs) to establish and monitor a 500-m EZ for

power downs and to monitor an additional 500-m buffer zone beyond the EZ. A power down required the reduction of the full array to a single 40-in³ airgun; a 100-m EZ was established and monitored for shut downs of the single airgun. Enforcement of mitigation zones via power and shut downs would be implemented as described below (or all applicable U.S. federal regulations, including IHA and ITS requirements).

2.1.3.2 Operational Phase

Marine mammals and sea turtles are known to occur in the proposed survey area. However, the number of individual animals expected to be approached closely during the proposed activities is expected to be relatively small in relation to regional population sizes. To minimize the likelihood that potential impacts could occur to the species and stocks, monitoring and mitigation measures proposed for use during the operational phase of the proposed activities, which are consistent with the PEIS and past IHA and incidental take statement (ITS) requirements, include:

1. monitoring by PSOs for marine mammals, sea turtles, and ESA-listed seabirds diving near the vessel, and observing for potential impacts of acoustic sources on fish;
2. passive acoustic monitoring (PAM);
3. PSO data collection and documentation; and
4. mitigation during operations (speed or course alteration; power-down, shut-down, and ramp-up procedures; and special mitigation measures for rare species, species concentrations, and sensitive habitats).

Six independently contracted PSOs would be on board the survey vessel with rotating shifts to allow two observers to monitor for marine species during daylight hours, and one observer would be aboard to conduct PAM during day- and night-time seismic operations. The proposed operational mitigation measures are standard for all high-energy seismic cruises, per the PEIS, and are described in the IHA application, and therefore are not discussed further here. Special mitigation measures were considered for this cruise. Concentrations of large whales may be encountered within the 160-dB isopleth if migrating whales arrive in the region earlier than usual and aggregations of food are present. If aggregations of whales are encountered, or a mother/calf pair, the source would be shutdown at any distance. The acoustic source would be shut down for North Pacific Right whales observed at any distance from the vessel, and would only operate in North Pacific right whale critical habitat during daylight hours, to facilitate the ability of PSOs to observe any right whales that may be present. Operations would also avoid exposing sea otters and their critical habitat to sound levels of 160-dB or greater (Level B zone) to avoid take. The acoustic source would also be powered or shut down in the event an ESA-listed seabird were to be observed diving or foraging within the designated exclusion zones. Observers would also watch for any impacts the acoustic sources may have on fish.

With the proposed monitoring and mitigation provisions, potential effects on most, if not all, individuals would be expected to be limited to minor behavioral disturbance. Those potential effects would be expected to have negligible impacts both on individual marine mammals, sea turtles, and seabirds, and on the associated species and stocks. Ultimately, survey operations would be conducted in accordance with all applicable U.S. federal regulations, including IHA and ITS requirements.

2.2 Alternative 1: No Action Alternative

An alternative to conducting the Proposed Action is the “No Action” alternative, i.e., do not issue an IHA and do not conduct the research operations (Table 4). Under the “No Action” alternative, NSF would not support L-DEO to conduct the proposed research operations. From NMFS’ perspective, pursuant to its

obligation to grant or deny permit applications under the MMPA, the “No Action” alternative entails NMFS denying the application for an IHA. If NMFS were to deny the application, L-DEO would not be authorized to incidentally take marine mammals. If the research was not conducted, the “No Action” alternative would result in no disturbance to marine mammals attributable to the Proposed Action. Although the No-Action Alternative is not considered a reasonable alternative because it does not meet the purpose and need for the Proposed Action, it is included and carried forward for analysis in § 4.3.

2.3 Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Further Analysis

Table 4 provides a summary of the Proposed Action, alternative, and alternatives eliminated from further analysis.

2.3.1 Alternative E1: Alternative Location

The survey location was chosen to supplement research activities already being conducted and equipment previously deployed as part of the AACSE array. This region was identified as highly suitable for studies on seismogenic zones and contrasts in subduction processes because dramatic variations in the seismic behavior, earthquake history, and geodetic seismic coupling occur within a compact area. Conducting a survey to achieve the same scientific goals in a different location would require substantially more resources and have a lower likelihood of a successful outcome.

2.3.2 Alternative E2: Use of Alternative Technologies

As described in § 2.6 of the PEIS, alternative technologies to the use of airguns were investigated to conduct high-energy seismic surveys. At this time, these technologies are still not feasible, commercially viable, or appropriate to meet the Purpose and Need. Additional details about these technologies are given in the Final USGS EA (RPS 2014a).

TABLE 4. Summary of Proposed Action, Alternative Considered, and Alternatives Eliminated.

Proposed Action	Description
Proposed Action: Conduct marine geophysical survey and associated activities in the Gulf of Alaska	Under this action, research activities are proposed to study Earth processes and would involve a 2D seismic survey. Active seismic portions of the survey would be expected to take up to 18 days. Additional operational days would be expected for transit; equipment deployment, maintenance, and retrieval; weather; marine mammal activity; and other contingencies. The affected environment, environmental consequences, and cumulative impacts of the proposed activities are described in § III and IV. The standard monitoring and mitigation measures identified in the PEIS would apply, along with any additional requirements identified by regulating agencies in the U.S. All necessary permits and authorizations, including an IHA, would be requested from regulatory bodies.
Alternatives	Description
Alternative 1: No Action	Under this Alternative, no proposed activities would be conducted and seismic data would not be collected. While this alternative would avoid impacts to marine resources, it would not meet the purpose and need for the Proposed Action. Geological data of scientific value and relevance, increasing our understanding of the architecture for the subduction zone and understanding variability in slip behavior of the Alaska Peninsula subduction zone, and adding to the comprehensive assessment of geohazards for the Alaska region, such as earthquake and tsunami hazards, would not be collected. An improved understanding of subduction zone processes associated with large earthquakes is important for assessing earthquakes and tsunami hazards at the Alaska Peninsula subduction zone and at other convergent margins worldwide. Earthquakes and associated near field tsunamis in the proposed survey area are a threat to local Alaskan populations and infrastructure. A recent USGS report shows that a tsunami generated at

	<p>this subduction zone could also impact the heavily populated U.S. west coast and Hawaii. The collection of new data, interpretation of these data, introduction of new results into the greater scientific community, and application of these data to other similar settings would not be achieved. No permits and authorizations, including an IHA, would be needed from regulatory bodies, as the Proposed Action would not be conducted.</p>
<p>Alternatives Eliminated from Further Analysis</p>	<p>Description</p>
<p>Alternative E1: Alternative Location</p>	<p>The survey location was chosen by the scientific community to deploy the AACSE array. This region was identified as highly suitable for studies on seismogenic zones and contrasts in subduction processes because dramatic variations in the seismic behavior, earthquake history, and geodetic seismic coupling occur within a compact area. The data that would be collected would add to the comprehensive assessment of geohazards for this region, such as earthquake and tsunami hazards, and could not reasonably be collected elsewhere.</p>
<p>Alternative E2: Use of Alternative Technologies</p>	<p>Under this alternative, L-DEO would use alternative survey techniques, such as marine vibroseis, that could potentially reduce impacts on the marine environment. Alternative technologies were evaluated in the PEIS, § 2.6. At this time, however, these technologies are still not feasible, commercially viable, or appropriate to meet the Purpose and Need.</p>

III AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

As described in the PEIS, Chapter 3, the description of the affected environment focuses only on those resources potentially subject to impacts. Accordingly, the discussion of the affected environment (and associated analyses) focuses mainly on those related to marine biological resources, as the proposed short-term activity has the potential to impact marine biological resources within the project area. These resources are identified in § III, and the potential impacts to these resources are discussed in § IV. Initial review and analysis of the proposed Project activity determined that the following resource areas did not require further analysis in this EA:

- *Air Quality/Greenhouse Gases*—Project vessel emissions would result from the proposed activity; however, these short-term emissions would not result in any exceedance of Federal Clean Air standards. Emissions would be expected to have a negligible impact on the air quality within the proposed survey area;
- *Land Use*— The Proposed Action would occur in the marine environment. Thus, no changes to current land uses or activities in the proposed survey area would result from the Project;
- *Safety and Hazardous Materials and Management*—No hazardous materials would be generated or used during the proposed activities. All Project-related wastes would be disposed of in accordance with U.S. state and federal requirements;
- *Geological Resources (Topography, Geology and Soil)*—The proposed Project would make use of previously deployed OBSs and land-based seismometers and therefore would not result in disturbance to geologic resources;
- *Water Resources*—No discharges to the marine environment that would adversely affect marine water quality are expected in the Project area. Therefore, there would be no impacts to water resources resulting from the proposed Project activity;
- *Terrestrial Biological Resources*—The proposed Project activity would occur in the marine environment and would not impact terrestrial biological resources;
- *Visual Resources*—No visual resources would be expected to be negatively impacted as the proposed activity would involve a continually moving vessel, would be short-term, and would mainly occur outside of the viewshed from the coast;
- *Socioeconomic and Environmental Justice*—Implementation of the proposed Project would not affect, beneficially or adversely, socioeconomic resources, environmental justice, or the protection of children. No changes in the population or additional need for housing or schools would occur. Activities in the survey area could include commercial and recreational fishing, subsistence fishing and hunting, limited recreational diving, and other vessel traffic. These activities and potential impacts on them from the proposed survey are described in further detail in § III and IV. No other socioeconomic impacts would be expected as result of the proposed activities; and
- *Cultural Resources*—There are cultural resources in the proposed Alaskan survey area. Traditional fisheries occur within the Alaskan EEZ and are described in further detail in § III and § IV. The proposed survey would limit impacts to these resources by avoiding areas where subsistence fishers are fishing (see § IV). There are also numerous shipwrecks in the vicinity of the proposed survey area (see § 3.9). However, airgun sounds would have no effects on solid structures; therefore, no significant impacts on shipwrecks would be expected.

3.1 Oceanography

The GOA includes all waters bordered by the southeastern, southcentral, and southwestern coasts of Alaska from Dixon Entrance to Unimak Pass. The GOA includes >2500 km of coastline. Greatest water depths within the GOA range from 3000 m off southeast Alaska to 4000 m off south-central Alaska, and over 7000 m at the Aleutian Trench. The Aleutian Trench extends from the northern-most point in the GOA west to the Kamchatka Peninsula, south of the Aleutian Islands. The continental shelf is narrowest in southeast Alaska, ranging in width from 50 km between Dixon Entrance and Cape Spencer, to 100 km or more along the southcentral coast to Seward, and 200 km west of Kodiak Island.

Water movements within the GOA are dominated by the Alaska Coastal Current (ACC). The ACC, which flows northward along the Alaskan coast, changes character and direction three times and is joined by other, narrower currents as it is forced by the coastline to change direction as it flows through the GOA. Coastal circulation is driven in winter by the persistent anti-clockwise wind stress over the GOA and in summer by the density gradient caused by immense freshwater input from coastal sources in British Columbia (B.C.) and southeast Alaska.

The Aleutian Low is a low-pressure system along the Aleutian Island chain (Stabeno et al. 1999). During the summer, with long daylight periods and high insolation, the Aleutian Low is weak (Stabeno et al. 1999). During winter, the Aleutian Low intensifies and dominates weather over the North Pacific and Bering Sea (Stabeno et al. 1999). During the winter, an average of 3–5 storms per month move eastward along the Aleutian Islands (Stabeno et al. 1999). The general climate is characterized by high winds, overcast skies, and frequent cyclonic storms (Armstrong 1971). Warm water from the Japanese current moderates the temperature.

The Alaska Stream flows west along the southern side of the Alaska Peninsula and Aleutian Islands. The Alaska Stream brings fresh surface waters and warm sub-surface water into the Bering Sea (Stabeno et al. 1999). The Alaska Stream enters the sea through the passes in the Aleutian Arc (Stabeno et al. 1999). Water flowing through the Amchitka and Amukta passes is the source of the Aleutian North Slope Current (Reed and Stabeno 1999), which flows eastward along the arc (Stabeno et al. 1999). There is extensive flow from the North Pacific through the 14 main passes in the Aleutian Arc into the Bering Sea; Unimak Pass is <80 m deep and ~30 km wide; it allows water from the ACC to flow into the Bering Sea (Stabeno et al. 1999). Samalga Pass appears to be a division between shallow shelf passes in the east and deeper passes to the west (Ladd et al. 2004, 2005). Surface waters were warmer and fresher, and nutrient concentrations were lower, to the east of Samalga Pass than those to the west of the pass (Ladd et al. 2004, 2005). Zeeman (2004) showed that there was a decline in productivity from the east to the west in the Aleutian Islands.

The GOA Large Marine Ecosystem (LME) is classified as a Class II, moderately productive (150–300 gC/m²/y) ecosystem (Aquarone and Adams 2009). Productivity in the GOA appears to be related to upwelling associated with the counterclockwise gyre of the ACC. The GOA's cold, nutrient-rich waters support a diverse ecosystem. Evidence from observations during the past two decades, and the results of modeling studies using historical and recent data, suggest that physical oceanographic processes, particularly climatic regime shifts, might be driving ecosystem-level changes that have been observed in the GOA. Numerous publications have examined the role of climate shifts as a forcing agent on species and community structure of the North Pacific Ocean (e.g., Francis and Hare 1994; Klyashtorin 1998; McGowan et al. 1998; Hollowed et al. 1998; Hare and Mantua 2000). Regime shifts that might impact productivity in the GOA include the Pacific Decadal Oscillation, changes in the intensity of the Aleutian low-pressure system, and the El Niño Southern Oscillation.

3.2 Protected Areas

3.2.1 Critical Habitat for ESA-listed Species

Several areas near the proposed survey area have been specifically identified as important to ESA-listed species, including critical habitat for three species of marine mammals (Fig. 1).

3.2.1.1 North Pacific Right Whale Critical Habitat

Critical feeding-season habitat has been designated by NMFS for the North Pacific right whale in the western GOA and in the southeast Bering Sea (71 FR 38277, 73 FR 2008). The bulk of the critical habitat lies in the Bering Sea with a small portion in the GOA located southeast of Kodiak Island (Fig. 1). A single proposed survey line running south from Kodiak Island crosses this critical habitat.

3.2.1.2 Steller Sea Lion Critical Habitat

Critical habitat for Steller sea lions is defined in detail in the Code of Federal Regulations (50 CFR 226.202). This species is divided into Western and Eastern DPSs with a boundary at 144°W. The survey area lies within the range of the endangered Western DPS. The Eastern DPS was formerly listed as threatened but was delisted in 2013 (78 FR 66139, 4 November 2013). Since this delisting, NMFS has begun reviewing the critical habitat for the Western DPS (Muto et al. 2018). In brief, designated critical habitat currently includes terrestrial, aquatic, and air zones that extend 3000 ft (0.9 km) landward, seaward, and above each major rookery and major haulout in Alaska. For the Western DPS, the aquatic zone extends further, out 20 n.mi. (37 km) seaward of major rookeries and haulouts west of 144°W (50 CFR 226.202). In addition, “no approach” buffer areas around rookery sites of the Western DPS of Steller sea lions are identified in the Code of Federal Regulations (50 CFR 223.202). “No approach” zones are restricted areas wherein no vessel may approach within 3 n.mi. (5.6 km) of listed rookeries. Critical habitat as well as “no approach” zones occur within the proposed survey area. In addition to the rookeries and haulouts in the area, the Shelikof Strait foraging area between the Alaska Peninsula and Kodiak Archipelago is also considered critical habitat. Sea Lion critical habitat in and near the proposed survey area is shown in Figure 1.

3.2.1.3 Northern Sea Otter Critical Habitat

Critical habitat for the Southwest Alaska DPS of the northern sea otter was designated in November 2009 (USFWS 2009a). The critical habitat primarily consists of shallow-water areas <20 m deep and nearshore water within 100 m of the mean tide line. Representative proposed survey lines have been designed to avoid the ensonification of sea otter critical habitat above 160 dB re 1 μPa SPL (Fig. 3).

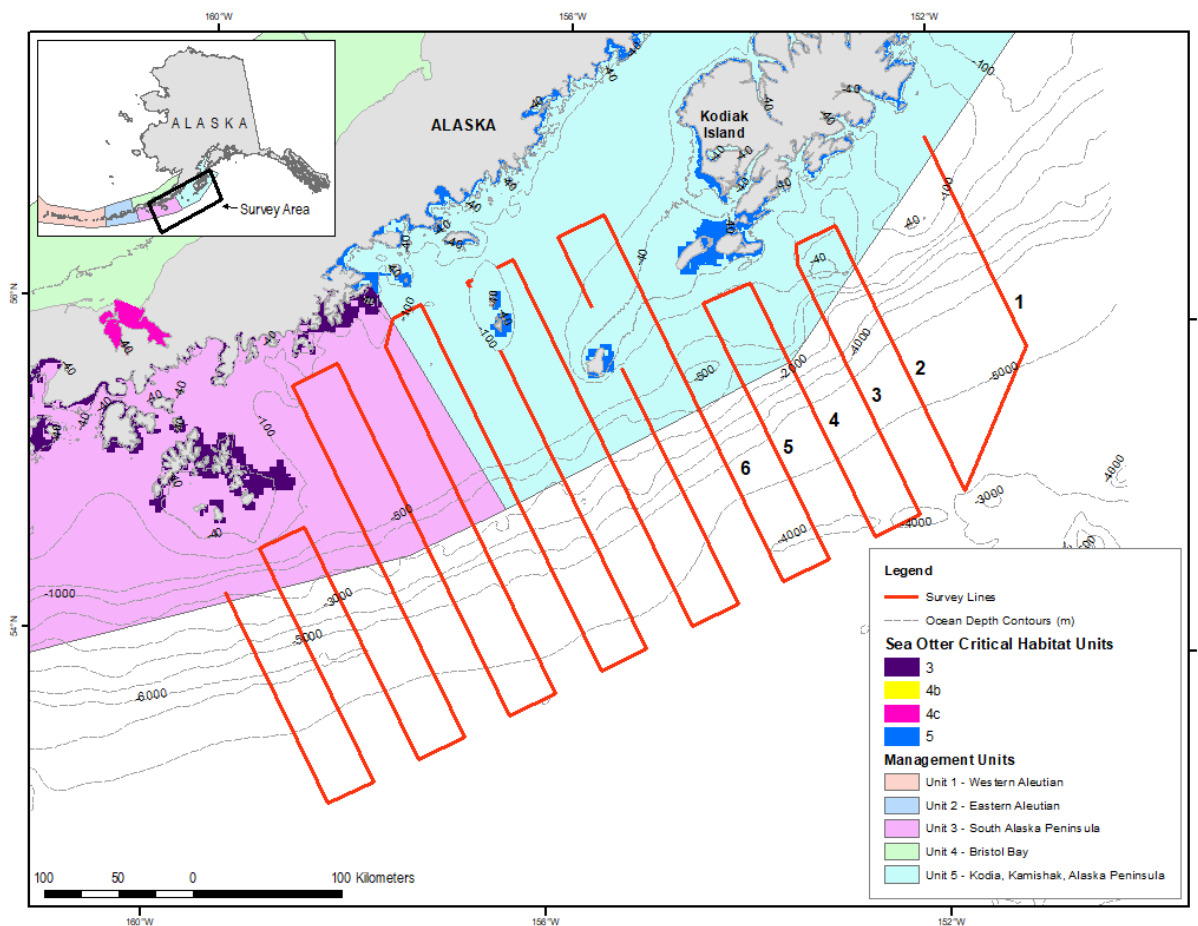


FIGURE 3. Sea otter critical habitat near the proposed survey lines.

3.2.2 Other Protected Areas

Several areas in and near the proposed survey area have been designated as Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (HAPCs) within Alaska's essential fish habitat (EFH). HAPCs are considered high-priority areas for conservation because they are rare, sensitive, or provide important ecosystem functions. HAPCs in and near the proposed survey area include the waters around Shumagin Island and Albatross Bank, which have been designated as Slope Habitat Conservation Areas, and several seamounts, which have been designated as Seamount Habitat Protection Areas (50 CFR 679). These include the Chirikof and Marchand seamounts, which overlap with the proposed survey area, and the Derickson and Patton seamounts, which are near the proposed survey area. HAPCs are shown on Figure 1 and discussed further below in section 3.7.

3.3 Marine Mammals

The marine mammals that occur in the proposed survey area belong to four taxonomic groups: odontocetes (toothed cetaceans, such as dolphins), mysticetes (baleen whales), pinnipeds (seals, sea lions, and walrus), and fissipeds (sea otter). Eighteen cetacean species, six pinniped species, and the northern sea

otter are known to or could occur in the western GOA study area (Table 5). Several of these species/populations are listed under the ESA as *endangered*, including the North Pacific right, sperm, Western North Pacific DPSs of humpback and gray whales, fin, sei, and blue whales and the Western DPS of Steller sea lions. Individuals from the Cook Inlet DPS of beluga whales are not expected to occur in the survey area. The southwest Alaska DPS of the northern sea otter and the Mexico DPS of the humpback whale are listed as *threatened*.

Several other North Pacific cetacean species are not included here because they do not typically occur in this part of the GOA. These are: the Bryde's whale; pygmy and dwarf sperm whales; Blainville's, ginkgo-toothed, and Longman's beaked whales; pygmy and false killer whales; beluga whale; short-finned pilot whale; melon-headed whale; northern right whale dolphin, long- and short-beaked common dolphins, Fraser's dolphin; pantropical spotted dolphin; striped and spinner dolphins; rough-toothed dolphin; and common bottlenose dolphin. Additionally, three pinniped species are not included. The Guadalupe fur seal, which only ranges as far north as California, and spotted and ribbon seals. Although the range of the two latter can extend into the Gulf of Alaska, they are strongly associated with sea ice and likely to be much further north as the ice recedes in the spring when the proposed survey is planned to occur.

Cetaceans and pinnipeds are the subject of the IHA application to NMFS. The northern sea otter and Pacific walrus are the two marine mammal species mentioned in this document that are managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS); all others are managed by NMFS. Walrus sightings are rare in the GOA. Sea otters generally inhabit nearshore areas inside the 40-m depth contour (Riedman and Estes 1990) and could be encountered in coastal waters of the study area. However, few seismic operations (<2% or 100 km of the representative survey lines) are expected to occur in water <40 m deep, and only approximately 590 km of seismic surveys are expected to occur in water 40–100 m deep.

General information on the taxonomy, ecology, distribution and movements, and acoustic capabilities of marine mammals are given in § 3.6.1, § 3.7.1, and § 3.8.1 of the NSF/USGS PEIS. The general distributions of marine mammals in the western North Pacific Ocean is discussed in § 3.6.2.4, § 3.7.2.4, § 3.8.2.4, and § 3.9.2.3 of the PEIS for the western GOA. The rest of this section deals specifically with marine mammal distribution within the proposed survey area. Information on the occurrence near the proposed survey area, habitat, population size, and conservation status for each of the marine mammal species that could occur in the area is presented in Table 5.

3.3.1 Mysticetes

3.3.1.1 North Pacific Right Whale (*Eubalaena japonica*)

North Pacific right whales summer in the northern North Pacific, primarily in the Okhotsk Sea (Brownell et al. 2001) and in the Bering Sea (Shelden et al. 2005; Wade et al. 2006). This species is divided into western and eastern North Pacific stocks. The eastern North Pacific stock that occurs in U.S. waters numbers only ~31 individuals (Wade et al. 2011), and critical habitat has been designated in the eastern Bering Sea and in the GOA, south of Kodiak Island (NMFS 2017b). Wintering and breeding areas are unknown, but have been suggested to include the Hawaiian Islands, Ryukyu Islands, and Sea of Japan (Allen 1942; Banfield 1974; Gilmore 1978; Reeves et al. 1978; Herman et al. 1980; Omura 1986).

Since the 1960s, North Pacific right whale sightings have been relatively rare (e.g., Clapham et al. 2004; Shelden et al. 2005). In the eastern North Pacific, south of 50°N, only 29 reliable sightings were recorded from 1900 to 1994 (Scarff 1986, 1991; Carretta et al. 1994). Starting in 1996, right whales have been sighted regularly in the southeast Bering Sea, including calves in some years (Goddard and Rugh 1998; LeDuc et al. 2001; Moore et al. 2000, 2002b; Wade et al. 2006; Zerbini et al. 2009); they have also been detected acoustically when sonobuoys were deployed (McDonald and Moore 2002; Munger et al.

2003; 2005, 2008; Berchok et al. 2009). Right whales are known to occur in the southeast Bering Sea from May to December (e.g., Tynan et al. 2001; Hildebrand and Munger 2005; Munger et al. 2005, 2008). Call frequencies tended to be higher in July–October than from May–June or November–December (Munger et al. 2008). Right whales seem to pass through the middle-shelf areas, without remaining there longer than a few days (Munger et al. 2008).

Shelden et al. (2005) reported that the slope and abyssal plain in the western GOA were important areas for right whales until the late 1960s, but sightings and acoustic detections in this region in recent decades are rare. In March 1979, a group of four right whales was seen in Yakutat Bay (Waite et al. 2003), but there were no further reports of right whale sightings in the GOA until July 1998, when a single whale was seen southeast of Kodiak Island (Waite et al. 2003). Three sightings and one acoustic detection of right whales were made in Barnabas Trough south of Kodiak Island during NOAA surveys in 2004 to 2006 in areas with high densities of zooplankton (Wade et al. 2011a). Those authors also report a fourth opportunistic sighting by a commercial fisher during that time in the same area. One right whale was sighted in the Aleutian Islands south of Unimak Pass in September 2004 (Wade et al. 2011b). A BIA for feeding for North Pacific right whales was designated east of the Kodiak Archipelago, encompassing the GOA critical habitat and extending south of 56° N and north of 58° N and beyond the shelf edge (Ferguson et al. 2015).

Right whale acoustic detections were made south of the Alaska Peninsula and to the east of Kodiak Island in 2000 during August and September (see Waite et al. 2003; Mellinger et al. 2004b), but no acoustic detections were made from April to August 2003 (Munger et al. 2008) or in April 2009 (Rone et al. 2010). Three right whales were acoustically detected in the Barnabas Trench area during a towed-PAM survey of the U.S. Navy training area east of Kodiak in the summer of 2013 but none were observed visually (Rone et al. 2014). Right whales were not detected acoustically in any year (2011–2015) of the fixed PAM monitoring in this region (Baumann-Pickering et al. 2012; Debich et al. 2013; Rice et al. 2015). No right whales were visually observed during the three years of surveys (2009, 2013, and 2015) in this military area east of Kodiak (Rone et al. 2017). The DoN assigned a year-round density of 0.00001/km² for right whales in this region (DoN 2014). There was one sighting of a single North Pacific right whale during the NSF/L-DEO seismic survey conducted in the summer of 2011 in the same area as the currently proposed survey (RPS 2011). Thus, it is possible that a right whale could be seen during the proposed survey.

3.3.1.2 Gray Whale (*Eschrichtius robustus*)

Two separate populations of gray whales have been recognized in the North Pacific (LeDuc et al. 2002): the eastern North Pacific and western North Pacific (or Korean-Okhotsk) stocks. However, the distinction between these two populations has been recently debated owing to evidence that whales from the western feeding area also travel to breeding areas in the eastern North Pacific (Weller et al. 2012, 2013; Mate et al. 2015). Thus, it is possible that whales from both the *endangered* Western North Pacific and the delisted Eastern North Pacific DPS could occur in the proposed survey area in the eastern North Pacific.

Gray whale populations were severely reduced by whaling, but the eastern North Pacific population is considered to have recovered. Punt and Wade (2012) estimated the eastern North Pacific population to be at 85% of its carrying capacity in 2009. The eastern North Pacific gray whale breeds and winters in Baja, California, and migrates north to summer feeding grounds in the northern Bering Sea, Chukchi Sea, and western Beaufort Sea (Rice and Wolman 1971; Rice 1998; Jefferson et al. 2015). Most of the eastern Pacific population makes a round-trip annual migration of more than 18,000 km. From late May to early October, the majority of the population concentrates in the northern and western Bering Sea and in the Chukchi Sea. However, some individuals spend the summer months scattered along the coasts of southeast Alaska, B.C., Washington, Oregon, and northern California (Rice and Wolman 1971; Nerini 1984; Darling

et al. 1998; Dunham and Duffus 2001, 2002; Calambokidis et al. 2002). Gray whales are found primarily in shallow water; most follow the coast during migration, staying close to the shoreline except when crossing major bays, straits, and inlets (Braham 1984).

It is difficult to determine precisely when the southbound migration begins; whales near Barrow were moving predominantly south in August (Maher 1960; Braham 1984). Gray whales leave the Bering Sea through Unimak Pass from late October through January (Braham 1984). From October to January, the main part of the population moves down the west coast of North America. Rugh et al. (2001) analyzed data collected from two sites in California to estimate the timing of the gray whale southward migration. They estimated that the median date for the migration past various sites was 1 December in the central Bering Sea (a nominal starting point), 12 December at Unimak Pass, 18 December at Kodiak Island, and 5 January for Washington.

By January and February, most of the whales are concentrated in the lagoons along the Pacific coast of the Baja Peninsula, Mexico. From late February to June, the population migrates northward to arctic and subarctic seas (Rice and Wolman 1971). The peak of northward migration in the GOA occurs in mid-April (Braham 1984). Most gray whales follow the coast during migration and stay within 2 km of the shoreline, except when crossing major bays, straits, and inlets from southeast Alaska to the eastern Bering Sea (Braham 1984). Gray whales use the nearshore areas of the Alaska Peninsula during the spring and fall migrations, and are often found within the bays and lagoons, primarily north of the peninsula, during the summer (Brueggeman et al. 1989 *in* Waite et al. 1999). However, gray whales are known to move further offshore between the entrance to Prince William Sound (PWS) and Kodiak Island and between Kodiak Island and the southern part of the Alaska Peninsula (Consiglieri et al. 1982). During May–October, primary occurrence extends seaward 28 km from the shoreline. This is the main migratory corridor for gray whales.

In the summer, gray whales are seen in the southeast Bering Sea (Moore et al. 2002b) and in the GOA, including around Kodiak Island (e.g., Wade et al. 2003; Calambokidis et al. 2004; Calambokidis 2007; Moore et al. 2007). In fact, gray whales have been seen feeding off southeast Kodiak Island, in particular near Ugak Bay, year-round (Moore et al. 2007). Moore et al. (2007) noted monthly sighting rates that exceeded 100 sightings/h in January, June, September, and November, and >20 sightings/h in most other months. One feeding aggregation in July consisted of 350-400 animals, clustered in groups of 10–20 animals, from the mouth of Ugak Bay to 100 km ESE of Ugak Island (Moore et al. 2007). Wade et al. (2003) reported a group size of 5.6 in the western GOA. A biologically important area (BIA) for feeding for gray whales has been identified in the waters east of the Kodiak Archipelago, with the greatest densities of gray whales occurring from June through August (Ferguson et al. 2015). Additionally, a gray whale migratory corridor BIA has been established extending from Unimak Pass in the western GOA to the Canadian border in the eastern GOA (Ferguson et al. 2015), including much of the landward side of the survey area. Gray whales occur in this area in high densities during November through January (southbound) and March through May (northbound).

TABLE 5. The habitat, abundance, and conservation status of marine mammals that could occur in or near the proposed seismic survey areas in the North Pacific Ocean.

Species	Habitat	Occurrence in/near Study Area	Abundance (Alaska)	Regional Abundance	ESA ¹	IUCN ²	CITES ³	Notes on Abundance Estimates
Mysticetes North Pacific right whale	Coastal, shelf	Rare	28–31 ⁴	400-500 ⁵	EN	EN	I	⁴ Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands (Wade et al. 2011b). ⁵ North Pacific (Jefferson et al. 2015).
Gray whale	Coastal	Uncommon	N.A.	20,990 ⁶	DL	LC	I	⁶ Eastern North Pacific (Carretta et al. 2016).
Humpback whale	Coastal, banks	Common	2215 ⁷	21,063 ⁸	EN/T/DL*	LC	I	⁷ NW GOA, Kodiak to ~142°W (Rone et al. (2017). ⁸ North Pacific, 2004–2006 (Barlow et al. 2011).
Common minke whale	Coastal, shelf	Uncommon	1233 ⁹	25,000 ¹⁰	NL	LC	I	⁹ W. GOA and E. Aleutians (Zerbini et al. 2006). ¹⁰ NW Pacific and Okhotsk Sea (IWC 2018a).
Sei whale	Pelagic	Rare	N.A.	27,197 ¹¹	EN	EN	I	¹¹ Central and Eastern North Pacific (Hakamada and Matsuoka 2015a).
Fin whale	Pelagic	Common	3168 ⁷	13,620-18,680 ¹²	EN	EN	I	⁷ NW GOA, Kodiak to ~142°W (Rone et al. (2017). ¹² North Pacific (Ohsumi and Wada 1974).
Blue whale	Pelagic, shelf, coastal	Rare	63 ⁷	1647 ¹³	EN	EN	I	⁷ NW GOA, Kodiak to ~142°W (Rone et al. (2017). ¹³ Eastern North Pacific Stock (Calambokidis and Barlow 2013).
Odontocetes Sperm whale	Pelagic	Uncommon	129 ⁷	26,300 ¹⁴	EN	VU	I	⁷ NW GOA, Kodiak to ~142°W (Rone et al. (2017). ¹⁴ NW Temperate Pacific; estimate based on visual sightings (Barlow and Taylor 2005).
Cuvier's beaked whale	Pelagic	Common	N.A.	20,000 ¹⁵	NL	LC	II	¹⁵ ETP (Wade and Gerrodette 1993).
Baird's beaked whale	Pelagic	Rare	N.A.	25,300 ¹⁶ 5029 ¹⁷ 10,190 ¹⁸	NL	DD	I	¹⁶ Includes all species of the genus <i>Mesoplodon</i> in the ETP (Wade and Gerrodette 1993). ¹⁷ Pacific coast of Japan (Kasuya 2009a). ¹⁸ Western Pacific Ocean (Okamura et al. 2012).
Stejneger's beaked whale	Likely pelagic	Common	N.A.	N.A.	NL	DD	II	
Pacific white-sided dolphin	Pelagic, shelf, coastal	Common	26,880 ¹⁹	988,333 ²⁰	NL	LC	II	¹⁹ North Pacific Stock (Muto et al. 2016). ²⁰ North Pacific Ocean (Miyashita 1993b).
Risso's dolphin	Pelagic, shelf, coastal	Extralimital	N.A.	838,000 ²¹	NL	LC	II	²¹ Western North Pacific Ocean (Miyashita 1993a).
Killer whale	Pelagic, shelf, coastal	Common	2934 ²²	8500 ²³	NL [‡]	DD	II	²² Minimum abundance in Alaska, includes 2347 residents and 587 transients (Muto et al. 2017). ²³ ETP (Ford 2009).
Harbor porpoise	Coastal	Uncommon	31,046 ²⁴	79,261 ²⁵	NL	LC	II	²⁴ GOA stock (Muto et al. 2018). ²⁵ GOA plus Bering Sea stocks (Muto et al. 2018).

Species	Habitat	Occurrence in/near Study Area	Abundance (Alaska)	Regional Abundance	ESA ¹	IUCN ²	CITES ³	Notes on Abundance Estimates
Dall's porpoise	Pelagic, shelf	Common	83,400 ²⁶	1,186,000 ²⁷	NL	LC	II	²⁶ Alaska stock (Muto et al. 2016). ²⁷ North Pacific Ocean and Bering Sea (Houck and Jefferson 1999).
Pinnipeds Northern fur seal	Pelagic, breeds coastally	Uncommon	626,734 ²⁸	1.1 million ²⁹	NL	VU	NL	²⁸ Eastern Pacific Stock (Muto et al. 2017). ²⁹ North Pacific (Gelatt and Lowry 2008).
Steller sea lion	Coastal, offshore	Common	41,638 ³⁰ 53,303 ³¹	N.A.	EN/DL [†]	NT	NL	³⁰ Eastern U.S. Stock (Muto et al. 2017). ³¹ Western U.S. Stock (Muto et al. 2018).
California sea lion	Coastal	Uncommon	N.A.	296,750 ³²	NL	LC	NL	³² Carretta et al. (2015).
Harbor seal	Coastal	Uncommon	54,906 ³³	205,090 ³⁴	NL	LC	NL	³³ Total of North Kodiak, South Kodiak, and Cook Inlet/Shelikof Strait Stocks (Muto et al. 2016). ³⁴ Alaska statewide (Muto et al. 2016).
Northern elephant seal	Coastal, offshore	Uncommon	N.A.	210,000- 239,000 ³⁵	NL	LC	NL	³⁵ U.S. and Mexico (Lowry et al. 2014).
Pacific walrus	Ice	Extralimital	129,000 ³⁶	N.A.	NL	DD	III	³⁶ Speckman et al. (2011).
Mustelids Northern sea otter	Coastal	Very rare	25,712 ³⁷ 18,297 ³⁸ 54,771 ³⁹	N.A.	T ^{††}	EN	II	³⁷ SE Alaska Stock (Muto et al. 2018). ³⁸ Southcentral Alaska Stock (Muto et al. 2018). ³⁹ SW Alaska Stock (Muto et al. 2018).

N.A. = data not available.

¹ U.S. Endangered Species Act. EN = Endangered; T = Threatened; DL = Delisted; NL = Not listed.

² Codes for IUCN (2010) classifications: EN = Endangered; VU = Vulnerable; NT = Near Threatened; LC = Least Concern; DD = Data Deficient.

³ Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES-UNEP 2010): Appendix I = threatened with extinction; Appendix II = not necessarily now threatened with extinction but may become so unless trade is closely controlled; Appendix III = trade of species regulated but cooperation from other countries needed to prevent unsustainable or illegal exploitation.

* The Western North Pacific DPS is listed as endangered and the Mexico DPS is listed as threatened; the Hawaii DPS was delisted in 2016 (81 FR 62260, 8 September 2016). Both the Central and Western North Pacific stock are considered depleted under the MMPA (Muto et al. 2018).

[†] Stocks in Alaska are not listed, but the southern resident DPS is listed as endangered. AT1 transient in Alaska is considered depleted and a strategic stock (NOAA 2004a).

[‡] The Western DPS is listed as endangered; the Eastern DPS was delisted in 2013 (78 FR 66139, 4 November 2013).

[¶] Southwest Alaska DPS.

Rone et al. (2017) sighted gray whales off Ugak Island, Kodiak, in all three years (2009, 2013, and 2015) of surveys in the military training area east of Kodiak. The US Department of the Navy (DoN 2014) estimated gray whale densities of 0.0485724/km² within 2.25 nmi of the coast and 0.0024276/km² for waters 2.25 to 20 nmi from shore for this area. Gray whales were detected acoustically throughout the summer and fall at fixed hydrophones on the shelf off Kenai Peninsula and near Kodiak Island in this military training area in a 2014-2015 study (Rice et al. 2015), but they were not detected at deeper slope or seamount sites and they were detected only once in prior years of study from 2011 to 2013 (Baumann-Pickering et al. 2012; Debich et al. 2013). Gray whales were neither observed visually nor detected acoustically during the NSF/L-DEO seismic survey conducted in the summer of 2011 in the same area as the currently proposed survey (RPS 2011). Gray whales could be encountered during the proposed seismic survey in the GOA.

3.3.1.3 Humpback Whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*)

The humpback whale is found throughout all oceans of the World (Clapham 2009), with recent genetic evidence suggesting three separate subspecies: North Pacific, North Atlantic, and Southern Hemisphere (Jackson et al. 2014). Nonetheless, genetic analyses suggest some gene flow (either past or present) between the North and South Pacific (e.g., Jackson et al. 2014; Bettridge et al. 2015). Although considered to be mainly a coastal species, the humpback whale often traverses deep pelagic areas while migrating (e.g., Mate et al. 1999; Garrigue et al. 2015).

North Pacific humpback whales migrate between summer feeding grounds along the Pacific Rim and the Bering and Okhotsk seas and winter calving and breeding areas in subtropical and tropical waters (Pike and MacAskie 1969; Rice 1978; Winn and Reichley 1985; Calambokidis et al. 2000, 2001, 2008). In the North Pacific, humpbacks winter in four different breeding areas: (1) along the coast of Mexico; (2) along the coast of Central America; (3) around the Main Hawaiian Islands; and (4) in the western Pacific, particularly around the Ogasawara and Ryukyu islands in southern Japan and the northern Philippines (Calambokidis et al. 2008; Fleming and Jackson 2011; Bettridge et al. 2015). These breeding areas are recognized as the Mexico, Central America, Hawaii, and Western Pacific DPSs (NMFS 2016b). Hawaii is the primary wintering area for whales from summer feeding areas in the Gulf of Alaska (Calambokidis et al. 2008). Individuals from the Hawaii, Western Pacific, and Mexico DPSs could occur in the proposed survey area to feed.

There is potential for mixing of the western and eastern North Pacific humpback populations on their summer feeding grounds, and several sources suggest that this occurs to a limited extent (Muto et al. 2018). NMFS is currently reviewing the global humpback whale stock structure in light of the recent revision to their ESA listing and identification of 14 DPSs (81 FR 62259, 8 September 2016). Currently, two stocks of humpback whales are recognized as occurring in Alaskan waters. The Central North Pacific Stock occurs from southeast Alaska to the Alaska Peninsula and the Western North Pacific Stock occurs from the Aleutians to the Bering Sea and Russia. These two stocks overlap on feeding grounds in the eastern Bering Sea and the western Gulf of Alaska (Muto et al. 2018), encompassing the entire proposed survey area. BIAs for humpback whale feeding have been designated surrounding Kodiak Island and the Shumagin Islands (Ferguson et al. 2015). The highest densities of humpback whales occur during July through September around Kodiak Island and during July through August in the Shumagin Islands.

Humpback whales are commonly sighted within the proposed survey area. Waite (2003) reported that 117 humpbacks were seen in 41 groups during their surveys in the western GOA in 2003, with aggregations seen off northeast Kodiak Island. During summer surveys from the Kenai Fjords to the central Aleutian Islands in 2001–2003, humpbacks were most abundant near Kodiak Island, the Shumagin Islands, and north of Unimak Pass (Zerbini et al. 2006). Sightings of humpbacks around the Kodiak Islands were

made most frequently in the fall, and aggregations were seen off Shuyak and Sitkalidak islands (Wynne and Witteveen 2005), as well as in Marmot and Chiniak bays (Baraff et al. 2005). Waite et al. (1999) noted another aggregation area north of Unalaska Island. Offshore sightings of humpbacks have also been made south of the Alaska Peninsula, including ~280 km south of the Shumagin Islands (e.g., Forney and Brownell 1996; Waite et al. 1999). Humpback whales were sighted a total of 220 times (637 animals) during the three years of surveys (2009, 2013, and 2015) in and near the U.S. Navy training area east of Kodiak (Rone et al. 2017). Humpback whales were also frequently detected acoustically during all years (2011-2015) of fixed-PAM studies in this area, with peak detections during late fall through early winter and detections at all shelf, slope, and seamount sites (Baumann-Pickering et al. 2012; Debich et al. 2013; Rice et al. 2015). Using sightings data from the June–July 2013 survey, density estimates for humpback whales were calculated for four different habitat strata: 0.093/km² for the inshore stratum (shelf waters), 0.001/km² for the offshore stratum (pelagic waters), 0.001/km² for the seamount stratum, and 0.0000/km² for the slope stratum (Rone et al. 2017). Humpback whales were the most frequently sighted cetacean during the NSF/L-DEO seismic survey conducted in the summer of 2011 in the same area as the currently proposed survey, comprising 50% of all cetacean sightings (RPS 2011). There were 92 sightings of this species, representing 288 animals during the 37 days of monitoring. The average group size was three and the maximum group size was 37. This species is likely to be common in the proposed survey area.

Calambokidis et al. (2008) reported an abundance estimate of 3000–5000 for the GOA. Rone et al. (2017) calculated an abundance estimate of 2,215 (uncorrected for missed animals) from a June–July 2013 survey in the U.S. Navy training area east of Kodiak Island, with the bulk of this estimate (2,927) found in the inshore stratum. NMFS provides best estimates of 1,107 for the Western North Pacific Stock and 10,103 for the Eastern North Pacific Stock (Muto et al. 2018). The entire North Pacific population has been estimated to number 21,063 individuals (Barlow et al. 2011).

3.3.1.4 Common Minke Whale (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*)

The common minke whale has a cosmopolitan distribution ranging from the tropics and subtropics to the ice edge in both hemispheres (Jefferson et al. 2015). In the Northern Hemisphere, minke whales are usually seen in coastal areas, but can also be seen in pelagic waters during northward migrations in spring and summer, and southward migration in autumn (Stewart and Leatherwood 1985). In the North Pacific, the summer range extends to the Chukchi Sea; in the winter, minke whales move further south to within 2° of the Equator (Perrin and Brownell 2009). The International Whaling Commission (IWC) recognizes three stocks in the North Pacific: the Sea of Japan/East China Sea, the rest of the western Pacific west of 180°N, and the remainder of the Pacific (Donovan 1991). NMFS recognizes a single stock in Alaskan waters and a second California/Oregon/Washington Stock (Muto et al. 2010).

The minke whale tends to be solitary or in groups of 2–3 but can occur in much larger aggregations around prey resources (Jefferson et al. 2008). Predominantly solitary animals were seen during surveys in Alaska (Wade et al. 2003; Waite 2003; Zerbini et al. 2006). The small size, inconspicuous blows, and brief surfacing times of minke whales mean that they are easily overlooked in heavy sea states, although they are known to approach vessels in some circumstances (Stewart and Leatherwood 1985). Little is known about the diving behavior of minke whales, but they are not known to make prolonged deep dives (Leatherwood and Reeves 1983).

Minke whales are relatively common in the Bering and Chukchi seas and in the inshore waters of the GOA (Mizroch 1992), but they are not considered abundant in any other part of the eastern Pacific (Brueggeman et al. 1990). Waite (2003) sighted four minke whales in three groups during surveys in the western GOA in 2003, south of the Kenai Peninsula and south of PWS. Moore et al. (2002b) reported a minke whale sighting south of the Sanak Islands. Baraff et al. (2005) reported a single sighting near Kodiak

Island in July 2002. During surveys in the western GOA and eastern Aleutians, minke whales occurred primarily in the Aleutians; a few sightings were made south of the Alaska Peninsula and near Kodiak Island (Zerbini et al. 2006). Rone et al. (2017) reported two sightings totaling three minke whales in 2009, three sightings totaling six minke whales in 2013, and no sightings of minke whales in 2015 in the U.S. Navy training area east of Kodiak. In 2009 the DoN derived a year-round density of 0.0006/km² for minke whales for this area, which they consider the best available estimate given the scarce sightings of this species in this area. Minke whales were not detected acoustically during any year (2011-2015) of the fixed-PAM studies in the DoN area east of Kodiak (Baumann-Pickering et al. 2012; Debich et al. 2013; Rice et al. 2015). There was one sighting of a single common minke whale during the NSF/L-DEO seismic survey conducted in the summer of 2011 in the same area as the currently proposed survey (RPS 2011).

3.3.1.5 Sei Whale (*Balaenoptera borealis*)

The sei whale occurs in all ocean basins (Horwood 2009) but appears to prefer mid-latitude temperate waters (Jefferson et al. 2015). It undertakes seasonal migrations to feed in subpolar latitudes during summer and returns to lower latitudes during winter to calve (Horwood 2009). The sei whale is pelagic and generally not found in coastal waters (Harwood and Wilson 2001). It occurs in deeper waters characteristic of the continental shelf edge region (Hain et al. 1985) and in other regions of steep bathymetric relief such as seamounts and canyons (Kenney and Winn 1987; Gregr and Trites 2001). On feeding grounds, sei whales associate with oceanic frontal systems (Horwood 1987) such as the cold eastern currents in the North Pacific (Perry et al. 1999a). Sei whales are frequently seen in groups of 2–5 (Jefferson et al. 2008), although larger groups sometimes form on feeding grounds (Gambell 1985a).

In the U.S. Pacific, an Eastern North Pacific and a Hawaii stock are recognized (Carretta et al. 2017). During summer in the North Pacific, the sei whale can be found from the Bering Sea to the northern GOA and south to California, and in the western Pacific from Japan to Korea. Its winter distribution is concentrated at about 20°N, and sightings have been made between southern Baja California and the Islas Revilla Gigedo (Rice 1998). No breeding grounds have been identified for sei whales; however, calving is thought to occur from September to March.

Moore et al. (2002b) made four sightings of six sei whales during summer surveys in the eastern Bering Sea, and one sighting south of the Alaska Peninsula between Kodiak and the Shumagin Islands. No sei whales were seen during surveys of the GOA by Wade et al. (2003), Waite (2003), or Zerbini et al. (2006). Rone et al. (2017) reported no sei whale sightings in 2009 or 2013 and a single sei whale sighting of one animal in 2015 in the U.S. Navy training area east of Kodiak. DoN (2014; see Figs. 5-24 and 5.25) estimated densities in the range of 0.000000-0.000102/km² for this area during the spring, summer, and fall. There was one sighting of two sei whales during the NSF/L-DEO seismic survey conducted in the summer of 2011 in the same area as the currently proposed survey (RPS 2011). Sei whale sightings are likely to be uncommon in the proposed survey area.

3.3.1.6 Fin Whale (*Balaenoptera physalus*)

The fin whale is widely distributed in all the World's oceans (Gambell 1985), although it is most abundant in temperate and cold waters (Aguilar 2009). Nonetheless, its overall range and distribution are not well known (Jefferson et al. 2015). A recent review of fin whale distribution in the North Pacific noted the lack of sightings across the pelagic waters between eastern and western winter areas (Mizroch et al. 2009). The fin whale most commonly occurs offshore but can also be found in coastal areas (Aguilar 2009). Most populations migrate seasonally between temperate waters where mating and calving occur in winter, and polar waters where feeding occurs in summer (Aguilar 2009). However, recent evidence suggests that some animals may remain at high latitudes in winter or low latitudes in summer (Edwards et al. 2015).

The fin whale is known to use the shelf edge as a migration route (Evans 1987). Sergeant (1977)

suggested that fin whales tend to follow steep slope contours, either because they detect them readily, or because the contours are areas of high biological productivity. However, fin whale movements have been reported to be complex (Jefferson et al. 2015). Stafford et al. (2009) noted that sea-surface temperature is a good predictor variable for fin whale call detections in the North Pacific.

North Pacific fin whales summer from the Chukchi Sea to California and winter from California southwards (Gambell 1985). In the U.S., three stocks are recognized in the North Pacific: California/Oregon/Washington, Hawaii, and Alaska (Northeast Pacific) (Carretta et al. 2017). Information about the seasonal distribution of fin whales in the North Pacific has been obtained from the detection of fin whale calls by bottom-mounted, offshore hydrophone arrays along the U.S. Pacific coast, in the central North Pacific, and in the western Aleutian Islands (Moore et al. 1998, 2006; Watkins et al. 2000a,b; Stafford et al. 2007, 2009). Fin whale calls are recorded in the North Pacific year-round, including the GOA (e.g., Moore et al. 2006; Stafford et al. 2007, 2009; Edwards et al. 2015). Near the Alaska Peninsula in the western GOA, the number of calls received peaked in May–August, with few calls during the rest of the year (Moore et al. 1998). In the central North Pacific, the GOA, and the Aleutian Islands, call rates peak during fall and winter (Moore et al. 1998, 2006; Watkins et al. 2000a,b; Stafford et al. 2009).

Rice and Wolman (1982) encountered 19 fin whales during surveys in the GOA, including 10 aggregated near Middleton Island on 1 July 1980. During surveys from the Kenai Peninsula to the central Aleutian Islands, fin whales were most abundant near the Semidi Islands and Kodiak Island (Zerbini et al. 2006). Numerous sightings of fin whales were also seen between the Semidi Islands and Kodiak Island during surveys by Waite (2003). Fin whale sightings around Kodiak Island were most numerous along the western part of the island in Uyak Bay and Kupreanof Straits, and in Marmot Bay (Wynne and Witteveen 2005; Baraff et al. 2005). Fin whales were sighted around Kodiak Island year-round, but most sightings were made in the spring and summer (Wynne and Witteveen 2005). A BIA for fin whale feeding has been designated southward from the Kenai Peninsula inshore of the Kodiak Archipelago and along the Alaska Peninsula to include the Semidi Islands (Ferguson et al. 2015), overlapping with a proportion of the proposed survey area. Densities of fin whales are highest in this area during June through August.

Rone et al. (2017) reported 24 fin whale sightings (64 animals) in 2009, two hundred fin whale sightings (392 animals) in 2013, and 48 fin whale sightings (69 animals) in 2015 in the U.S. Navy training area east of Kodiak. They used the 2013 data to calculate densities of fin whales for four habitat areas: 0.068/km² for the inshore stratum, 0.016/km² for the offshore stratum, 0.003/km² for the seamount stratum, and 0.013/km² for the slope stratum. That study also provided an abundance estimate of 3168 for this area. The density and abundance estimates were not corrected for missed animals. Fin whales were also frequently detected acoustically throughout the year during all years (2011-2015) of fixed-PAM studies in this area and detections occurred at all shelf, slope, and seamount sites (Baumann-Pickering et al. 2012; Debich et al. 2013; Rice et al. 2015). Fin whales were the second most frequently sighted cetacean during the NSF/L-DEO seismic survey conducted in the summer of 2011 in the same area as the currently proposed survey, comprising 15.2% of all cetacean sightings (RPS 2011). There were 28 sightings of this species, representing 79 animals during the 37 days of monitoring. The average group size was three and the maximum group size was 10. Fin whales are likely to be common in the proposed survey area.

3.3.1.7 Blue Whale (*Balaenoptera musculus*)

The blue whale has a cosmopolitan distribution and tends to be pelagic, only coming nearshore to feed and possibly to breed (Jefferson et al. 2015). Blue whale migration is less well defined than for some other rorquals, and their movements tend to be more closely linked to areas of high primary productivity, and hence prey, to meet their high energetic demands (Branch et al. 2007). Generally, blue whales are seasonal migrants between high latitudes in the summer, where they feed, and low latitudes in the winter,

where they mate and give birth (Lockyer and Brown 1981). Some individuals may stay in low or high latitudes throughout the year (Reilly and Thayer 1990; Watkins et al. 2000b).

Although it has been suggested that there are at least five subpopulations in the North Pacific (Reeves et al. 1998), analysis of calls monitored from the U.S. Navy Sound Surveillance System (SOSUS) and other offshore hydrophones (e.g., Stafford et al. 1999, 2001, 2007; Watkins et al. 2000a; Stafford 2003) suggests that there are two separate populations: one in the eastern and one in the central North Pacific (Carretta et al. 2017). The Eastern North Pacific Stock includes whales that feed primarily off California from June–November and winter off Central America (Calambokidis et al. 1990; Mate et al. 1999). The Central North Pacific Stock feeds off Kamchatka, south of the Aleutians and in the Gulf of Alaska during summer (Stafford 2003; Watkins et al. 2000b), and migrates to the western and central Pacific (including Hawaii) to breed in winter (Stafford et al. 2001; Carretta et al. 2017). The status of these two populations could differ substantially, as little is known about the population size in the western North Pacific (Branch et al. 2016).

In the North Pacific, blue whale calls are detected year-round (Stafford et al. 2001, 2009; Moore et al. 2002, 2006; Monnahan et al. 2014). Stafford et al. (2009) reported that sea-surface temperature is a good predictor variable for blue whale call detections in the North Pacific. In the GOA, no detections of blue whales had been made since the late 1960s (NOAA 2004b; Calambokidis et al. 2009) until blue whale calls were recorded in the area during 1999–2002 (Stafford 2003; Stafford and Moore 2005; Moore et al. 2006; Stafford et al. 2007). Call types from both northeastern and northwestern Pacific blue whales were recorded from July through December in the GOA, suggesting that two stocks used the area at that time (Stafford 2003; Stafford et al. 2007). Call rates peaked from August through November (Moore et al. 2006). More recent acoustic studies using fixed PAM have confirmed the presence of blue whales from both the Central and Northeast Pacific stocks in the Gulf of Alaska concurrently (Baumann-Pickering et al. 2012; Debich et al. 2013; Rice et al. 2015). Blue whale calls were recorded in all months; at all shelf, slope, and seamount sites; and during all years (2011–2015) of those studies.

In July 2004, three blue whales were sighted in the GOA. The first blue whale was seen on 14 July ~185 km southeast of PWS. Two more blue whales were seen ~275 km southeast of PWS (NOAA 2004b; Calambokidis et al. 2009). These whales were thought to be part of the California feeding population (Calambokidis et al. 2009). Western blue whales are more likely to occur in the western portion of the GOA, southwest of Kodiak, where their calls have been detected (see Stafford 2003). Two blue whale sightings were also made in the Aleutians in August 2004 (Calambokidis et al. 2009). No blue whales were seen during surveys of the western GOA by Zerbini et al. (2006).

Rone et al. (2017) reported no blue whale sightings in 2009, five blue whale sightings (seven animals) in 2013, and 13 blue whale sightings (13 animals) in 2015 in the U.S. Navy training area east of Kodiak. Rone et al. (2017) used the June–July 2013 sightings data to calculate a blue whale density of 0.0014/km² for the seamount stratum and an abundance estimate of 63 for that area. These density and abundance estimates were not corrected for missed animals. The DoN considers blue whale densities to be in the range of 0.001651–0.002644/km² for the seamount stratum and 0.000010–0.000826/km² for the other areas in the region year-round (see Fig. 5-36 of DoN 2014). Blue whales were not observed during the NSF/L-DEO seismic survey conducted in the summer of 2011 in the same area as the currently proposed survey (RPS 2011).

3.3.2 Odontocetes

3.3.2.1 Sperm Whale (*Physeter macrocephalus*)

The sperm whale is the largest of the toothed whales, with an extensive worldwide distribution from

the edge of the polar pack ice to the Equator (Whitehead 2009). Sperm whale distribution is linked to its social structure: mixed groups of adult females and juveniles of both sexes generally occur in tropical and subtropical waters at latitudes less than $\sim 40^\circ$ (Whitehead 2009). After leaving their female relatives, males gradually move to higher latitudes, with the largest males occurring at the highest latitudes and only returning to tropical and subtropical regions to breed. Sperm whales generally are distributed over large areas that have high secondary productivity and steep underwater topography, in waters at least 1000 m deep (Jaquet and Whitehead 1996). They are often found far from shore but can be found closer to oceanic islands that rise steeply from deep ocean waters (Whitehead 2009).

Most of the information regarding sperm whale distribution in the GOA (especially the eastern GOA) and southeast Alaska has come from anecdotal observations from fishermen and reports from fisheries observers aboard commercial fishing vessels (e.g., Dahlheim 1988). Fishery observers have identified interactions (e.g., depredation) between longline vessels and sperm whales in the GOA and southeast Alaska since at least the mid-1970s (e.g., Hill et al. 1999; Straley et al. 2005; Sigler et al. 2008), with most interactions occurring in the West Yakutat and East Yakutat/Southeast regions (Perez 2006; Hanselman et al. 2008). Sigler et al. (2008) noted high depredation rates in West Yakutat, East Yakutat/Southeast region, as well as the central GOA. Hill et al. (1999) found that most interactions in the GOA occurred to the east of Kodiak Island, even though there was substantial longline effort in waters to the west of Kodiak. Mellinger et al. (2004a) also noted that sperm whales occurred less often west of Kodiak Island.

Sperm whales are commonly sighted during surveys in the Aleutians and the central and western GOA (e.g., Forney and Brownell 1996; Moore 2001; Waite 2003; Wade et al. 2003; Zerbini et al. 2004; Barlow and Henry 2005; Ireland et al. 2005; Straley et al. 2005). Waite (2003) and Wade et al. (2003) noted an average group size of 1.2 in the western GOA. In contrast, there are fewer reports on the occurrence of sperm whales in the eastern GOA (e.g., Rice and Wolman 1982; Mellinger et al. 2004a; MacLean and Koski 2005; Rone et al. 2010). Rone et al. (2017) reported no sperm whale sightings in 2009, 19 sperm whale sightings (22 animals) in 2013, and 27 sperm whale sightings (45 animals) in 2015 in the U.S. Navy training area east of Kodiak. Additionally, there were 241 acoustic encounters with sperm whales during the 2013 towed-hydrophone survey in that study (Rone et al. 2014). Sperm whales were also frequently detected acoustically throughout the year during all years (2011-2015) of fixed-PAM studies in this area and detections occurred at all shelf, slope, and seamount sites, but they were less common at the shelf site near Kenai Peninsula and most common on the slope (Baumann-Pickering et al. 2012; Debich et al. 2013; Rice et al. 2015).

Rone et al. (2017) used the June–July 2013 sightings data to calculate sperm whale densities of $0.0000/\text{km}^2$ for the seamount stratum and $0.003/\text{km}^2$ for the slope stratum, with an overall density of $0.0003/\text{km}^2$ for the area. They also provided an abundance estimate (uncorrected for missed animals) for the area of 129 sperm whales, most of which were found in slope waters. Sperm whales were not observed during the NSF/L-DEO seismic survey conducted in the summer of 2011 in the same area as the currently proposed survey (RPS 2011).

3.3.2.2 Cuvier's Beaked Whale (*Ziphius cavirostris*)

Cuvier's beaked whale is the most widespread of the beaked whales, occurring in almost all temperate, subtropical, and tropical waters and even some sub-polar and polar waters (MacLeod et al. 2006). It is likely the most abundant of all beaked whales (Heyning and Mead 2009). Cuvier's beaked whale is found in deep water over and near the continental slope (Jefferson et al. 2015).

Cuvier's beaked whale ranges north to the GOA, including southeast Alaska, the Aleutian Islands, and the Commander Islands (Rice 1986, 1998). Most reported sightings have been in the Aleutian Islands (e.g., Leatherwood et al. 1983; Forney and Brownell 1996; Brueggeman et al. 1987). Waite (2003) reported

a single sighting of four Cuvier's beaked whales at the shelf break east of Kodiak Island during the summer of 2003 and one stranded on Kodiak Island in January 1987 (Foster and Hare 1990). There was one sighting of a single Cuvier's beaked whale during a 2013 survey in the U.S. Navy training area east of Kodiak, but none during the 2009 and 2015 surveys in that region (Rone et al. 2017). There were also five sightings (eight animals) of unidentified beaked whales during the 2013 survey and none during the other years. Additionally, there were 34 acoustic encounters with Cuvier's beaked whales during the 2013 towed-hydrophone survey in that study (Rone et al. 2014). Cuvier's beaked whales were detected occasionally at deep-water sites (900-1000 m) during the 2011-2015 fixed-PAM studies in the U.S. Navy training area. They were infrequently detected on the slope site but more commonly detected at Pratt and Quinn seamounts. Detections occurred May to July 2014 at Pratt Seamount and October 2014 to March 2015 at Quinn Seamount in one of those studies (Rice et al. 2015). The U.S. DoN (2014) used Waite (2003) sightings data for this species to calculate a density estimate of 0.0022/km² for their GOA training area east of Kodiak year-round. Beaked whales were not observed during the NSF/L-DEO seismic survey conducted in the summer of 2011 in the same area as the currently proposed survey (RPS 2011).

3.3.2.3 Stejneger's Beaked Whale (*Mesoplodon stejnegeri*)

Stejneger's beaked whale occurs in subarctic and cool temperate waters of the North Pacific (Mead 1989). Most records are from Alaskan waters, and the Aleutian Islands appear to be its center of distribution (Mead 1989; Wade et al. 2003). There have been no confirmed sightings of Stejneger's beaked whale in the GOA since 1986 (Wade et al. 2003). However, they have been detected acoustically in the Aleutian Islands during summer, fall, and winter (Baumann-Pickering et al. 2014) and were detected year-round at deep-water sites during the 2011-2015 fixed-PAM studies in the U.S. Navy training area east of Kodiak (Baumann-Pickering et al. 2012; Debich et al. 2013; Rice et al. 2015). In contrast to Cuvier's beaked whales, which were more prevalent at seamounts, Stejneger's beaked whales were detected most frequently at the slope site, with peak detections in September and October (Debich et al. 2013; Rice et al. 2015). There were no sightings of Stejneger's beaked whales during three years of surveys (2009, 2013, 2015) in this area (Rone et al. 2017). However, there were five sightings (eight animals) of unidentified beaked whales during the 2013 survey. Additionally, there were six acoustic encounters with Stejneger's beaked whales during the 2013 towed-hydrophone survey in that study (Rone et al. 2014). Beaked whales were not observed during the NSF/L-DEO seismic survey conducted in the summer of 2011 in the same area as the currently proposed survey (RPS 2011).

3.3.2.4 Baird's Beaked Whale (*Berardius bairdii*)

Baird's beaked whale has a fairly extensive range across the North Pacific north of 30°N, and strandings have occurred as far north as the Pribilof Islands (Rice 1986). Two forms of Baird's beaked whales have been recognized – the common slate-gray form and a smaller, rare black form (Morin et al. 2017). The gray form is seen off Japan, in the Aleutians, and on the west coast of North America, whereas the black form has been reported for northern Japan and the Aleutians (Morin et al. 2017). Recent genetic studies suggest that the black form could be a separate species (Morin et al. 2017).

Baird's beaked whale is currently divided into three distinct stocks: Sea of Japan, Okhotsk Sea, and Bering Sea/eastern North Pacific (Balcomb 1989; Reyes 1991). Baird's beaked whales sometimes are seen close to shore, but their primary habitat is over or near the continental slope and oceanic seamounts in waters 1000–3000 m deep (Jefferson et al. 1993; Kasuya and Ohsumi 1984; Kasuya 2009a).

Baird's beaked whale is migratory, arriving in the Bering Sea in the spring, and remaining there throughout the summer; the winter distribution is unknown (Kasuya 2002). There are numerous sighting records from the central GOA to the Aleutian Islands and the southern Bering Sea (Leatherwood et al. 1983; Kasuya and Ohsumi 1984; Forney and Brownell 1996; Brueggeman et al. 1987; Moore et al. 2002b; Waite

2003; Wade et al. 2003). There were seven sightings of Baird's beaked whales (58 animals) during a 2013 survey in the U.S. Navy training area east of Kodiak (Rone et al. 2017). Additionally, there were nine acoustic encounters with Baird's beaked whales during the 2013 towed-hydrophone survey in that study (Rone et al. 2014). There were also five sightings (eight animals) of unidentified beaked whales during that survey. No beaked whales were observed in 2009 or 2015 surveys in the same area (Rone et al. 2017). Baird's beaked whales were detected acoustically during fixed-PAM studies in this area during the 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 studies but not in 2014-2015 (Baumann-Pickering et al. 2012; Debich et al. 2013; Rice et al. 2015). They were detected regularly at the slope site from November through and January and at the Pratt Seamount site during most months. The U.S. DoN (2014) used Waite (2003) sightings data for this species to calculate a density estimate of 0.0005/km² for their GOA training area east of Kodiak year round. Beaked whales were not observed during the NSF/L-DEO seismic survey conducted in the summer of 2011 in the same area as the currently proposed survey (RPS 2011).

3.3.2.5 Pacific White-sided Dolphin (*Lagenorhynchus obliquidens*)

The Pacific white-sided dolphin is found throughout the temperate North Pacific, in a relatively narrow distribution between 38°N and 47°N (Brownell et al. 1999). It is common both on the high seas and along the continental margins (Leatherwood et al. 1984; Dahlheim and Towell 1994; Ferrero and Walker 1996). Pacific white-sided dolphins often associate with other species, including cetaceans (especially Risso's and northern right whale dolphins; Green et al. 1993), pinnipeds, and seabirds.

Pacific white-sided dolphins were seen throughout the North Pacific during surveys conducted during 1983–1990 (Buckland et al. 1993; Miyashita 1993b). During winter, this species is most abundant in California slope and offshore areas; as northern marine waters begin to warm in the spring, it appears to move north to slope and offshore waters off Oregon/Washington (Green et al. 1992, 1993; Forney 1994; Forney et al. 1995; Buchanan et al. 2001; Barlow 2003). During the summer, Pacific white-sided dolphins occur north into the GOA and west to Amchitka in the Aleutian Islands, but rarely in the southern Bering Sea (Allen and Angliss 2010). Moore et al. (2002b) documented a single sighting of eight Pacific white-sided dolphins in the southeast Bering Sea along the Alaska Peninsula. Sightings in the GOA and Aleutian Islands have been documented in the summer by Waite (2003) and Wade et al. (2003), and in the spring to the southeast of Kodiak Island by Rone et al. (2010). Dahlheim and Towell (1994) reported sightings for southeast Alaska. There was one sighting of 60 Pacific white-sided dolphins in 2009, no sightings in 2013, and 10 sightings of Pacific white-sided dolphins (986 animals) in 2015 during surveys in the U.S. Navy training area east of Kodiak (Rone et al. 2017). The DoN (2014) has assigned this species a year-round density estimate of 0.0208/km² in this region. Pacific white-sided dolphins were not observed during the NSF/L-DEO seismic survey conducted in the summer of 2011 in the same area as the currently proposed survey (RPS 2011), but there was one sighting of two unidentified small odontocetes.

3.3.2.6 Risso's Dolphin (*Grampus griseus*)

Risso's dolphin is primarily a tropical and mid-temperate species distributed worldwide (Kruse et al. 1999). It occurs between 60°N and 60°S, where surface water temperatures are at least 10°C (Kruse et al. 1999). Water temperature appears to be an important factor affecting its distribution (Kruse et al. 1999). Although it occurs from coastal to deep water, it shows a strong preference for mid-temperate waters of the continental shelf and slope (Jefferson et al. 2014).

Throughout the region from California to Washington, the distribution and abundance of Risso's dolphins are highly variable, presumably in response to changing oceanographic conditions on both annual and seasonal time scales (Forney and Barlow 1998; Buchanan et al. 2001; Becker 2007). Water temperature appears to be an important factor affecting their distribution (Kruse et al. 1999; see also Becker 2007). Like the Pacific white-sided dolphin, Risso's dolphin is believed to make seasonal north-south movements

related to water temperature, spending colder winter months off California and moving north to waters off Oregon/Washington during the spring and summer as northern waters begin to warm (Green et al. 1992, 1993; Buchanan et al. 2001; Barlow 2003; Becker 2007). Risso's dolphins are uncommon to rare in the GOA. Risso's dolphins have been sighted near Chirikof Island (southwest of Kodiak Island) and offshore in the GOA (Consiglieri et al. 1980; Braham 1983). They were detected acoustically once, in January 2013, near Pratt Seamount during fixed-PAM studies from 2011-2015 in the U.S. Navy training area (Debich et al. 2013). The DoN (2014) considers this species to be only an occasional visitor to their GOA training area and has assigned them a year-round density of 0.00001/km² in this region. Risso's dolphins were not observed during the NSF/L-DEO seismic survey conducted in the summer of 2011 in the same area as the currently proposed survey (RPS 2011). There was one sighting of two unidentified small odontocetes.

3.3.2.7 Killer Whale (*Orcinus orca*)

The killer whale is cosmopolitan and globally fairly abundant; it has been observed in all oceans of the World (Ford 2009). It is very common in temperate waters and also frequents tropical waters, at least seasonally (Heyning and Dahlheim 1988). High densities of the species occur in high latitudes, especially in areas where prey is abundant. Killer whale movements generally appear to follow the distribution of their prey, which includes marine mammals, fish, and squid.

Of eight killer whale stocks currently recognized in the Pacific U.S., six occur in Alaskan waters: (1) the Eastern North Pacific Alaska Resident Stock, from southeast Alaska to the Aleutians and Bering Sea, (2) the Eastern North Pacific Northern Resident Stock, from B.C. through parts of southeast Alaska, (3) the Eastern North Pacific Gulf of Alaska, Aleutian Islands, and Bering Sea Transient Stock, from PWS through to the Aleutians and Bering Sea, (4) the AT1 Transient Stock, from PWS through the Kenai Fjords, (5) the West Coast Transient Stock, from California through southeast Alaska, and (6) the Offshore Stock, from California through Alaska. The AT1 Transient Stock is considered depleted under the MMPA and therefore a strategic stock. Movements of resident groups between different geographic areas have also been documented (Leatherwood et al. 1990; Dahlheim et al. 1997; Matkin et al. 1997, 1999 *in* Allen and Angliss 2010). In the proposed study area, individuals from one resident stock (Eastern North Pacific Alaska Resident Stock), the North Pacific Offshore Stock, and two transient stocks (Eastern North Pacific Gulf of Alaska, Aleutian Islands, and Bering Sea Transient Stock and the depleted AT1 transient stock), could be encountered during the survey.

During surveys of the western GOA and Aleutian Islands, transient killer whale densities were higher south of the Alaska Peninsula between the Shumagin Islands and the eastern Aleutians than in other areas (Wade et al. 2003; Zerbini et al. 2007). They were not seen between the Shumagin Islands and the eastern side of Kodiak Island during surveys in 2001–2003, but they were sighted there during earlier surveys (e.g., Dahlheim 1997 *in* Zerbini et al. 2007). Resident killer whales were most abundant near Kodiak Island, around Umnak and Unalaska Islands in the eastern Aleutians, and in Seguam Pass in the central Aleutians (Wade et al. 2003; Zerbini et al. 2007). No residents were seen between 156°W and 164°W, south of the Alaska Peninsula (Zerbini et al. 2007).

Little is known about offshore killer whales in the GOA, but they could be encountered during the proposed survey. During summer surveys of the western GOA and Aleutian Islands in 2001–2003, two sightings of offshore killer whales were made, one northeast of Unalaska Island and another one south of Kodiak Island near the Trinity Islands (Wade et al. 2003; Zerbini et al. 2007). As the groups sighted were large, it suggests the number of offshore killer whales in the area is relatively high (Zerbini et al. 2007). Dahlheim et al. (2008b) encountered groups of 20–60 killer whales in western Alaska; offshore killer whales encountered near Kodiak Island and the eastern Aleutians were also sighted in southeast Alaska and California. A group of at least 54 offshore killer whales was sighted in July 2003 during a survey in the

eastern Aleutian Islands (Matkin et al. 2007).

Rone et al. (2017) reported six killer whale sightings (119 animals) in 2009, 21 killer whale sightings (138 animals) in 2013, and 10 killer whale sightings (73 animals) in 2015 in the U.S. Navy training area east of Kodiak. Additionally, there were 32 acoustic encounters with killer whales and three acoustic encounters with offshore killer whales (based on known differences in their acoustic signals) during the 2013 towed-hydrophone survey in that study (Rone et al. 2014). Killer whales were detected acoustically sporadically throughout the year at shelf, slope, and seamount sites in the U.S. Navy training area (Baumann-Pickering et al. 2012; Debich et al. 2013). Rone et al. (2017) used the June–July 2013 sightings data to calculate killer whale densities of 0.005/km² for the inshore stratum, 0.002/km² for the seamount stratum, and 0.019/km² for the slope stratum, with an overall density of 0.0023/km² for the area. They also provided an abundance estimate (uncorrected for missed animals) for the area of 899 killer whales, most of which were found in slope waters. There was one sighting of a single killer whale during the NSF/L-DEO seismic survey conducted in the summer of 2011 in the same area as the currently proposed survey (RPS 2011).

3.3.2.8 Dall's Porpoise (*Phocoenoides dalli*)

Dall's porpoise is only found in the North Pacific and adjacent seas. It is widely distributed across the North Pacific over the continental shelf and slope waters, and over deep (>2500 m) oceanic waters (Hall 1979), ranging from ~30–62°N (Jefferson et al. 2015). In general, this species is common throughout its range (Buckland et al. 1993). It is known to approach vessels to bowride (Jefferson 2009b).

Dall's porpoise occurs throughout Alaska; the only apparent gaps in distribution in Alaskan waters south of the Bering Strait are for upper Cook Inlet and the Bering Sea shelf. Using a population estimate based on vessel surveys during 1987–1991, and correcting for the tendency of this species to approach vessels, which Turnock and Quinn (1991) suggested resulted in inflated abundance estimates perhaps by as much as five times, a population estimate of 83,400 was calculated for the Alaska stock of Dall's porpoise. Because this estimate is more than eight years old, NMFS considers it to be unreliable and reported that there are no reliable abundance estimates available for the Alaska Stock of this species when it was last reviewed (Muto et al. 2016).

Numerous studies have documented the occurrence of Dall's porpoise in the Aleutian Islands and western GOA (Forney and Brownell 1996; Moore 2001; Wade et al. 2003; Waite 2003; Baraff et al. 2005; Ireland et al. 2005) as well as in the Bering Sea (Moore et al. 2002b). Dall's porpoise was one of the most frequently sighted species during summer seismic surveys in the central and eastern GOA and southeast Alaska (MacLean and Koski 2005; Hauser and Holst 2009). Rone et al. (2017) reported 10 Dall's porpoise sightings (59 animals) in 2009, 337 Dall's porpoise sightings (907 animals) in 2013, and 98 Dall's porpoise sightings (391 animals) in 2015 in the U.S. Navy training area east of Kodiak. Additionally, there were three acoustic encounters with Dall's porpoise during the 2013 towed-hydrophone survey in that study (Rone et al. 2014). Rone et al. (2017) used the June–July 2013 sightings data to calculate Dall's porpoise densities for four habitat strata – 0.218/km² for the inshore stratum, 0.037/km² for the offshore stratum, 0.024/km² for the seamount stratum, and 0.196/km² for the slope stratum, with an overall density of 0.0398/km² for this area. They also provided an abundance estimate for the area of 15,423 Dall's porpoises. This estimate was uncorrected for missed animals and did not account for their propensity to approach vessels. Dall's porpoise was the second most frequently sighted cetacean during the NSF/L-DEO seismic survey conducted in the summer of 2011 in the same area as the currently proposed survey, comprising 14.1% of all cetacean sightings (RPS 2011). There were 26 sightings of this species, representing 227 animals during the 37 days of monitoring. The average group size was nine and the largest group size was 35.

3.3.2.9 Harbor Porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*)

The harbor porpoise inhabits temperate, subarctic, and arctic waters. It is typically found in shallow water (<100 m) nearshore but is occasionally sighted in deeper offshore water (Jefferson et al. 2015); abundance declines linearly as depth increases (Barlow 1988). In the eastern North Pacific, its range extends from Point Barrow, Alaska, to Point Conception, California.

In Alaska, there are three separate stocks of harbor porpoise: Southeast Alaska, GOA, and Bering Sea. The Southeast Alaska Stock occurs from northern B.C. to Cape Suckling, and the GOA Stock ranges from Cape Suckling to Unimak Pass. The population estimates for the Southeast Alaska, GOA, and Bering Sea stocks are 11,146, 31,046, and 48,215, respectively (Muto et al. 2016).

Harbor porpoise are seen regularly in the western GOA and Aleutian Islands (e.g., Wade et al. 2003; Waite 2003; Baraff et al. 2005; Ireland et al. 2005) and Bering Sea (Moore et al. 2002b). Harbor porpoises are also sighted in the eastern and central GOA and southeast Alaska (Dahlheim et al. 2000, 2008a; MacLean and Koski 2005; Rone et al. 2010). There were 30 sightings (89 animals) of harbor porpoise in 2009, eight sightings (11 animals) of harbor porpoise in 2013, and a single sighting of one harbor porpoise in 2015 during surveys in the U.S. Navy training area east of Kodiak (Rone et al. 2017). Harbor porpoise were not observed during the NSF/L-DEO seismic survey conducted in the summer of 2011 in the same area as the currently proposed survey (RPS 2011), but there was one sighting of two unidentified small odontocetes.

3.3.3 Pinnipeds

3.3.3.1 Northern Fur Seal (*Callorhinus ursinus*)

The northern fur seal is endemic to the North Pacific Ocean and occurs from southern California to the Bering Sea, Okhotsk Sea, and Honshu Island, Japan (Muto et al. 2018). During the breeding season, most of the worldwide population of northern fur seals inhabits the Pribilof Islands in the southern Bering Sea (Lee et al. 2014; Muto et al. 2018). The rest of the population occurs at rookeries on Bogoslof Island in the Bering Sea, in Russia (Commander Islands, Robben Island, Kuril Islands), on San Miguel Island in southern California (NMFS 1993; Lee et al. 2014), and on the Farallon Islands off central California (Muto et al. 2018). In the U.S., two stocks are recognized—the Eastern Pacific and the California stocks (Muto et al. 2018). The Eastern Pacific stock ranges from the Pribilof Islands and Bogoslof Island in the Bering Sea during summer to California during winter (Muto et al. 2018).

When not on rookery islands, northern fur seals are primarily pelagic but occasionally haul out on rocky shorelines (Muto et al. 2018). During the breeding season, adult males usually come ashore in May–August and may sometimes be present until November; adult females are found ashore from June–November (Carretta et al. 2017; Muto et al. 2018). After reproduction, northern fur seals spend the next 7–8 months feeding at sea (Roppel 1984). Once weaned, juveniles spend 2–3 years at sea before returning to rookeries. Animals may migrate to the GOA, off Japan, and the west coast of the U.S. (Muto et al. 2018). Pups travel through Aleutian passes and spend the first two years at sea before returning to their islands of origin.

In November, adult females and pups leave the Pribilof Islands and migrate into the North Pacific Ocean to areas including offshore Oregon and Washington (Ream et al. 2005). Males usually migrate only as far south as the GOA (Kajimura 1984). Ream et al. (2005) showed that migrating females moved over the continental shelf as they migrated southeasterly. Instead of following depth contours, their travel corresponded with movements of the Alaska Gyre and the North Pacific Current (Ream et al. 2005). Their foraging areas were associated with eddies, the subarctic-subtropical transition region, and coastal mixing (Ream et al. 2005; Alford et al. 2005). Some juveniles and non-pregnant females may remain in the GOA

throughout the summer (Calkins 1986).

Robson et al. (2004) reported that female fur seals from St. Paul and St. George islands traveled in different directions. They also observed habitat separation among breeding sites on the same island (Robson et al. 2004). Lactating females from the same breeding site share a foraging area, whereas females from different sites tend to forage in different areas (Robson et al. 2004). Females from both islands traveled for similar durations and maximum distances (Robson et al. 2004).

Northern fur seals were seen throughout the North Pacific during surveys conducted during 1987–1990 (Buckland et al. 1993). Tracked adult male fur seals that were tagged on St. Paul Island in the Bering Sea in October 2009, wintered in the Bering Sea or northern North Pacific Ocean; females migrated to the GOA and the California Current (Sterling et al. 2014).

A total of 42 northern fur seals was seen during 3767 km of shipboard surveys in the northwestern GOA during June–July 1987 (Brueggeman et al. 1988). Leatherwood et al. (1983) reported 14 sightings of 34 northern fur seals away from the breeding islands in the southeast Bering Sea during aerial surveys in 1982, mostly during July and August. No fur seals were seen during summer surveys in the GOA in 2004 and 2008 (MacLean and Koski 2005; Hauser and Holst 2009) or during spring surveys in 2009 (Rone et al. 2010). None of the 42 female northern fur seals tagged on St Paul Island between August–October 2007 and 2008 traveled south of the Aleutian Islands (Kuhn et al. 2010). Rone et al. (2014) reported 78 northern fur seal sightings (83 animals) in 2013 in the U.S. Navy training area east of Kodiak and calculated densities for four habitat strata: 0.015/km² for the inshore stratum, 0.017/km² for the offshore stratum, 0.006/km² for the seamount stratum, and 0.004/km² for the slope stratum, with an overall density of 0.011/km² for the area. They also provided an abundance estimate (uncorrected for missed animals) for the area of 1770 northern fur seals. There were seven sightings, representing 7 northern fur seals, during the NSF/L-DEO seismic survey conducted in the summer of 2011 in the same area as the currently proposed survey (RPS 2011).

3.3.3.2 Steller Sea Lion (*Eumetopias jubatus*)

The Steller sea lion occurs along the North Pacific Rim from northern Japan to California (Loughlin et al. 1984). They are distributed around the coasts to the outer shelf from northern Japan through the Kuril Islands and Okhotsk Sea, through the Aleutian Islands, central Bering Sea, southern Alaska, and south to California (NMFS 2016c). There are two stocks, or DPSs, of Steller sea lions – the Western and Eastern DPSs, which are divided at 144°W longitude (NMFS 2016c). The Western DPS is listed as *endangered* and includes animals that occur in Japan and Russia (NMFS 2016c; Muto et al. 2017); the Eastern DPS was delisted from *threatened* in 2013 (NMFS 2013a). Critical habitat has been designated 20 n.mi. around all major haulouts and rookeries, as well as three large foraging areas (NMFS 2017b). The critical habitat of both stocks is currently under review in light of the delisting of the Eastern DPS (Muto et al. 2018). Critical habitat as well as “no approach” zones occur within the proposed study area. “No approach” zones are restricted areas wherein no vessel may approach within 3 n.mi. (5.6 km) of listed rookeries (50 CFR 223.202). Only individuals from the Western DPS are expected to occur in the proposed survey area. The Eastern DPS is estimated at 41,638 (Muto et al. 2017) and appears to have increased at an annual rate of 4.76% between 1989 and 2015 (Muto et al. 2018).

Rookeries of Steller sea lions from the Western DPS are located on the Aleutian Islands and along the Gulf of Alaska, as well as the east coast of Kamchatka, Commander Islands, and Kuril Islands (Burkanov and Loughlin 2005; Fritz et al. 2016; Muto et al. 2017). Breeding adults occupy rookeries from late-May to early-July (NMFS 2008). Non-breeding adults use haulouts or occupy sites at the periphery of rookeries during the breeding season (NMFS 2008). Pupping occurs from mid-May to mid-July (Pitcher and Calkins 1981) and peaks in June (Pitcher et al. 2002). Territorial males fast and remain on land during

the breeding season (NMFS 2008). Females with pups generally stay within 30 km of the rookeries in shallow (30–120 m) water when feeding (NMFS 2008). Tagged juvenile sea lions showed localized movements near shore (Briggs et al. 2005). Loughlin et al. (2003) reported that most (88%) at-sea movements of juvenile Steller sea lions in the Aleutian Islands were short (<15 km) foraging trips. The mean distance of juvenile sea lion trips at sea was 16.6 km and the maximum trip distance recorded was 447 km. Long-range trips represented 6% of all trips at sea, and trip distance and duration increase with age (Loughlin et al. 2003; Call et al. 2007). Although Steller sea lions are not considered migratory, foraging animals can travel long distances outside of the breeding season (Loughlin et al. 2003; Raum-Suryan et al. 2002).

Steller sea lions are present in Alaska year-round, with centers of abundance in the GOA and Aleutian Islands. There are five major rookery sites within the study area in the northern GOA: Chirikof, Chowiet, Atkins, Chernabura islands, and Pinnacle Rock. There are also numerous haulout sites located within the study area (see Fig. 1); most haulout sites on Kodiak Island (and within the study area) are used year-round (e.g., Wynne 2005). Counts are highest in late summer (Wynne 2005). Sea lion counts in the central GOA, including Kodiak Island, were reported to be declining between 1999 and 2003 (Sease and Gudmundson 2002; Wynne 2005). Evidence suggests that counts in Alaska were lowest in 2002 and 2003, but between 2003 and 2016 pup and non-pup counts have increased by 2.19%/year and 2.24%/year, respectively (Muto et al. 2018). These rates vary regionally, with the highest rates of increase in the eastern Gulf of Alaska and a steadily decreasing rate of increase heading west to the Aleutian Islands.

Steller sea lions are an important subsistence resource for Alaska Natives from southeast Alaska to the Aleutian Islands. There are numerous communities along the shores of the GOA that participate in subsistence hunting. In 2008, 19 sea lions were taken in the Kodiak Island region and 9 were taken along the South Alaska Peninsula (Wolfe et al. 2009). As of 2009, data on community subsistence harvests are no longer being collected consistently so no data are available. The most recent 5 years of data available (2004–2008) show an annual average catch of 172 steller sea lions for all areas in Alaska combined except the Pribilof Islands in the Bering Sea (Muto et al. 2018).

The U.S. DoN (2014) estimates a density of 0.0098/km² for this species year-round in its training area east of Kodiak. There was one sighting of 18 Steller sea lions during the NSF/L-DEO seismic survey conducted in the summer of 2011 in the same area as the currently proposed survey (RPS 2011).

3.3.3.3 Northern Elephant Seal (*Mirounga angustirostris*)

Northern elephant seals breed in California and Baja California, primarily on offshore islands (Stewart et al. 1994), from December–March (Stewart and Huber 1993). Adult elephant seals engage in two long northward migrations per year, one following the breeding season, and another following the annual molt, with females returning earlier to molt (March–April) than males (July–August) (Stewart and DeLong 1995). Juvenile elephant seals typically leave the rookeries in April or May and head north, traveling an average of 900–1000 km. Hindell (2009) noted that traveling likely takes place in water depths >200 m.

When not breeding, elephant seals feed at sea far from the rookeries, ranging as far north as 60°N, into the GOA and along the Aleutian Islands (Le Boeuf et al. 2000). Some seals that were tracked via satellite-tags for no more than 224 days traveled distances in excess of 10,000 km during that time (Le Boeuf et al. 2000). Northern elephant seals that were satellite-tagged at a California rookery have been recorded traveling as far west as ~166.5–172.5°E (Le Boeuf et al. 2000; Robinson et al. 2012; Robinson 2016 *in* OBIS 2018; Costa 2017 *in* OBIS 2018). Post-molting seals traveled longer and farther than post-breeding seals (Robinson et al. 2012). Rone et al. (2014) reported 16 northern fur seal sightings (16 animals) in a June–July 2013 survey in the U.S. Navy training area east of Kodiak. The U.S. DoN (2014) estimates a cold water (winter/spring) density of 0.0024/km² and warm water (summer/fall) density of 0.0022/km² for

this species in its GOA training area east of Kodiak. Northern elephant seal males could occur in the GOA throughout the year (Calkins 1986).

3.3.3.4 California Sea Lion (*Zalophus californianus*)

The primary range of the California sea lion includes the coastal areas and offshore islands of the eastern North Pacific Ocean from BC, Canada, to central Mexico, including the Gulf of California (Jefferson et al. 2015). However, its distribution is expanding (Jefferson et al. 2015), and its secondary range extends into the GOA where it is occasionally recorded (Maniscalco et al. 2004) and southern Mexico (Gallo-Reynoso and Solórzano-Velasco 1991). California sea lions are coastal animals that often haul out on shore throughout the year. King (1983) noted that sea lions are rarely found more than 16 km offshore. During fall and winter surveys off Oregon/Washington, mean distance from shore was ~13 km (Bonnell et al. 1992).

California sea lion rookeries are on islands located in southern California, western Baja California, and the Gulf of California (Carretta et al. 2016a). A single stock is recognized in U.S. waters: the U.S. Stock. Five genetically distinct geographic populations have been identified: (1) Pacific Temperate (includes rookeries in U.S. waters and the Coronados Islands to the south), (2) Pacific Subtropical, (3) Southern Gulf of California, (4) Central Gulf of California, and (5) Northern Gulf of California (Schramm et al. 2009). Animals from the Pacific Temperate population occur in the proposed project area. California sea lions that are sighted in Alaska are typically seen at Steller sea lion rookeries or haulouts, with most sightings occurring between March and May, although they can be found in the GOA year-round (Maniscalco et al. 2004). The U.S. DoN (2014) estimates a density of 0.00001/km² for this species year-round in its training area east of Kodiak

3.3.3.5 Harbor Seal (*Phoca vitulina*)

The harbor seal is distributed in the North Atlantic and North Pacific. Two subspecies occur in the Pacific: *P.v. stejnegeri* in the northwest Pacific Ocean and *P.v. richardii* in the eastern Pacific Ocean. Eastern Pacific harbor seals occur in nearshore, coastal, and estuarine areas ranging from Baja California, Mexico, north to the Pribilof Islands in Alaska (Muto et al. 2016). Harbor seals inhabit estuarine and coastal waters, hauling out on rocks, reefs, beaches, and glacial ice flows. They are generally non-migratory, but move locally with the tides, weather, season, food availability, and reproduction (Scheffer and Slipp 1944; Fisher 1952; Bigg 1969, 1981). Twelve stocks of harbor seals are recognized in Alaska (Muto et al. 2016). The proposed survey would take place within the range of three of these stocks: North Kodiak, South Kodiak, and Cook Inlet/Shelikof Strait stocks. Nearby stocks are the Aleutian Islands, Prince William Sound, and Glacier Bay/Icy Strait stocks. There are two stocks in the Bering Sea (Bristol Bay and Pribilof Islands) and four stocks in southeast Alaska.

Female harbor seals give birth to a single pup while hauled out on shore or on glacial ice flows; pups are born from May to mid-July. The mother and pup remain together until weaning occurs at 3–6 weeks (Bishop 1967; Bigg 1969). When molting, which occurs primarily in late August, seals spend the majority of the time hauled out on shore, glacial ice, or other substrates. Juvenile harbor seals can travel significant distances (525 km) to forage or disperse, whereas adults were generally found within 190 km of their tagging location in Prince William Sound, Alaska (Lowry et al. 2001). The smaller home range used by adults is suggestive of a strong site fidelity (Pitcher and Calkins 1979; Pitcher and McAllister 1981; Lowry et al. 2001). Pups tagged in the GOA most commonly undertook multiple return trips of more than 75 km from natal areas, followed by movements of <25 km from the natal area (Small et al. 2005). Pups tagged in Prince William Sound traveled a mean maximum distance of 43.2 km from their tagging location, whereas those tagged in the GOA moved a mean maximum distance of 86.6 km (Small et al. 2005).

Harbor seals are an important subsistence resource for Alaska Natives in the northern GOA. In 2011–2012, 37 harbor seals were taken from the North Kodiak Stock and 126 harbor seals were taken from the South Kodiak Stock by communities on Kodiak Island (Muto et al. 2016). The number taken from the Cook Inlet/Shelikof Strait Stock for 2011–2012 is unknown, but an average of 233 were taken from this stock annually during 2004–2008 (Muto et al. 2016).

The U.S. DoN (2014) estimates a density of 0.00001/km² for this species year-round in its training area east of Kodiak. There was one sighting of nine harbor seals during the NSF/L-DEO seismic survey conducted in the summer of 2011 in the same area as the currently proposed survey (RPS 2011). Harbor seals could be encountered in the proposed survey area.

3.3.3.6 Pacific Walrus (*Odobenus rosmarus divergens*)

The walrus occurs in moving pack ice over shallow waters of the circumpolar arctic coast (King 1983). There are two subspecies, the Atlantic walrus (*O. r. rosmarus*) and the Pacific walrus (*O. r. divergens*). The Pacific walrus ranges from the Bering Sea to the Chukchi Sea, occasionally moving to the East Siberian and Beaufort seas. Walruses are migratory, moving south with the advancing ice in autumn and north as the ice recedes in spring (Fay 1981). In summer, most of the population of the Pacific walrus moves to the Chukchi Sea, but several thousand aggregate in the Gulf of Anadyr and in Bristol Bay (Allen and Angliss 2010). During the late winter breeding season, walrus concentrations occur from the Gulf of Anadyr to southwest of St. Lawrence Island, and in the southeast Bering Sea, from south of Nunivak Island to northwestern Bristol Bay.

A single stock of Pacific walrus is recognized in the U.S. – the Alaska Stock (USFWS 2014a). The Pacific walrus is vagrant to the GOA (Fay 1982). Two walruses were seen during surveys of the southern Alaska Peninsula in July 1979 at Spitz and Mitrofanina Islands (Bailey and Faust 1981). Walruses have also been reported that summer in Chignik Bay (Bailey and Faust 1981). No Pacific walruses were sighted during the NSF/L-DEO seismic survey conducted in the summer of 2011 in the same area as the currently proposed survey (RPS 2011). Walruses likely would not be encountered during the proposed survey.

3.3.4 Marine Fissiped

3.3.4.1 Northern Sea Otter (*Enhydra lutris*)

There are two subspecies of sea otters in U.S. waters. The southern sea otter (*E. l. nereis*) is found in California and the northern sea otter (*E. l. kenyoni*) can be found in Washington and Alaska. Sea otters generally occur in shallow (<35 m), nearshore waters in areas with sandy or rocky bottoms, where they feed on a wide variety of sessile and slow-moving benthic invertebrates (Rotterman and Simon-Jackson 1988). Sea otters in Alaska are generally not migratory and do not disperse over long distances. However, individual sea otters are capable of long-distance movements of >100 km (Garshelis and Garshelis 1984), although movements are likely limited by geographic barriers, high energy requirements of animals, and social behavior. Before commercial exploitation, the worldwide population of sea otters was estimated to be between 150,000 (Kenyon 1969) and 300,000 (Johnson 1982). Sea otters occupied coastal areas from Hokkaido, Japan, around the North Pacific Rim to central Baja California (Rotterman and Simon-Jackson 1988). Commercial exploitation reduced the total sea otter population to as low as 2000 in 13 locations (Kenyon 1969). In 1911, sea otters received protection under the North Pacific Fur Seal Convention, and populations recovered quickly (Kenyon 1969).

Three stocks (DPSs) of sea otters are recognized in Alaska: the Southeast Alaska Stock, from Dixon Entrance to Cape Yakataga; the Southcentral Alaska Stock, from Cape Yakataga to Cook Inlet, including PWS, the Kenai Peninsula, and Kachemak Bay; and the Southwest Alaska Stock, from the Alaska Peninsula

and Bristol Bay coasts, and the Aleutian, Barren, Kodiak, and Pribilof Islands (USFWS 2014b). The Southwest Alaska DPS of the sea otter occurs in the proposed study area; it is listed as Threatened under the ESA. This DPS had declined by more than 50% since the mid-1980s when it was listed as threatened in 2005 (USFWS 2013). However, the most recent estimate for the size of this stock is 54,772 (USFWS 2014b). The population declined substantially in the Aleutian Islands from 1993 to 2003 but now appears to be stable (i.e., growth rate ~ 0), and populations numbers in the Kodiak Archipelago, the Alaska Peninsula, and Kamishak Bay appear to be stable and perhaps increasing (USFWS 2014b). Critical habitat for the Southwest Alaska DPS of the northern sea otter was designated in November 2009 (USFWS 2009a). The critical habitat primarily consists of shallow-water areas <20 m deep and nearshore water within 100 m of the mean tide line. The representative survey lines have been designed to avoid the ensonification of sea otter critical habitat above 160 dB re 1 μ Pa (Fig. 3).

Sea otters are an important subsistence resource for Alaska Natives from southeast Alaska to the Aleutian Islands. There are numerous communities along the shores of the GOA that participate in subsistence hunting. For 2006–2010, the average subsistence takes of northern sea otters were 293 animals for the Southcentral Alaska Stock, 447 animals for the Southeast Alaska Stock, and 76 for the Southwest Alaska Stock (USFWS 2014b,c,d).

During surveys between Mitrofanina and Sutwik islands in July 1979, most otters were seen around Unavikshak Island; large numbers were also seen around Sutwik Island, and a few sea otters were seen between Kuiuikta and Warner bays (Bailey and Faust 1981). Rone et al. (2010) sighted one sea otter off southern Kodiak Island during surveys in April 2009. During vessel-based sea otter surveys in the Aleutian Islands in 2000, sea otter encounter rates were 0.61–5.19/km (Doroff et al. 2003). There were three sightings representing 39 northern sea otters during the NSF/L-DEO seismic survey conducted in the summer of 2011 in the same area as the currently proposed survey (RPS 2011).

3.4 Sea Turtles

Two species of sea turtles could occur in or near the proposed survey area, including the *endangered* leatherback turtle and the *threatened* Central North Pacific DPS and East Pacific DPS of the green turtle (Márquez 1990; ADF&G 2010a). Although far less common, the olive ridley turtle (*Lepidochelys olivacea*) and loggerhead turtle (*Caretta caretta*) have also been recorded in Alaska waters. The leatherback is the most likely turtle species to occur in the relatively cold water of the proposed project area. The other species are considered warm-water species and would be extralimital (ADF&G 2010a). There were no sightings of sea turtles during the NSF/L-DEO seismic survey conducted in the summer of 2011 in the same area as the currently proposed survey (RPS 2011). Any sea turtles occurring in the GOA would be non-nesting individuals. General information on the taxonomy, ecology, distribution and movements, and acoustic capabilities of sea turtles are given in § 3.4.1 of the PEIS. General distribution of sea turtles in the GOA is discussed in § 3.4.2.4 of the PEIS. The rest of this section deals specifically with their distribution within the proposed survey area.

3.4.1 Leatherback Turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*)

The leatherback turtle is the most widely distributed sea turtle, ranging far from its tropical and subtropical breeding grounds to feed (Plotkin 2003). It is found from 71°N to 47°S, and nesting occurs from 38°N to 34°S (Eckert et al. 2012). In the eastern Pacific, leatherbacks nest along the west coast of Mexico and Central America (Marquez 1990); critical habitat has been designated off the U.S. west coast (NMFS 2017b).

After nesting, female leatherbacks typically migrate from tropical waters to temperate areas, where

higher densities of jellyfish occur in the summer (NMFS 2016d). Leatherbacks tend to feed in areas of high productivity, such as current fronts and upwelling areas, along continental margins, and in archipelagic waters (Morreale et al. 1994; Lutcavage 1996). Hatchling leatherbacks are pelagic, but nothing is known about their distribution for the first four years (Musick and Limpus 1997). Leatherbacks are highly pelagic and are known to swim more than 11,000 km each year (Eckert 1998). They are one of the deepest divers in the ocean, with dives deeper than 4000 m (Spotila 2004). The leatherback dives continually and spends short periods of time on the surface between dives (Eckert et al. 1986). During migrations or long distance movements, leatherbacks maximize swimming efficiency by traveling within 5 m of the surface (Eckert 2002).

Adult leatherbacks appear to migrate along bathymetric contours from 200–3500 m (Morreale et al. 1994). They appear to use the Kuroshio Extension (north of Hawaii) during migrations from Indonesia to the high seas and the eastern Pacific (Benson et al. 2008). The westward migration, from foraging grounds along the west coast of North America to western Pacific nesting sites, is believed to be south of Hawaii (Eckert pers. comm. *in* DoN 2005). It is not known whether most leatherbacks in the central Pacific Ocean come from eastern or western Pacific nesting sites, but individuals from both nesting areas occur in Hawaiian waters (Dutton et al. 1998; 2000a,b).

After analyzing some 363 records of sea turtles sighted along the Pacific coast of North America, Stinson (1984) concluded that the leatherback was the most common sea turtle in U.S. waters north of Mexico. Sightings and incidental capture data indicate that leatherbacks are found in Alaska as far north as 60°N, 145°W, and as far west as the Aleutian Islands, and documented encounters extend southward through the waters of B.C., Washington, Oregon, and California (NMFS and USFWS 1998a). Leatherbacks occur north of central California during the summer and fall, when sea surface temperatures are highest (Dohl et al. 1983; Brueggeman 1991). Some aerial surveys of California, Oregon, and Washington waters suggest that most leatherbacks occur in continental slope waters and fewer occur over the continental shelf.

3.4.2 Green Turtle (*Chelonia mydas*)

The green turtle is widely distributed in tropical and subtropical waters near continental coasts and around islands, ranging from ~30°N to 30°S (NMFS 2016e). In the central Pacific, green turtles are found around most tropical islands, including Hawaii (NMFS 2016e). Green turtles can undertake long migrations from foraging areas to nesting sites (NMFS 2016e).

Mature females typically show nest-site fidelity and return to their natal beaches to nest repeatedly (NMFS and USFWS 2007d). Hatchlings swim to offshore areas where they are pelagic for several years (NMFS and USFWS 2007d). Subsequently, most green turtles travel to nearshore areas where they live in bays and along protected shorelines, and feed on algae and seagrass (NMFS 2016e). While in oceanic habitats near Hawaii, green turtles feed on jellyfish and other pelagic prey (Parker and Balazs 2008). Juvenile and sub-adult green turtles can travel thousands of kilometers before they return to breeding and nesting grounds (Carr et al. 1978).

In the eastern Pacific, green turtles nest at several locations on the Mexican mainland, Central America, and off the coast of Colombia and Ecuador. The primary nesting grounds are located in Michoacán, Mexico, and the Galápagos Islands, Ecuador (NMFS and USFWS 2007). Nesting occurs in Michoacán from August to January, with a peak in October–November, and on the Galápagos Islands from December to May with a peak in February–March (Alvarado and Figueroa 1995). Stinson (1984) reviewed sea turtle sighting records from northern Baja California to Alaska, and determined that the East Pacific green turtle was the most commonly observed hard-shelled sea turtle on the U.S. Pacific coast. Most of the sightings (62%) were reported from northern Baja California and southern California. In the North Pacific,

the species has been documented as far north as southern Alaska (ADF&G 2010a).

3.5 Seabirds

Two seabird species for which there is concern related to declining numbers in portions of their range could occur in the survey area. The Steller's eider (*Polysticta stelleri*), which is listed as **Threatened**, is found in the area in low densities during the summer but is more common in the GOA during fall and winter. The **Endangered** short-tailed albatross (*Phoebastria albatrus*) may occur as a seasonal visitor to the project area. Both are considered **Vulnerable** by the IUCN (2018). The species is listed as **Endangered** on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species (IUCN 2018).

General information on the taxonomy, ecology, distribution and movements, and acoustic capabilities of seabird families is given in § 3.5.1 of the PEIS.

3.5.1 Short-tailed Albatross (*Phoebastria albatrus*)

Historically, millions of short-tailed albatrosses bred in the western North Pacific Ocean on islands off the coast of Japan. This species was the most abundant albatross in the North Pacific. However, the entire population was nearly extirpated during the last century by feather hunters at Japanese breeding colonies. In addition, the breeding grounds of the remaining birds were threatened by volcanic eruptions in the 1930s; this species was believed to be extinct in 1949 until it was rediscovered in 1951 (BirdLife International 2018a). However, this population is increasing, and the most recent population estimate is 4200 individuals (BirdLife International 2018a). Current threats to this population include volcanic activity on Torishima, commercial fisheries, and pollutants (USFWS 2008).

Currently, nearly all short-tailed albatrosses breed on two islands off the coast of Japan: Torishima and Minami-kojima (USFWS 2008; BirdLife International 2018a). Single nests have been found in recent years on other islands, including Kita-Kojima, Senkaku, Yomejima Island; and Midway Island, Hawaii; however, nesting attempts in Hawaii have not been successful (USFWS 2008). During the breeding season (December–May), the highest densities are found around Japan (BirdLife International 2018a). Parents forage primarily off the east coast of Honshu Island, where the warm Kuroshio and the cold Oyashio currents meet (USFWS 2008). However, albatrosses have been seen as far south (23°N) as the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands between November and April (USFWS 2008).

After the breeding season, short-tailed albatrosses roam much of the North Pacific Ocean; females spend more time offshore from Japan and Russia, while males and juveniles spend more time around the Aleutian Islands and Bering Sea (Suryan et al. 2007). Post-breeding dispersal occurs from April through November (Suryan et al. 2007; USFWS 2008). They are considered a continental shelf-edge specialist (Piatt et al. 2006). However, Suryan et al. (2007) reported that short-tailed albatrosses occasionally transit the northern boundary of the Kuroshio Extension in May while en route to the Aleutians and Bering Sea, but that they do not spend much time in the area. Short-tailed albatrosses, particularly juveniles, start appearing in the Aleutian Islands as early as June (USFWS 2008b), but most birds travel to the Aleutians in September (Suryan et al. 2006). This species can be found throughout the Aleutians and GOA during the summer and early fall (USFWS 2008b; Suryan et al. 2006, 2007).

3.5.2 Steller's Eider (*Polysticta stelleri*)

There are three breeding populations of Steller's eiders worldwide: two in Arctic Russia and one in Alaska. The largest population breeds across coastal eastern Siberia and may number >128,000 (Hodges and Eldridge 2001). Smaller numbers breed in western Russia and on the Arctic Coastal Plain of Alaska. Steller's eider was listed as **Threatened** under the ESA in July 1997 because of a reduction in the number

of breeding birds and suspected reduction in the breeding range in Alaska (USFWS 1997).

Although Steller's eiders were formerly common breeders in the Yukon-Kuskokwim (Y-K) Delta, numbers there declined drastically, and only a small subpopulation breeds there now (Kertell 1991; Flint and Herzog 1999; Birdlife International 2018b). Flint and Herzog (1999) reported single Steller's eider nests in the Y-K Delta in 1994, 1996, and 1997, and three nests in 1998. Steller's eiders continue to nest in extremely low numbers in the Y-K Delta (MMS 2006). Steller's eider density on the Arctic Coastal Plain is low, with the highest densities reported near Barrow (Ritchie and King 2001, 2002 in USFWS 2002).

Mallek et al. (2006) reported lower than average population indices for Steller's eiders on the North Slope of Alaska for the period 2000–2005, when the indices ranged from 0 to 563 birds. The long-term average for the index had been 968 for the period 1986–2001 (Mallek et al. 2003). Larned et al. (2009) also reported a decreasing population growth rate for Steller's eiders during eider breeding pair surveys on the North Slope, but the numbers detected were so few that the survey was used primarily to document occurrence and long-term distribution rather than to detect a meaningful trend. Based on comparisons of historical and recent data, Quakenbush et al. (2002) suggested that a reduction in both occurrence and breeding frequency of Steller's eiders had occurred on the Arctic Coastal Plain with the exception of the Barrow area. Larned (2005a) also reported a declining trend during annual spring surveys for Steller's eiders in the Bristol Bay area during migration. Flint et al. (2000) noted a lower survival rate in males than in females.

In Alaska, Steller's eiders nest on tundra habitats often associated with polygonal ground both near the coast and at inland locations (e.g., Quakenbush et al. 2004); nests have been found as far inland as 90 km (USFWS 2002). Emergent *Carex* and *Arctophila* provide important areas for feeding and cover. At Barrow, Steller's eiders apparently nest during high lemming years when predators, such as snowy owl (*Nyctea scandiaca*) and pomarine jaeger (*Stercorarius pomarinus*), that feed on lemmings are also nesting (Quakenbush et al. 2004). Steller's eiders, as well as snowy owls and pomarine jaegers, may not nest at all during low lemming years. This cycle has been consistent since the initiation of intensive studies of Steller's eider nesting biology in the Barrow area in 1991 and has continued through 2006 (Quakenbush et al. 1995, 2004; Obritschkewitsch et al. 2001; Obritschkewitsch and Martin 2002a,b; Rojek and Martin 2003; Rojek 2007). Theoretically, an ample supply of lemmings may divert potential predators away from eider eggs and chicks, thus making it more advantageous for eiders to nest during years of high lemming populations (Quakenbush et al. 2004). Some evidence also suggests that Steller's eiders may benefit by nesting close to nests of avian predators such as jaegers and snowy owls; these aggressive birds defend their own nests against other predators, and eider nests located nearby may benefit when potential predators are driven from the area (Quakenbush et al. 2004).

Steller's eiders move to nearshore marine habitats after breeding (Fredrickson 2001). The young Steller's eiders hatch in late June. Male departure from the breeding grounds begins in late June or early July. Females that fail in breeding attempts may remain in the Barrow area into late summer. Females and fledged young depart the breeding grounds in early to mid-September.

The molting period occurs from late July to late October (USFWS 2002). Molting occurs throughout southwest Alaska, but is concentrated at four areas along the north side of the Alaska Peninsula; molting areas tend to be shallow areas with eelgrass beds and intertidal sand flats and mudflats (USFWS 2002). During the molt, winter, and spring migration, the Alaska breeding population mixes with the Russian-Pacific population in the waters of southwest Alaska (USFWS 2002).

During the non-breeding season, Steller's eiders that nested on the Arctic Coastal Plain may use lagoon systems and coastal bays from Barrow to Cape Lisburne, the northeast Chukotka coast, and

numerous locations in southwest Alaska (USFWS 2002). Steller's eiders are known to occur in shallow marine habitats of Kodiak Island, the south side of the Alaska Peninsula, and the eastern Aleutian Islands to lower Cook Inlet, with stragglers occurring south to B.C. during the non-breeding season. There are four locations along the north coast of the Alaska Peninsula that are particularly important for molting and staging Steller's eiders: the Izembek Lagoon, Nelson Lagoon, Port Heiden, and Seal Islands. Photographic surveys during spring migration in late April of 2012 recorded 24,108 in the Izembek Lagoon, 5,767 in Nelson Lagoon, 5,960 in the Seal Islands Lagoon, and 6,127 in Port Heiden (Larned 2012). Surveys of molting Steller's eider from 26 August to 2 September 2016 recorded 6,457 at the Izembek Lagoon, 24,716 at Nelson Lagoon, 8,484 at Seal Islands Lagoon, and 368 at Port Heiden (Williams et al 2016). Steller's eiders may begin to arrive in the proposed project area in late August or September. However, they are considered to be uncommon in the Kodiak Island Archipelago during the fall (MacIntosh 1998). During the winter and spring, they are more common in the Kodiak area. Larned (2005b) reported over 2000 Steller's eiders in Kamishak Bay in lower Cook Inlet during an aerial survey on 14 September 2005. During aerial surveys conducted in 2004 and 2005, the numbers of Steller's eiders in lower Cook Inlet, which is adjacent to the proposed project area, peaked in January (Larned 2006).

Causes for the decline of the Steller's eider population in Alaska are unknown but may include increased predation pressure on the North Slope and Y-K Delta breeding grounds, subsistence harvest, ingestion of lead shot, and contaminants (Quakenbush and Snyder-Conn 1993). Flint et al. (2000) suggested that a decrease in adult survival may have brought on the long-term decline in the population. Bustnes and Systad (2001) also suggested that Steller's eiders may have specialized feeding behavior that may limit the availability of winter foraging habitat. Steller's eiders could be affected by global climate regime shifts that cause changes in prey communities.

The USFWS has established Steller's eider critical habitat in the Y-K Delta nesting area, the Kuskokwim Shoals, and at the Seal Island, Nelson Lagoon, and Izembek Lagoon units on the Alaska Peninsula (USFWS 2004), but none of these areas occur within the proposed study area. Strategies for recovery of the Alaska breeding population of Steller's eiders are discussed in detail in the Steller's Eider Recovery Plan (USFWS 2002).

3.6 Corals

There are 137 distinct taxa of corals that occur throughout Alaskan waters, including octocorals (89 taxa), hydrocorals (24 taxa), antipatharians (12 taxa), and scleractinian corals (12 taxa) (Stone and Cairns 2017). The Aleutian Islands region supports the highest abundance and diversity of corals in Alaska with 96 taxa recorded (Heifetz 2000; Stone and Cairns 2017). The Western GOA, including the survey area, has 24 taxa of coral (Stone and Cairns 2017), which are patchily distributed across the continental shelf and slope, with some dense groves of gorgonians and sea pens (Stone and Shotwell 2007). Coral diversity is lower in deep water, although corals may be found at depths greater than 4700 m (Alaska Science Outreach 2004; Stone and Shotwell 2007). The most diverse communities occur at 300–350 m and continue to a lesser degree down to 800 m (Alaska Science Outreach 2004). These ecologically important coral communities provide structure and refuge for fish and invertebrates, especially juveniles (Stone and Shotwell 2007), and in the central Aleutian Islands, 84.7% of commercial fish and crab species were associated with corals and other epibenthic invertebrate structures (Stone 2006). Several areas in the GOA with coral communities have been designated as habitat areas of particular concern (HAPC) for fish (see Fig. 1).

3.7 Fish, Essential Fish Habitat, and Habitat Areas of Particular Concern

3.7.1 ESA-Listed Fish Species

There are no ESA-listed fish species that have critical habitat in Alaska. However, there are several ESA-listed fish species that spawn on the West Coast of the Lower 48 United States and may occur in Alaskan waters during the marine phases of their life cycles. Species listed as **Endangered** include the sockeye salmon (*Oncorhynchus nerka*; Snake River Evolutionarily Significant Unit [ESU]) and chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*; Upper Columbia River spring-run ESU). Species listed as **Threatened** include the green sturgeon (*Acipenser medirostris*; Southern DPS), chum salmon (*Oncorhynchus keta*; Hood Canal summer-run ESU), coho salmon (*Oncorhynchus kisutch*; Lower Columbia River ESU), steelhead trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*; Snake River Basin DPS, Upper Willamette River DPS, and Lower, Middle, Upper Columbia River DPSs), and chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*; Lower Columbia River ESU, Upper Willamette River ESU, Puget Sound ESU, Snake River fall-run ESU, Snake River spring/summer-run ESU) (NOAA 2018a). The Alaskan populations of these species, which are more likely to be encountered near the survey area, are not listed under the ESA.

3.7.2 Important Fish Resources

The GOA supports substantial ESA non-listed finfish resources, including groundfish, forage fish, rockfish, and salmonids, that are important to the area both biologically and economically. Additionally, there are important shellfish and invertebrate resources.

3.7.2.1 Groundfish

Walleye pollock (*Theragra chalcogramma*) occupy demersal habitats along the outer continental shelf (OCS) and slope during winter. They migrate into shallower waters and aggregate for spawning in the Shumagin Islands between 15 February and 1 March, and in Shelikof Strait typically between 15 March 15 and 1 April. Walleye pollock in the GOA are managed as a single stock (Dorn et al. 2007).

Pacific cod (*Gadus macrocephalus*) has been an important commercial species in Alaska since 1882 (Rigby 1984). Pacific cod inhabit waters of the continental shelf and upper continental slope waters (100–250 m deep) in the winter (Hart 1973) and move to water <100 m deep in the summer (NOAA 2004c). They are moderately fast growing and short lived compared to many other Alaskan groundfish. Spawning generally occurs from January to April in waters 40–120 m deep (Klovach et al. 1995). Eggs and winter concentrations of adults have been found to be associated with coarse sand and cobble bottom types, and it has been inferred that this is optimal spawning habitat (Palsson 1990). Larvae and juveniles are pelagic, and there is some evidence that both larvae and juveniles are transported to nursery habitats by currents (Garrison and Miller 1982). Nursery habitats are associated with shallow water and intertidal areas with a sandy bottom and kelp or eel grass (Miller et al. 1976). It has been suggested that, with increasing size and age, juveniles move into deeper water (Brodeur et al. 1995).

Sablefish (*Anoplopoma fimbria*) inhabit the northeastern Pacific Ocean from northern Mexico to the GOA, westward to the Aleutian Islands, and into the Bering Sea (Wolotira et al. 1993). Adult sablefish occur along the continental slope, shelf gullies, and in deep fjords, generally at depths greater than 200 m. Sablefish observed from a manned submersible were found on or within 1 m of the bottom (Krieger 1997). In contrast to their adult distribution, juvenile sablefish (<40 cm long) spend their first two to three years on the continental shelf of the GOA. Sablefish are highly migratory for at least part of their life (Heifetz and Fujioka 1991; Maloney and Heifetz 1997; Kimura et al. 1998) and are assessed as a single population in Alaskan waters (Hanselman et al. 2007a).

The arrowtooth flounder (*Atheresthes stomias*) is the most abundant groundfish species in the GOA,

and it ranges from central California to the eastern Bering Sea (Turnock and Wilderbuer 2007) in water depths 20–800 m. Although their stock structure and migratory patterns are poorly understood, they do appear to move to deeper water as they grow (Zimmerman and Goddard 1996), but recent research suggests juveniles may be more ubiquitous across depths than previously thought (Doyle et al. 2018).

Pacific halibut (*Hippoglossus stenolepis*) spawn during the winter, primarily from December through February, off the edge of the continental shelf in waters 350–550 m deep (IPHC 1998). Males reach maturity at ~7 years of age and females at ~8 years. Females are highly fecund, laying two to three million eggs annually. Younger halibut, <10 years of age, are highly migratory and range throughout the GOA. Older halibut tend to be much less migratory; they often use both shallow and deep waters over the annual cycle, but they do not travel as much as the younger fish (IPHC 1998).

3.7.2.3 Other Groundfish

Other groundfish that are found in the waters of the project area include Atka mackerel (*Pleurogrammus monopterygius*), black rockfish (*Sebastes melanops*), lingcod (*Ophiodon elongatus*), yellowfin sole (*Limanda aspera*), starry flounder (*Platichthys stellatus*), and other flatfish, greenlings, scuplins, poachers, and pricklebacks, which inhabit the Kodiak and southern Aleutian Peninsula region (NPFMC 2015; Mecklenburg et al., 2002). These species generally are in the same habitats as the previously discussed groundfish species and are often food sources for other fish, birds, and mammals.

3.7.2.4 Forage Fish

Pacific herring (*Clupea pallasii*) is an abundant and widespread forage fish of the Gulf of Alaska. They are critical prey for a variety of fishes, mammals, and birds. Herring migrate in large schools and generally spawn in the spring. Herring spawn extensively along much of the Shelikof coast of Kodiak Island, and the southern Alaska Peninsula. After spawning, most adults leave inshore waters and move seaward to feed primarily on zooplankton such as copepods and other crustaceans. They are seasonal feeders and accumulate fat reserves for periods of relative inactivity. Herring schools often demonstrate a diel vertical migration, spending daylight hours near the seafloor and moving upward during the evening to feed (ADF&G 2015).

Other forage fish that are critical food sources to marine mammals, seabirds, and larger fish species and found near Kodiak and the Aleutian Peninsula region of the GOA include eulachon (*Thaleichthys pacificus*), capelin (*Mallotus villosus*), and Pacific sandlance (*Ammodytes hexapterus*) (Ormseth and Vollenweider 2018).

3.7.2.5 Salmonids

Pacific salmon (*Oncorhynchus* spp.) rear in the GOA and are managed in three regions based on freshwater drainage areas: southeast, central (Cook Inlet, PWS, and Bristol Bay), and westward (Alaska Peninsula, Chignik, and Kodiak). Although some Pacific salmon species are listed under the ESA in parts of their range, they are not listed in Alaska. Salmon distribution throughout the GOA varies by species and stock. All salmon except chinook generally spend the majority of their ocean life in offshore pelagic waters, bounded by brief periods of migration through coastal areas as juveniles and returning adults. Chinook salmon migrate through coastal areas as juveniles and returning adults, whereas adult chinook salmon undergo extensive migrations and can be found inshore and offshore throughout the North Pacific (Morrow 1980). Salmon are not targeted in high seas fisheries, but are targeted in nearshore waters with troll, gillnet, and seine gear.

3.7.2.6 Rockfish

Rockfishes (*Sebastes* spp.) range from southern California to the Bering Sea. At least 30 rockfish species inhabit Alaskan waters, with Pacific ocean perch (*S. alutus*) being the most common. Pacific ocean

perch are slow growing, bear live young, and reach a maximum age of ~30 years (Hart 1973). Males grow more slowly and have shorter life spans than do females. Rockfishes are internal fertilizers, with females releasing larvae. Pacific ocean perch release their larvae in winter. Larvae and juveniles are pelagic until joining adults in demersal habitats after two or three years. Adults are found primarily on the OCS and the upper continental slope in depths 150–420 m. In the summer, adults inhabit shallower depths, especially 150–300 m; in the fall, they migrate farther offshore to depths of ~300–420 m. They stay at these deeper depths until about May, when they return to their shallower summer depths (Love et al. 2002; Hanselman et al. 2007b).

3.7.2.7 Shellfish

Crab, shrimp, other crustaceans, and mollusks are harvested from Alaskan waters. All these species, grouped in this document as shellfish, inhabit benthic regions as adults, but can occupy pelagic waters as larvae. Three species of king crab (red, *Paralithodes camtschaticus*; blue, *P. platypus*; golden, *Lithodes aequispinus*) and two species of Tanner crab (Tanner, *Chionoecetes bairdi*; snow, *C. opilio*) occur in the GOA. *Pandalus* shrimp, Geoduck clam (*Panopea generosa*), spot prawn (*Pandalus platyceros*), and Weathervane scallop (*Patinopecten caurinus*) are also important shellfish resources. These are discussed further below.

3.7.3 Essential Fish Habitat

Under the 1976 *Magnuson Fisheries Conservation and Management Act* (renamed *Magnuson Stevens Fisheries Conservation and Management Act* in 1996), Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) is defined as “those waters and substrate necessary to fish for spawning, breeding, feeding, or growth to maturity”. “Waters” include aquatic areas and their associated physical, chemical, and biological properties that are used by fish. “Substrate” includes sediment, hard bottom, structures underlying the waters, and associated biological communities (NOAA 2018c).

EFH is identified for only those species managed under a federal Fishery Management Plan (FMP), which in the GOA includes groundfish, Pacific cod, sablefish, rockfish, scallops, and Pacific salmon. As the entire GOA has been designated as EFH, the proposed survey work would be conducted in areas designated as EFH. The *Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act* (16 U.S.C. §1801-1882) established Regional Fishery Management Councils and mandated that FMPs be developed to manage exploited fish and invertebrate species responsibly in federal waters of the U.S. When Congress reauthorized the act in 1996 as the Sustainable Fisheries Act, several reforms and changes were made. One change was to charge NMFS with designating and conserving EFH for species managed under existing FMPs; this mandate was intended to minimize, to the extent practicable, any adverse effects on habitat caused by fishing or non-fishing activities, and to identify other actions to encourage the conservation and enhancement of such habitat. EFH has been designated for groundfish species or species assemblages, salmonids, and invertebrates in different development stages in the GOA (Table 6). NSF consulted with NMFS on EFH.

TABLE 6. Species with Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) in the Gulf of Alaska.

Species	Eggs	Larvae	Early Juvenile	Late Juvenile	Adult
Walleye pollock	✓	✓	-	✓	✓
Pacific cod	✓	✓	-	✓	✓
Yellowfin sole	✓	✓	-	✓	✓
Arrowtooth flounder	-	✓	-	✓	✓
Northern rock sole	-	✓	-	✓	✓
Southern rock sole	-	✓	-	✓	✓
Alaska plaice	✓	✓	-	✓	✓
Rex sole	✓	✓	-	✓	✓
Dover sole	✓	✓	-	✓	✓
Flathead sole	✓	✓	-	✓	✓
Sablefish	✓	✓	-	✓	✓
Pacific ocean perch	-	✓	-	✓	✓
Shortraker rockfish	-	-	-	-	✓
Blackspotted/rougeye rockfish	-	-	-	-	✓
Northern rockfish	-	-	-	-	✓
Thornyhead rockfish	-	✓	✓	✓	✓
Yelloweye rockfish	-	✓	✓	✓	✓
Dusky rockfish	-	✓	-	-	✓
Atka mackerel	✓	✓	-	-	✓
Sculpins	-	-	-	✓	✓
Skates	-	-	-	-	✓
Sharks	-	-	-	-	-
Forage fish complex	-	-	-	-	-
Squid	-	-	-	✓	✓
Octopus	-	-	-	-	-
Chinook salmon*	-	-	✓	✓	✓
Chum salmon*	-	-	✓	✓	✓
Coho salmon*	-	-	✓	✓	✓
Pink salmon*	-	-	✓	✓	✓
Sockeye salmon*	-	-	✓	✓	✓
Weathervane scallop	-	-	-	✓	✓

-information currently unavailable.

* Salmon egg and larval life stages not included because they occur in freshwater.

Source: Most recent FMPs, available from North Pacific Fishery Management Council website, <http://npfmc.org>.

3.7.4 Habitat Areas of Particular Concern

A Habitat Area of Particular Concern (HAPC) is a subset of EFH that provides important ecological functions, is especially vulnerable to degradation, or includes habitat that is rare (NOAA 2018). In the GOA, 10 areas along the continental slope are designated as HAPCs; they are closed to bottom trawling to protect hard bottom that may be important to rockfish. These areas, which are thought to contain high relief bottom and coral communities, total 7155 km² (Witherell and Woodby 2005). Five small areas off southeast Alaska (a total of 46 km²) are closed to all bottom-contact fishing to protect dense thickets of red tree corals.

Another 15 areas offshore are closed to all bottom fishing to protect seamounts (NOAA 2018b). Additionally, all trawling has been prohibited east of longitude 140°W since 1998. HAPCs within and near the proposed survey area are shown in Figure 1.

3.8 Fisheries

3.8.1 Commercial Fisheries

The GOA supports many active fisheries. Most fishing in the GOA occurs over the relatively narrow continental shelf and slope. Principal groundfish fisheries in the GOA are directed at pollock, Pacific cod, sablefish, flatfish, and rockfish. Halibut, not included in the groundfish group, is another targeted species that is managed independently. In addition, the nearshore salmon fishery contributes to the overall value of the GOA fisheries. The total ex-vessel value of all domestic fish and shellfish in Alaska during 2016 was \$1.7 billion, with 51% of the value attributable to the groundfish fishery and 26% attributable to the salmon fishery (NOAA 2017). Catches of the main species or species groups for 2016 and 2017 are shown in Table 7.

Beginning in the early 1970s, foreign vessels were fishing walleye pollock in the GOA (Megrey 1989), but by 1988 the pollock fishery was operated by a wholly domestic fleet. The winter fishery targets pre-spawning fish for their valuable roe. All walleye pollock fishing in the GOA is shore based. Fishing in summer is generally around the east side of Kodiak Island and in nearshore waters of the Alaska Peninsula (Dorn et al. 2007). Foreign fleets trawled for rockfish in Alaskan waters in the early 1960s, which resulted in overfishing. The rockfish stocks have since rebounded to some extent, and currently most rockfish are caught with bottom or pelagic trawls. In 2017, none of the groundfish fishery stocks were overfished or undergoing overfishing (NOAA 2017).

Walleye pollock contributes a large percentage to the total groundfish harvest in the GOA. In 2018, acceptable biological catch (ABC) of walleye pollock in the GOA was projected at 170,265 metric tons (NOAA 2018d). Pacific cod has been an important commercial species in Alaska since 1882 (Rigby 1984) and was the second largest volume groundfish fishery in the GOA, after pollock, according to 2017 landings. However, the 2018 ABC of Pacific cod was reduced from 2017 by 80% in order to reduce fishing pressure on spawning biomass (NOAA 2017).

The Pacific halibut is a large flatfish harvested on the continental shelf throughout the North Pacific Ocean, primarily in the GOA. This species is managed internationally by the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) and the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC). The largest fisheries occur in the GOA, with smaller fisheries in the Bering Sea. Halibut are harvested by longline gear only, and the fishery is conducted as an Individual Transferable Quota fishery in Alaska.

TABLE 7. Total commercial catches in metric tons from the Gulf of Alaska in 2016 and 2017. See footnotes for data sources.

Species	Commercial Catch (t)	
	2016	2017
Walleye pollock	173,226	184,243
Pacific cod	39,544	33,115
Arrowtooth flounder	19,830	26,007
Pacific ocean perch	23,127	22,919
Sablefish	9,354	10,386
Shallow water flatfish	3,808	2,481

Northern rockfish	3,437	1,779
Dusky rockfish	3,328	2,587
Flathead sole	2,420	1,875
Rex sole	1,748	1,410
Atka mackerel	1,092	1,048
Big skate	2,101	1,565
Longnose skate	1,396	1,119
Other skates	1,666	1,472
Thornyheads	1,119	1,012
Sculpins	1,332	1,284
Sharks	2,016	1,505
Pacific halibut	7,600	7,998
Chinook salmon	2,211	1,431
Sockeye salmon	130,419	131,953
Coho salmon	12,529	14,883
Pink salmon	68,075	233,709
Chum salmon	53,374	86,932
Other rockfish	1,283	1,059
Shortraker rockfish	777	547
Rougheye and blackspotted rockfish	641	536
Deep water flatfish	238	241
Demersal shelf rockfish	117	124
Squid	239	44
Octopus	383	180
	Commercial Catch (t)	
	2014	2015
Tanner/Snow crab	26,308	37,648
King crab	7,938	7,666

Groundfish (<https://www.afsc.noaa.gov/REFM/Stocks/assessments.htm>)

Shellfish (https://www.afsc.noaa.gov/News/pdfs/Wholesale_Market_Profiles_for_Alaskan_Groundfish_and_Crab_Fisheries.pdf)

Salmon (http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyfisherysalmon.salmon_by_report_type)

Halibut (<https://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/fisheries-catch-landings>)

Sablefish (*Anoplopoma fimbria*), or black cod, is managed as a directed fishery in the GOA. It is long lived and occurs along the OCS in water depths >900 m. It is harvested primarily by longline and is under an Individual Transferable Quota program in all federal waters. Some sablefish is harvested as trawl bycatch or by pot gear.

At least 30 rockfish species inhabit Alaskan waters, with Pacific Ocean perch being the most common. In 1998, a prohibition on rockfish trawling was imposed for the GOA east of 140°W longitude; rockfish in the GOA are primarily caught in the western region and along the Aleutian Islands.

All five species of Pacific salmon occur in the GOA: chinook (*O. tshawytscha*), sockeye (*O. nerka*), chum (*O. keta*), coho (*O. kisutch*), and pink (*O. gorbuscha*). Sockeye is the most valuable commercial salmon species in Alaska, and the pink salmon is the most numerous; the two comprise most of the salmon catch in the GOA.

Large quantities of crab, shrimp, other crustaceans, and mollusks are harvested from Alaskan waters.

The most lucrative of the Alaska shellfish fisheries is the crab fishery. Three species of king crab (red, *Paralithodes camtschaticus*; blue, *P. platypus*; golden, *Lithodes aequispinus*) and two species of Tanner crab (Tanner, *Chionoecetes bairdi*; snow, *C. opilio*) traditionally have been harvested in the GOA. Statewide the peak harvests were 81,647 t of king crab in 1980 and 166,922 t of Tanner crab in 1991 (NOAA 2016). Historically, large harvests originated from the Kodiak area, but that fishery has failed to recover since its closure in 1983, and several other once important king and Tanner crab fishing grounds have been closed because of conservation concerns (Woodby et al. 2005; NOAA 2016). The average annual harvests during the 2011–2014 seasons were 7620 t of king crabs, worth \$122.5 million, and 30,708 t of snow crabs worth \$246.3 million. The majority of both the Tanner and king crab harvests were obtained from the Bering Sea. The predominant king crab commercial harvests are of red king crab from Bristol Bay, followed by golden king crab from the Aleutian Islands, and blue king crab from St. Matthew (NOAA 2016).

Pandalus shrimp, once a major component of the commercial GOA fishery, with landings reaching over 54,431 t in the 1970s, declined drastically in the early 1980s to harvests of ~1000 t between 1998 and 2017 (Woodby et al. 2005; ADF&G 2018a). The 2017 harvest of 1,288,068 pounds was worth a wholesale value of \$4.3 million (ADF&G 2018a). The primarily Kodiak-based fishery declined following a climate-induced regime shift concomitant with an increase in Pacific cod, a major shrimp predator. Small trawl fisheries continue in southeast Alaska, PWS, and the Kodiak area, as well as a pot fishery for spot prawns (*Pandalus platyceros*) in southeast Alaska (ADF&G 2018a).

The Weathervane scallop (*Patinopecten caurinus*) supports a sporadic commercial fishery in Alaska waters from Yakutat west to the eastern Aleutian Islands. Most dredging occurs at depth, between 70 and 110 m, where the scallops are aggregated in elongated beds parallel to the depth contours.

Geoduck clams (*Panopea generosa*), California sea cucumber (*Parastichopus californicus*), red sea urchin (*Mesocentrotus franciscanus*), and green sea urchin (*Strongylocentrotus droebachiensis*) are harvested in small hand-pick SCUBA diving fisheries in the GOA. Traditionally there is also a dive fishery for pinto abalone (*Haliotis kamschatkana*), which is now closed commercially (ADF&G 2018b).

3.8.2 Recreational and Subsistence Fisheries

Subsistence fisheries and subsistence hunting make up 0.9% of all harvest of fish and game statewide in Alaska, compared to 98.5% taken by commercial fisheries. Although a small sector overall, subsistence fishing provides crucial sustenance for local communities, on average providing ~275 pounds of food per person per year in rural Alaska (ADF&G 2014a). Of the estimated 34.3 million pounds of wild foods harvested in rural Alaska communities annually, subsistence fisheries contribute 53.2% from finfish and 3.2% from shellfish (ADF&G 2014a).

In the rural communities along the GOA, salmon species are the most targeted subsistence fish, making up 31.8% of total subsistence harvests (ADF&G 2014). In 2012, 935,470 salmon were harvested by subsistence fishers in Alaska (ADF&G 2012). Most of the salmon harvest consisted of chum salmon (39%), followed by sockeye (37%), coho (9%), chinook (8%), and pink (7%) (ADF&G 2012). The three management areas that fall within the study area (Kodiak, Alaska Peninsula, and Chignik) each contributed 5% or less to the total subsistence salmon harvest in 2015 (Fall et al. 2018). Set gillnets are the preferred subsistence harvest method for salmon, and there are no restrictions on specific streams, nor are there daily or annual limits to the number of fishes taken; there are restrictions to keep subsistence and commercial fisheries separate (ADF&G 2005). Bottomfish, Pacific herring, smelt, crustaceans, and mollusks are also caught by subsistence fishers in the northwestern GOA.

In 2014, the subsistence catch of halibut made up 2.3% of the total harvest, with 4506 subsistence

fishers taking 40,698 halibut, totaling 760,469 pounds (ADF&G 2014b). The majority of the catch (71%) was taken by setline, and 29% was taken by hand-operated fishing gear (ADF&G 2014b). Regulatory area 2C (Southeast Alaska) took the greatest percentage of the harvest (56%), followed by 3A (Southcentral Alaska; 32%) and 4E (East Bering Sea; 9%) (ADF&G 2014b). Rockfish and lingcod are also taken by subsistence halibut fishers (Fall and Koster 2008).

Recreational fisheries in Alaska are a small but economically valuable sector, taking less than 0.4% of total fisheries harvests in 2014 (ADF&G 2014a). In 2007, recreational fisheries generated \$1.4 billion in total expenditures of sport fishers (ADF&G 2007). In 2017 in the Southcentral Alaska Region, including the study area in the GOA, 320,086 anglers fished a total of 1,312,586 angler-days (ADF&G 2018c). The largest portions of recreational harvest by numbers of fish were the five species of salmon (263,876), halibut (237,193), and rockfish (128,708). Other fish species targeted were Pacific cod, lingcod, smelt, sablefish, Arctic char, shark, and steelhead trout. Tanner and Dungeness crabs and shellfish, including hard-shell clams and razor clams, were also taken in the recreational fishery (ADF&G 2018c).

3.8.3 Aquaculture

The *Aquatic Farming Act* was approved in Alaska in 1988, allowing for the culture of indigenous shellfish and aquatic plants in nearshore waters. The culture of finfish is prohibited. In 2015, there were 63 permitted operations, including 54 aquatic farms, seven hatcheries, and two nurseries. Four of these aquatic farms and one hatchery are located in the Kodiak region near the study area. The 2015 inventory of primary cultured species includes Pacific oyster (15.2 million oysters; 63% of total farm production), blue mussel (8 million), and geoduck clam (910,926). Littleneck clam and several species of urchin, scallop, cockle, and sea cucumber are also produced by permitted operations. Production of several species of kelp and seaweed is becoming a viable part of the aquaculture industry as well. Sales of shellfish and aquatic plants from all operations totaled \$1.13 million in 2015 (ADF&G 2016).

3.9 Recreational SCUBA Diving

Recreational SCUBA diving occurs in the GOA and near Kodiak Island, but is not a high capacity operation. Popular dive sites are primarily located within reach of shore off Kodiak Island. Several shipwrecks exist in the GOA and near Kodiak Island, but are not frequented as dive sites.

IV ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

4.1 Proposed Action

4.1.1 Direct Effects on Marine Mammals and Sea Turtles and Their Significance

The material in this section includes a summary of the expected potential effects (or lack thereof) of airgun sounds on marine mammals and sea turtles given in the PEIS, and reference to recent literature that has become available since the PEIS was released in 2011. A more comprehensive review of the relevant background information appears in § 3.4.4.3, § 3.6.4.3, § 3.7.4.3, § 3.8.4.3, and Appendix E of the PEIS. Relevant background information on the hearing abilities of marine mammals and sea turtles can also be found in the PEIS.

This section also includes estimates of the numbers of marine mammals that could be affected by the proposed seismic survey. A description of the rationale for NSF's estimates of the numbers of individuals exposed to received sound levels ≥ 160 dB re 1 $\mu\text{Pa}_{\text{rms}}$ is also provided. Acoustic modeling for the Proposed Action was conducted by L-DEO, consistent with past EAs and determined to be acceptable by NMFS for use in the calculation of estimated Level A and B takes under the MMPA.

4.1.1.1 Summary of Potential Effects of Airgun Sounds

As noted in the PEIS (§ 3.4.4.3, § 3.6.4.3, § 3.7.4.3, § 3.8.4.3), the effects of sounds from airguns could include one or more of the following: tolerance, masking of natural sounds, behavioral disturbance, and at least in theory, temporary or permanent hearing impairment, or non-auditory physical or physiological effects (Richardson et al. 1995; Gordon et al. 2004; Nowacek et al. 2007; Southall et al. 2007; Erbe 2012; Peng et al. 2015; Erbe et al. 2015, 2016; Kunc et al. 2016; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2017; Weilgart 2017a). In some cases, a behavioral response to a sound can reduce the overall exposure to that sound (e.g., Finneran et al. 2015; Wensveen et al. 2015).

Permanent hearing impairment (PTS), in the unlikely event that it occurred, would constitute injury, but TTS is not considered an injury (Southall et al. 2007; Le Prell 2012). Rather, the onset of TTS has been considered an indicator that, if the animal is exposed to higher levels of that sound, physical damage is ultimately a possibility. Nonetheless, research has shown that sound exposure can cause cochlear neural degeneration, even when threshold shifts and hair cell damage are reversible (Kujawa and Liberman 2009; Liberman 2016). These findings have raised some doubts as to whether TTS should continue to be considered a non-injurious effect (Weilgart 2014; Tougaard et al. 2015, 2016). Although the possibility cannot be entirely excluded, it is unlikely that the proposed survey would result in any cases of temporary or permanent hearing impairment, or any significant non-auditory physical or physiological effects. If marine mammals encounter a survey while it is underway, some behavioral disturbance could result, but this would be localized and short-term.

Tolerance.—Numerous studies have shown that pulsed sounds from airguns are often readily detectable in the water at distances of many kilometers (e.g., Nieuwirk et al. 2012). Several studies have shown that marine mammals at distances more than a few kilometers from operating seismic vessels often show no apparent response. That is often true even in cases when the pulsed sounds must be readily audible to the animals based on measured received levels and the hearing sensitivity of that mammal group. Although various baleen and toothed whales, and (less frequently) pinnipeds have been shown to react behaviorally to airgun pulses under some conditions, at other times mammals of all three types have shown no overt reactions. The relative responsiveness of baleen and toothed whales are quite variable.

Masking.—Masking effects of pulsed sounds (even from large arrays of airguns) on marine mammal

calls and other natural sounds are expected to be limited, although there are few specific data on this. Because of the intermittent nature and low duty cycle of seismic pulses, animals can emit and receive sounds in the relatively quiet intervals between pulses. However, in exceptional situations, reverberation occurs for much or all of the interval between pulses (e.g., Simard et al. 2005; Clark and Gagnon 2006), which could mask calls. Situations with prolonged strong reverberation are infrequent. However, it is common for reverberation to cause some lesser degree of elevation of the background level between airgun pulses (e.g., Gedamke 2011; Guerra et al. 2011, 2016; Klinck et al. 2012; Guan et al. 2015), and this weaker reverberation presumably reduces the detection range of calls and other natural sounds to some degree. Guerra et al. (2016) reported that ambient noise levels between seismic pulses were elevated as a result of reverberation at ranges of 50 km from the seismic source. Based on measurements in deep water of the Southern Ocean, Gedamke (2011) estimated that the slight elevation of background levels during intervals between pulses reduced blue and fin whale communication space by as much as 36–51% when a seismic survey was operating 450–2800 km away. Based on preliminary modeling, Wittekind et al. (2016) reported that airgun sounds could reduce the communication range of blue and fin whales 2000 km from the seismic source. Nieukirk et al. (2012) and Blackwell et al. (2013) noted the potential for masking effects from seismic surveys on large whales.

Some baleen and toothed whales are known to continue calling in the presence of seismic pulses, and their calls usually can be heard between the pulses (e.g., Nieukirk et al. 2012; Thode et al. 2012; Bröker et al. 2013; Sciacca et al. 2016). Cerchio et al. (2014) suggested that the breeding display of humpback whales off Angola could be disrupted by seismic sounds, as singing activity declined with increasing received levels. In addition, some cetaceans are known to change their calling rates, shift their peak frequencies, or otherwise modify their vocal behavior in response to airgun sounds (e.g., Di Iorio and Clark 2010; Castellote et al. 2012; Blackwell et al. 2013, 2015). The hearing systems of baleen whales are undoubtedly more sensitive to low-frequency sounds than are the ears of the small odontocetes that have been studied directly (e.g., MacGillivray et al. 2014). The sounds important to small odontocetes are predominantly at much higher frequencies than are the dominant components of airgun sounds, thus limiting the potential for masking. In general, masking effects of seismic pulses are expected to be minor, given the normally intermittent nature of seismic pulses. We are not aware of any information concerning masking of hearing in sea turtles.

Disturbance Reactions.—Disturbance includes a variety of effects, including subtle to conspicuous changes in behavior, movement, and displacement. Based on NMFS (2001, p. 9293), National Research Council (NRC 2005), and Southall et al. (2007), we believe that simple exposure to sound, or brief reactions that do not disrupt behavioral patterns in a potentially significant manner, do not constitute harassment or “taking”. By potentially significant, we mean, ‘in a manner that might have deleterious effects to the well-being of individual marine mammals or their populations’.

Reactions to sound, if any, depend on species, state of maturity, experience, current activity, reproductive state, time of day, and many other factors (Richardson et al. 1995; Wartzok et al. 2004; Southall et al. 2007; Weilgart 2007; Ellison et al. 2012). If a marine mammal does react briefly to an underwater sound by changing its behavior or moving a small distance, the impacts of the change are unlikely to be significant to the individual, let alone the stock or population (e.g., New et al. 2013a). However, if a sound source displaces marine mammals from an important feeding or breeding area for a prolonged period, impacts on individuals and populations could be significant (Lusseau and Bejder 2007; Weilgart 2007; New et al. 2013b; Nowacek et al. 2015; Forney et al. 2017). Some studies have attempted modeling to assess consequences of effects from underwater noise at the population level (e.g., King et al. 2015; Costa et al. 2016a,b; Ellison et al. 2016; Harwood et al. 2016; Nowacek et al. 2016; Farmer et al. 2017).

Given the many uncertainties in predicting the quantity and types of impacts of noise on marine mammals, it is common practice to estimate how many marine mammals would be present within a particular distance of industrial activities and/or exposed to a particular level of industrial sound. In most cases, this approach likely overestimates the numbers of marine mammals that would be affected in some biologically important manner. The sound criteria used to estimate how many marine mammals could be disturbed to some biologically important degree by a seismic program are based primarily on behavioral observations of a few species. Detailed studies have been done on humpback, gray, bowhead, and sperm whales. Less detailed data are available for some other species of baleen whales and small toothed whales, but for many species, there are no data on responses to marine seismic surveys.

Baleen Whales

Baleen whales generally tend to avoid operating airguns, but avoidance radii are quite variable. Whales are often reported to show no overt reactions to pulses from large arrays of airguns at distances beyond a few kilometers, even though the airgun pulses remain well above ambient noise levels out to much longer distances. However, baleen whales exposed to strong noise pulses from airguns often react by deviating from their normal migration route and/or interrupting their feeding and moving away. In the cases of migrating gray and bowhead whales, the observed changes in behavior appeared to be of little or no biological consequence to the animals. They simply avoided the sound source by displacing their migration route to varying degrees, but within the natural boundaries of the migration corridors (Malme et al. 1984; Malme and Miles 1985; Richardson et al. 1995).

Responses of *humpback whales* to seismic surveys have been studied during migration, on summer feeding grounds, and on Angolan winter breeding grounds; there has also been discussion of effects on the Brazilian wintering grounds. Off Western Australia, avoidance reactions began at 5–8 km from the array, and those reactions kept most pods ~3–4 km from the operating seismic boat; there was localized displacement during migration of 4–5 km by traveling pods and 7–12 km by more sensitive resting pods of cow-calf pairs (McCauley et al. 1998, 2000). However, some individual humpback whales, especially males, approached within distances of 100–400 m.

Dunlop et al. (2015) reported that migrating humpback whales in Australia responded to a vessel operating a 20 in³ airgun by decreasing their dive time and speed of southward migration; however, the same responses were obtained during control trials without an active airgun, suggesting that humpbacks responded to the source vessel rather than the airgun. A ramp up was not superior to triggering humpbacks to move away from the vessel compared with a constant source at a higher level of 140 in³, although an increase in distance from the airgun(s) was noted for both sources (Dunlop et al. 2016a). Avoidance was also shown when no airguns were operational, indicating that the presence of the vessel itself had an effect on the response (Dunlop et al. 2016a,b). Overall, the results showed that humpbacks were more likely to avoid active small airgun sources (20 and 140 in³) within 3 km and received levels of at least 140 dB re 1 $\mu\text{Pa}^2 \cdot \text{s}$ (Dunlop et al. 2017a). Responses to ramp up and use of a large 3130 in³ array elicited greater behavioral changes in humpbacks when compared with small arrays (Dunlop et al. 2016c). Humpbacks reduced their southbound migration, or deviated from their path thereby avoiding the active array, when they were within 4 km of the active large airgun source, where received levels were >135 dB re 1 $\mu\text{Pa}^2 \cdot \text{s}$ (Dunlop et al. 2017b). These results are consistent with earlier studies (e.g., McCauley et al. 2000).

In the northwest Atlantic, sighting rates were significantly greater during non-seismic periods compared with periods when a full array was operating, and humpback whales were more likely to swim away and less likely to swim towards a vessel during seismic vs. non-seismic periods (Moulton and Holst 2010). In contrast, sightings of humpback whales from seismic vessels off the U.K. during 1994–2010 indicated that detection rates were similar during seismic and non-seismic periods, although sample sizes

were small (Stone 2015). On their summer feeding grounds in southeast Alaska, there was no clear evidence of avoidance, despite the possibility of subtle effects, at received levels up to 172 re 1 μPa on an approximate rms basis (Malme et al. 1985). It has been suggested that South Atlantic humpback whales wintering off Brazil may be displaced or even strand upon exposure to seismic surveys (Engel et al. 2004), but data from subsequent years indicated that there was no observable direct correlation between strandings and seismic surveys (IWC 2007b).

There are no data on reactions of *right whales* to seismic surveys. However, Rolland et al. (2012) suggested that ship noise causes increased stress in right whales; they showed that baseline levels of stress-related faecal hormone metabolites decreased in North Atlantic right whales with a 6-dB decrease in underwater noise from vessels. Wright et al. (2011), Atkinson et al. (2015), Houser et al. (2016), and Lyamin et al. (2016) also reported that sound could be a potential source of stress for marine mammals.

Bowhead whales show that their responsiveness can be quite variable depending on their activity (migrating vs. feeding). Bowhead whales migrating west across the Alaskan Beaufort Sea in autumn, in particular, are unusually responsive, with substantial avoidance occurring out to distances of 20–30 km from a medium-sized airgun source (Miller et al. 1999; Richardson et al. 1999). Subtle but statistically significant changes in surfacing–respiration–dive cycles were shown by traveling and socializing bowheads exposed to airgun sounds in the Beaufort Sea, including shorter surfacings, shorter dives, and decreased number of blows per surfacing (Robertson et al. 2013). More recent research on bowhead whales corroborates earlier evidence that, during the summer feeding season, bowheads are less responsive to seismic sources (e.g., Miller et al. 2005; Robertson et al. 2013).

Bowhead whale calls detected in the presence and absence of airgun sounds have been studied extensively in the Beaufort Sea. Bowheads continue to produce calls of the usual types when exposed to airgun sounds on their summering grounds, although numbers of calls detected are significantly lower in the presence than in the absence of airgun pulses (Blackwell et al. 2013, 2015). Blackwell et al. (2013) reported that calling rates in 2007 declined significantly where received SPLs from airgun sounds were 116–129 dB re 1 μPa ; at SPLs <108 dB re 1 μPa , calling rates were not affected. When data for 2007–2010 were analyzed, Blackwell et al. (2015) reported an initial increase in calling rates when airgun pulses became detectable; however, calling rates leveled off at a received $\text{CSEL}_{10\text{-min}}$ (cumulative SEL over a 10-min period) of ~ 94 dB re 1 $\mu\text{Pa}^2 \cdot \text{s}$, decreased at $\text{CSEL}_{10\text{-min}} > 127$ dB re 1 $\mu\text{Pa}^2 \cdot \text{s}$, and whales were nearly silent at $\text{CSEL}_{10\text{-min}} > 160$ dB re 1 $\mu\text{Pa}^2 \cdot \text{s}$. Thus, bowhead whales in the Beaufort Sea apparently decreased their calling rates in response to seismic operations, although movement out of the area could also have contributed to the lower call detection rate (Blackwell et al. 2013, 2015).

A multivariate analysis of factors affecting the distribution of calling bowhead whales during their fall migration in 2009 noted that the southern edge of the distribution of calling whales was significantly closer to shore with increasing levels of airgun sound from a seismic survey a few hundred kilometers to the east of the study area (i.e., behind the westward-migrating whales; McDonald et al. 2010, 2011). It was not known whether this statistical effect represented a stronger tendency for quieting of the whales farther offshore in deeper water upon exposure to airgun sound, or an actual inshore displacement of whales.

There was no indication that *western gray whales* exposed to seismic sound were displaced from their overall feeding grounds near Sakhalin Island during seismic programs in 1997 (Würsig et al. 1999) and in 2001 (Johnson et al. 2007; Meier et al. 2007; Yazvenko et al. 2007a). However, there were indications of subtle behavioral effects among whales that remained in the areas exposed to airgun sounds (Würsig et al. 1999; Gailey et al. 2007; Weller et al. 2006a) and localized redistribution of some individuals within the nearshore feeding ground so as to avoid close approaches by the seismic vessel (Weller et al. 2002, 2006b; Yazvenko et al. 2007a). Despite the evidence of subtle changes in some quantitative measures

of behavior and local redistribution of some individuals, there was no apparent change in the frequency of feeding, as evident from mud plumes visible at the surface (Yazvenko et al. 2007b). Similarly, no large changes in gray whale movement, respiration, or distribution patterns were observed during the seismic programs conducted in 2010 (Bröker et al. 2015; Gailey et al. 2016). Although sighting distances of gray whales from shore increased slightly during a 2-week seismic survey, this result was not significant (Muir et al. 2015). However, there may have been a possible localized avoidance response to high sound levels in the area (Muir et al. 2016). The lack of strong avoidance or other strong responses during the 2001 and 2010 programs was presumably in part a result of the comprehensive combination of real-time monitoring and mitigation measures designed to avoid exposing western gray whales to received SPLs above ~ 163 dB re $1 \mu\text{Pa}_{\text{rms}}$ (Johnson et al. 2007; Nowacek et al. 2012, 2013b). In contrast, preliminary data collected during a seismic program in 2015 showed some displacement of animals from the feeding area and responses to lower sound levels than expected (Gailey et al. 2017; Sychenko et al. 2017).

Gray whales in British Columbia, Canada, exposed to seismic survey sound levels up to ~ 170 dB re $1 \mu\text{Pa}$ did not appear to be strongly disturbed (Bain and Williams 2006). The few whales that were observed moved away from the airguns but toward deeper water where sound levels were said to be higher due to propagation effects (Bain and Williams 2006).

Various species of *Balaenoptera* (blue, sei, fin, and minke whales) have occasionally been seen in areas ensonified by airgun pulses. Sightings by observers on seismic vessels using large arrays off the U.K. from 1994–2010 showed that the detection rate for minke whales was significantly higher when airguns were not operating; however, during surveys with small arrays, the detection rates for minke whales were similar during seismic and non-seismic periods (Stone 2015). Sighting rates for fin and sei whales were similar when large arrays of airguns were operating vs. silent (Stone 2015). All baleen whales combined tended to exhibit localized avoidance, remaining significantly farther (on average) from large arrays (median closest point of approach or CPA of ~ 1.5 km) during seismic operations compared with non-seismic periods (median CPA ~ 1.0 km; Stone 2015). In addition, fin and minke whales were more often oriented away from the vessel while a large airgun array was active compared with periods of inactivity (Stone 2015). Singing fin whales in the Mediterranean moved away from an operating airgun array, and their song notes had lower bandwidths during periods with vs. without airgun sounds (Castellote et al. 2012).

During seismic surveys in the northwest Atlantic, baleen whales as a group showed localized avoidance of the operating array (Moulton and Holst 2010). Sighting rates were significantly lower during seismic operations compared with non-seismic periods. Baleen whales were seen on average 200 m farther from the vessel during airgun activities vs. non-seismic periods, and these whales more often swam away from the vessel when seismic operations were underway compared with periods when no airguns were operating (Moulton and Holst 2010). Blue whales were seen significantly farther from the vessel during single airgun operations, ramp up, and all other airgun operations compared with non-seismic periods (Moulton and Holst 2010). Similarly, fin whales were seen at significantly farther distances during ramp up than during periods without airgun operations; there was also a trend for fin whales to be sighted farther from the vessel during other airgun operations, but the difference was not significant (Moulton and Holst 2010). Minke whales were seen significantly farther from the vessel during periods with than without seismic operations (Moulton and Holst 2010). Minke whales were also more likely to swim away and less likely to approach during seismic operations compared to periods when airguns were not operating (Moulton and Holst 2010). However, Matos (2015) reported no change in sighting rates of minke whales in Vestfjorden, Norway, during ongoing seismic surveys outside of the fjord. Vilela et al. (2016) cautioned that environmental conditions should be taken into account when comparing sighting rates during seismic surveys, as spatial modeling showed that differences in sighting rates of rorquals (fin and minke whales)

during seismic periods and non-seismic periods during a survey in the Gulf of Cadiz could be explained by environmental variables.

Data on short-term reactions by cetaceans to impulsive noises are not necessarily indicative of long-term or biologically significant effects. It is not known whether impulsive sounds affect reproductive rate or distribution and habitat use in subsequent days or years. However, gray whales have continued to migrate annually along the west coast of North America with substantial increases in the population over recent years, despite intermittent seismic exploration (and much ship traffic) in that area for decades. The western Pacific gray whale population continued to feed off Sakhalin Island every summer, despite seismic surveys in the region. In addition, bowhead whales have continued to travel to the eastern Beaufort Sea each summer, and their numbers have increased notably, despite seismic exploration in their summer and autumn range for many years. Pirotta et al. (2018) used a dynamic state model of behavior and physiology to assess the consequences of disturbance (e.g., seismic surveys) on whales (in this case, blue whales). They found that the impact of localized, acute disturbance (e.g., seismic surveys) depended on the whale's behavioral response, with whales that remained in the affected area having a greater risk of reduced reproductive success than whales that avoided the disturbance. Chronic, but weaker disturbance (e.g., vessel traffic) appeared to have less effect on reproductive success.

Toothed Whales

Little systematic information is available about reactions of toothed whales to sound pulses. However, there are recent systematic studies on sperm whales, and there is an increasing amount of information about responses of various odontocetes to seismic surveys based on monitoring studies. Seismic operators and marine mammal observers on seismic vessels regularly see dolphins and other small toothed whales near operating airgun arrays, but in general there is a tendency for most delphinids to show some avoidance of operating seismic vessels (e.g., Stone and Tasker 2006; Moulton and Holst 2010; Barry et al. 2012; Wole and Myade 2014; Stone 2015; Monaco et al. 2016). In most cases, the avoidance radii for delphinids appear to be small, on the order of 1 km or less, and some individuals show no apparent avoidance.

Observations from seismic vessels using large arrays off the U.K. from 1994–2010 indicated that detection rates were significantly higher for killer whales, white-beaked dolphins, and Atlantic white-sided dolphins when airguns were not operating; detection rates during seismic vs. non-seismic periods were similar during seismic surveys using small arrays (Stone 2015). Detection rates for long-finned pilot whales, Risso's dolphins, bottlenose dolphins, and short-beaked common dolphins were similar during seismic (small or large array) vs. non-seismic operations (Stone 2015). CPA distances for killer whales, white-beaked dolphins, and Atlantic white-sided dolphins were significantly farther (>0.5 km) from large airgun arrays during periods of airgun activity compared with periods of inactivity, with significantly more animals traveling away from the vessel during airgun operation (Stone 2015). Observers' records suggested that fewer cetaceans were feeding and fewer delphinids were interacting with the survey vessel (e.g., bow-riding) during periods with airguns operating (Stone 2015).

During seismic surveys in the northwest Atlantic, delphinids as a group showed some localized avoidance of the operating array (Moulton and Holst 2010). The mean initial detection distance was significantly farther (by ~200 m) during seismic operations compared with periods when the seismic source was not active; however, there was no significant difference between sighting rates (Moulton and Holst 2010). The same results were evident when only long-finned pilot whales were considered.

Preliminary findings of a monitoring study of *narwhals* in Melville Bay, Greenland, (summer and fall 2012) showed no short-term effects of seismic survey activity on narwhal distribution, abundance, migration timing, and feeding habits (Heide-Jørgensen et al. 2013a). In addition, there were no reported

effects on narwhal hunting. These findings do not seemingly support a suggestion by Heide-Jørgensen et al. (2013b) that seismic surveys in Baffin Bay may have delayed the migration timing of narwhals, thereby increasing the risk of narwhals to ice entrapment.

The beluga, however, is a species that (at least at times) shows long-distance (10s of km) avoidance of seismic vessels (e.g., Miller et al. 2005). Captive bottlenose dolphins and beluga whales exhibited changes in behavior when exposed to strong pulsed sounds similar in duration to those typically used in seismic surveys, but the animals tolerated high received levels of sound before exhibiting aversive behaviors (e.g., Finneran et al. 2000, 2002, 2005). Schlundt et al. (2016) also reported that bottlenose dolphins exposed to multiple airgun pulses exhibited some anticipatory behavior.

Most studies of *sperm whales* exposed to airgun sounds indicate that the sperm whale shows considerable tolerance of airgun pulses; in most cases the whales do not show strong avoidance (e.g., Stone and Tasker 2006; Moulton and Holst 2010). Winsor et al. (2017) outfitted sperm whales in the Gulf of Mexico with satellite tags to examine their spatial distribution in relation to seismic surveys. They found no evidence of avoidance or changes in orientation by sperm whales to active seismic vessels. Based on data collected by observers on seismic vessels off the U.K. from 1994–2010, detection rates for sperm whales were similar when large arrays of airguns were operating vs. silent; however, during surveys with small arrays, the detection rate was significantly higher when the airguns were not in operation (Stone 2015). Foraging behavior can also be altered upon exposure to airgun sound (e.g., Miller et al. 2009), which according to Farmer et al. (2017), could have significant consequences on individual fitness. Preliminary data from the Gulf of Mexico show a correlation between reduced sperm whale acoustic activity and periods with airgun operations (Sidorovskaia et al. 2014).

There are almost no specific data on the behavioral reactions of *beaked whales* to seismic surveys. Most beaked whales tend to avoid approaching vessels of other types (e.g., Würsig et al. 1998) and/or change their behavior in response to sounds from vessels (e.g., Pirota et al. 2012). Thus, it is likely that most beaked whales would also show strong avoidance of an approaching seismic vessel. Observations from seismic vessels off the U.K. from 1994–2010 indicated that detection rates of beaked whales were significantly higher ($p < 0.05$) when airguns were not operating vs. when a large array was in operation, although sample sizes were small (Stone 2015). Some northern bottlenose whales remained in the general area and continued to produce high-frequency clicks when exposed to sound pulses from distant seismic surveys (e.g., Simard et al. 2005).

The limited available data suggest that *harbor porpoises* show stronger avoidance of seismic operations than do Dall's porpoises. The apparent tendency for greater responsiveness in the harbor porpoise is consistent with its relative responsiveness to boat traffic and some other acoustic sources (Richardson et al. 1995; Southall et al. 2007). Based on data collected by observers on seismic vessels off the U.K. from 1994–2010, detection rates of harbor porpoises were significantly higher when airguns were silent vs. when large or small arrays were operating (Stone 2015). In addition, harbor porpoises were seen farther away from the array when it was operating vs. silent, and were most often seen traveling away from the airgun array when it was in operation (Stone 2015). Thompson et al. (2013b) reported decreased densities and reduced acoustic detections of harbor porpoise in response to a seismic survey in Moray Firth, Scotland, at ranges of 5–10 km (SPLs of 165–172 dB re 1 μ Pa, SELs of 145–151 dB μ Pa² · s). For the same survey, Pirota et al. (2014) reported that the probability of recording a porpoise buzz decreased by 15% in the ensonified area, and that the probability was positively related to the distance from the seismic ship; the decreased buzzing occurrence may indicate reduced foraging efficiency. Nonetheless, animals returned to the area within a few hours (Thompson et al. 2013b). In a captive facility, harbor porpoise showed avoidance of a pool with elevated sound levels, but search time for prey within that pool was no different

than in a quieter pool (Kok et al. 2017).

Kastelein et al. (2013a) reported that a harbor porpoise showed no response to an impulse sound with an SEL below 65 dB, but a 50% brief response rate was noted at an SEL of 92 dB and an SPL of 122 dB re 1 $\mu\text{Pa}_{0\text{-peak}}$. However, Kastelein et al. (2012c) reported a 50% detection threshold at a SEL of 60 dB to a similar impulse sound; this difference is likely attributable to the different transducers used during the two studies (Kastelein et al. 2013c). Van Beest et al. (2018) exposed five harbor porpoise to a single 10 in³ airgun for 1 min at 2–3 s intervals at ranges of 420–690 m and levels of 135–147 dB $\mu\text{Pa}^2 \cdot \text{s}$. One porpoise moved away from the sound source but returned to natural movement patterns within 8 h, and two porpoises had shorter and shallower dives but returned to natural behaviors within 24 h.

Odontocete reactions to large arrays of airguns are variable and, at least for delphinids, seem to be confined to a smaller radius than has been observed for the more responsive of the mysticetes and some other odontocetes. A ≥ 170 dB disturbance criterion (rather than ≥ 160 dB) is considered appropriate for delphinids, which tend to be less responsive than the more responsive cetaceans. NMFS is currently developing new guidance for predicting behavioral effects (Scholik-Schlomer 2015). As behavioral responses are not consistently associated with received levels, some authors have made recommendations on different approaches to assess behavioral reactions (e.g., Gomez et al. 2016; Harris et al. 2017).

Pinnipeds

Pinnipeds are not likely to show a strong avoidance reaction to an airgun array. Visual monitoring from seismic vessels has shown only slight (if any) avoidance of airguns by pinnipeds and only slight (if any) changes in behavior. However, telemetry work has suggested that avoidance and other behavioral reactions may be stronger than evident to date from visual studies (Thompson et al. 1998). Observations from seismic vessels operating large arrays off the U.K. from 1994–2010 showed that the detection rate for gray seals was significantly higher when airguns were not operating; for surveys using small arrays, the detection rates were similar during seismic vs. non-seismic operations (Stone 2015). No significant differences in detection rates were apparent for harbor seals during seismic and non-seismic periods (Stone 2015). There were no significant differences in CPA distances of grey or harbor seals during seismic vs. non-seismic periods (Stone 2015). Lallas and McConnell (2015) made observations of New Zealand fur seals from a seismic vessel operating a 3090 in³ airgun array in New Zealand during 2009. However, the results from the study were inconclusive in showing whether New Zealand fur seals respond to seismic sounds. Reichmuth et al. (2016) exposed captive spotted and ringed seals to single airgun pulses; only mild behavioral responses were observed.

Sea Turtles

Several recent papers discuss the morphology of the turtle ear (e.g., Christensen-Dalsgaard et al. 2012; Willis et al. 2013) and the hearing ability of sea turtles (e.g., Martin et al. 2012; Piniak et al. 2012a,b; Lavender et al. 2014). The limited available data indicate that sea turtles will hear airgun sounds and sometimes exhibit localized avoidance (see PEIS, § 3.4.4.3). In addition, Nelms et al. (2016) suggest that sea turtles could be excluded from critical habitats during seismic surveys.

DeRuiter and Doukara (2012) observed that immediately following an airgun pulse, small numbers of basking loggerhead turtles (6 of 86 turtles observed) exhibited an apparent startle response (sudden raising of the head and splashing of flippers, occasionally accompanied by blowing bubbles from the beak and nostrils, followed by a short dive). Diving turtles (49 of 86 individuals) were observed at distances from the center of the airgun array ranging from 50–839 m. The estimated sound level at the median distance of 130 m was 191 dB re 1 $\mu\text{Pa}_{\text{peak}}$. These observations were made during ~150 h of vessel-based monitoring from a seismic vessel operating an airgun array (13 airguns, 2440 in³) off Algeria; there was no corresponding observation effort during periods when the airgun array was inactive (DeRuiter and Doukara

2012).

Based on available data, it is likely that sea turtles will exhibit behavioral changes and/or avoidance within an area of unknown size near a seismic vessel. To the extent that there are any impacts on sea turtles, seismic operations in or near areas where turtles concentrate would likely have the greatest impact. There are no specific data that demonstrate the consequences to sea turtles if seismic operations with large or small arrays of airguns occur in important areas at biologically important times of the year. However, a number of mitigation measures can, on a case-by-case basis, be considered for application in areas important to sea turtles (e.g., Pendoley 1997; van der Wal et al. 2016).

Hearing Impairment and Other Physical Effects.—Temporary or permanent hearing impairment is a possibility when marine mammals are exposed to very strong sounds. TTS has been demonstrated and studied in certain captive odontocetes and pinnipeds exposed to strong sounds (reviewed by Southall et al. 2007; Finneran 2015). However, there has been no specific documentation of TTS let alone permanent hearing damage, i.e., PTS, in free-ranging marine mammals exposed to sequences of airgun pulses during realistic field conditions.

Additional data are needed to determine the received sound levels at which small odontocetes would start to incur TTS upon exposure to repeated, low-frequency pulses of airgun sound with variable received levels. To determine how close an airgun array would need to approach in order to elicit TTS, one would (as a minimum) need to allow for the sequence of distances at which airgun pulses would occur, and for the dependence of received SEL on distance in the region of the seismic operation (e.g., Breitzke and Bohlen 2010; Laws 2012). At the present state of knowledge, it is also necessary to assume that the effect is directly related to total received energy (SEL); however, this assumption is likely an over-simplification (Finneran 2012). There is recent evidence that auditory effects in a given animal are not a simple function of received acoustic energy (Finneran 2015). Frequency, duration of the exposure, and occurrence of gaps within the exposure can also influence the auditory effect (Finneran and Schlundt 2010, 2011, 2013; Finneran et al. 2010a,b; Popov et al. 2011, 2013; Finneran 2012, 2015; Kastelein et al. 2012a,b; 2013b,c, 2014, 2015a, 2016a,b, 2017; Ketten 2012; Supin et al. 2016).

Studies have shown that the SEL required for TTS onset to occur increases with intermittent exposures, with some auditory recovery during silent periods between signals (Finneran et al. 2010b; Finneran and Schlundt 2011). Studies on bottlenose dolphins by Finneran et al. (2015) indicate that the potential for seismic surveys using airguns to cause auditory effects on dolphins could be lower than previously thought. Based on behavioral tests, no measurable TTS was detected in three bottlenose dolphins after exposure to 10 impulses from a seismic airgun with a cumulative SEL of up to ~ 195 dB re $1 \mu\text{Pa}^2 \cdot \text{s}$ (Finneran et al. 2015; Schlundt et al. 2016). However, auditory evoked potential measurements were more variable; one dolphin showed a small (9 dB) threshold shift at 8 kHz (Finneran et al. 2015; Schlundt et al. 2016).

Studies have also shown that the SEL necessary to elicit TTS can depend substantially on frequency, with susceptibility to TTS increasing with increasing frequency above 3 kHz (Finneran and Schlundt 2010, 2011; Finneran 2012). When beluga whales were exposed to fatiguing noise with sound levels of 165 dB re $1 \mu\text{Pa}$ for durations of 1–30 min at frequencies of 11.2–90 kHz, the highest TTS with the longest recovery time was produced by the lower frequencies (11.2 and 22.5 kHz); TTS effects also gradually increased with prolonged exposure time (Popov et al. 2013). Additionally, Popov et al. (2015) demonstrated that the impacts of TTS include deterioration of signal discrimination. Kastelein et al. (2015b, 2017) reported that exposure to multiple pulses with most energy at low frequencies can lead to TTS at higher frequencies in some cetaceans, such as the harbor porpoise. When a porpoise was exposed to 10 and 20 consecutive shots (mean shot interval ~ 17 s) from two airguns with a SEL_{cum} of 188 and 191 $\mu\text{Pa}^2 \cdot \text{s}$, respectively, significant

TTS occurred at a hearing frequency of 4 kHz and not at lower hearing frequencies that were tested, despite the fact that most of the airgun energy was <1 kHz; recovery occurred within 12 min post exposure (Kastelein et al. 2017).

Popov et al. (2016) reported that TTS produced by exposure to a fatiguing noise was larger during the first session (or naïve subject state) with a beluga whale than TTS that resulted from the same sound in subsequent sessions (experienced subject state). Similarly, several other studies have shown that some marine mammals (e.g., bottlenose dolphins, false killer whales) can decrease their hearing sensitivity in order to mitigate the impacts of exposure to loud sounds (e.g., Nachtigall and Supin 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017).

Previous information on TTS for odontocetes was primarily derived from studies on the bottlenose dolphin and beluga, and that for pinnipeds has mostly been obtained from California sea lions and elephant seals (see § 3.6.4.3, § 3.7.4.3, § 3.8.4.3 and Appendix E of the PEIS). Thus, it is inappropriate to assume that onset of TTS occurs at similar received levels in all cetaceans or pinnipeds (*cf.* Southall et al. 2007). Some cetaceans or pinnipeds could incur TTS at lower sound exposures than are necessary to elicit TTS in the beluga and bottlenose dolphin or California sea lion and elephant seal, respectively.

Several studies on TTS in porpoises (e.g., Lucke et al. 2009; Popov et al. 2011; Kastelein et al. 2012a, 2013a,b, 2014, 2015a) indicate that received levels that elicit onset of TTS are lower in porpoises than in other odontocetes. Kastelein et al. (2012a) exposed a harbor porpoise to octave band noise centered at 4 kHz for extended periods. A 6-dB TTS occurred with SELs of 163 dB and 172 dB for low-intensity sound and medium-intensity sound, respectively; high-intensity sound caused a 9-dB TTS at a SEL of 175 dB (Kastelein et al. 2012a). Kastelein et al. (2013b) exposed a harbor porpoise to a long, continuous 1.5-kHz tone, which induced a 14-dB TTS with a total SEL of 190 dB. Popov et al. (2011) examined the effects of fatiguing noise on the hearing threshold of Yangtze finless porpoises when exposed to frequencies of 32–128 kHz at 140–160 dB re 1 μ Pa for 1–30 min. They found that an exposure of higher level and shorter duration produced a higher TTS than an exposure of equal SEL but of lower level and longer duration. Popov et al. (2011) reported a TTS of 25 dB for a Yangtze finless porpoise that was exposed to high levels of 3-min pulses of half-octave band noise centered at 45 kHz with an SEL of 163 dB.

For the harbor porpoise, Tougaard et al. (2015) have suggested an exposure limit for TTS as an SEL of 100–110 dB above the pure tone hearing threshold at a specific frequency; they also suggested an exposure limit of $L_{eq-fast}$ (rms average over the duration of the pulse) of 45 dB above the hearing threshold for behavioral responses (i.e., negative phonotaxis). In addition, according to Wensveen et al. (2014) and Tougaard et al. (2015), M-weighting, as used by Southall et al. (2007), might not be appropriate for the harbor porpoise. Thus, Wensveen et al. (2014) developed six auditory weighting functions for the harbor porpoise that could be useful in predicting TTS onset. Mulsow et al. (2015) suggested that basing weighting functions on equal latency/loudness contours may be more appropriate than M-weighting for marine mammals. Simulation modeling to assess the risk of sound exposure to marine mammals (gray seal and harbor porpoise) showed that SEL is most strongly influenced by the weighting function (Donovan et al. 2017). Houser et al. (2017) provide a review of the development and application of auditory weighting functions, as well as recommendations for future work.

Initial evidence from exposures to non-pulses has also suggested that some pinnipeds (harbor seals in particular) incur TTS at somewhat lower received levels than do most small odontocetes exposed for similar durations (Kastak et al. 1999, 2005, 2008; Ketten et al. 2001). Kastelein et al. (2012b) exposed two harbor seals to octave-band white noise centered at 4 kHz at three mean received SPLs of 124, 136, and 148 dB re 1 μ Pa; TTS >2.5 dB was induced at an SEL of 170 dB (136 dB SPL for 60 min), and the maximum TTS of 10 dB occurred after a 120-min exposure to 148 dB re 1 μ Pa or an SEL of 187 dB. Kastelein et al.

(2013c) reported that a harbor seal unintentionally exposed to the same sound source with a mean received SPL of 163 dB re 1 μ Pa for 1 h induced a 44 dB TTS. For a harbor seal exposed to octave-band white noise centered at 4 kHz for 60 min with mean SPLs of 124–148 re 1 μ Pa, the onset of PTS would require a level of at least 22 dB above the TTS onset (Kastelein et al. 2013c). Reichmuth et al. (2016) exposed captive spotted and ringed seals to single airgun pulses with SELs of 165–181 dB and SPLs (peak to peak) of 190–207 re 1 μ Pa; no low-frequency TTS was observed.

Hermannsen et al. (2015) reported that there is little risk of hearing damage to harbor seals or harbor porpoises when using single airguns in shallow water. Similarly, it is unlikely that a marine mammal would remain close enough to a large airgun array for sufficiently long to incur TTS, let alone PTS. However, Gedamke et al. (2011), based on preliminary simulation modeling that attempted to allow for various uncertainties in assumptions and variability around population means, suggested that some baleen whales whose CPA to a seismic vessel is 1 km or more could experience TTS.

There is no specific evidence that exposure to pulses of airgun sound can cause PTS in any marine mammal, even with large arrays of airguns. However, given the possibility that some mammals close to an airgun array might incur at least mild TTS, there has been further speculation about the possibility that some individuals occurring very close to airguns might incur PTS (e.g., Richardson et al. 1995, p. 372ff; Gedamke et al. 2011). In terrestrial animals, exposure to sounds sufficiently strong to elicit a large TTS induces physiological and structural changes in the inner ear, and at some high level of sound exposure, these phenomena become non-recoverable (Le Prell 2012). At this level of sound exposure, TTS grades into PTS. Single or occasional occurrences of mild TTS are not indicative of permanent auditory damage, but repeated or (in some cases) single exposures to a level well above that causing TTS onset might elicit PTS (e.g., Kastak and Reichmuth 2007; Kastak et al. 2008).

The new noise exposure criteria for marine mammals that were recently released by NMFS (2016a) account for the newly-available scientific data on TTS, the expected offset between TTS and PTS thresholds, differences in the acoustic frequencies to which different marine mammal groups are sensitive, and other relevant factors. For impulsive sounds, such as airgun pulses, the thresholds use dual metrics of cumulative SEL (SEL_{cum} over 24 hours) and Peak SPL_{flat}. Onset of PTS is assumed to be 15 dB higher when considering SEL_{cum} and 6 dB higher when considering SPL_{flat}. Different thresholds are provided for the various hearing groups, including LF cetaceans (e.g., baleen whales), MF cetaceans (e.g., most delphinids), HF cetaceans (e.g., porpoise and *Kogia* spp.), phocids underwater (PW), and otariids underwater (OW).

Nowacek et al. (2013a) concluded that current scientific data indicate that seismic airguns have a low probability of directly harming marine life, except at close range. Several aspects of the planned monitoring and mitigation measures for this project are designed to detect marine mammals occurring near the airgun array, and to avoid exposing them to sound pulses that might, at least in theory, cause hearing impairment. Also, many marine mammals and (to a limited degree) sea turtles show some avoidance of the area where received levels of airgun sound are high enough such that hearing impairment could potentially occur. In those cases, the avoidance responses of the animals themselves would reduce or (most likely) avoid any possibility of hearing impairment. Aarts et al. (2016) noted that an understanding of animal movement is necessary in order to estimate the impact of anthropogenic sound on cetaceans.

Non-auditory physical effects may also occur in marine mammals exposed to strong underwater pulsed sound. Possible types of non-auditory physiological effects or injuries that might (in theory) occur in mammals close to a strong sound source include stress, neurological effects, bubble formation, and other types of organ or tissue damage. Gray and Van Waerebeek (2011) have suggested a cause-effect relationship between a seismic survey off Liberia in 2009 and the erratic movement, postural instability,

and akinesia in a pantropical spotted dolphin based on spatially and temporally close association with the airgun array. It is possible that some marine mammal species (i.e., beaked whales) are especially susceptible to injury and/or stranding when exposed to strong transient sounds (e.g., Southall et al. 2007). Ten cases of cetacean strandings in the general area where a seismic survey was ongoing have led to speculation concerning a possible link between seismic surveys and strandings (Castellote and Llorens 2016). An analysis of stranding data found that the number of long-finned pilot whale stranding along Ireland's coast increased with seismic surveys operating offshore (McGeady et al. 2016). However, there is no definitive evidence that any of these effects occur even for marine mammals in close proximity to large arrays of airguns. Morell et al. (2017) examined the inner ears of long-finned pilot whales after a mass stranding in Scotland and reported damage to the cochlea compatible with over-exposure from underwater noise; however, no seismic surveys were occurring in the vicinity in the days leading up to the stranding.

Since 1991, there have been 67 Marine Mammal Unusual Mortality Events (UME) in the U.S. (NMFS 2018b). In a hearing to examine the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management's 2017–2022 OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Program (<http://www.energy.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/hearings-and-business-meetings?ID=110E5E8F-3A65-4BEC-9D25-5D843A0284D3>), it was Dr. Knapp's (a geologist from the University of South Carolina) interpretation that there was no evidence to suggest a correlation between UMEs and seismic surveys given the similar percentages of UMEs in the Pacific, Atlantic, and Gulf of Mexico, and the greater activity of oil and gas exploration in the Gulf of Mexico.

Non-auditory effects, if they occur at all, would presumably be limited to short distances and to activities that extend over a prolonged period. Marine mammals that show behavioral avoidance of seismic vessels, including most baleen whales, some odontocetes, and some pinnipeds, are especially unlikely to incur non-auditory physical effects. The brief duration of exposure of any given mammal, the deep water in the majority of the survey area, and the planned monitoring and mitigation measures would further reduce the probability of exposure of marine mammals to sounds strong enough to induce non-auditory physical effects.

Sea Turtles

There is substantial overlap in the frequencies that sea turtles detect versus the frequencies in airgun pulses. We are not aware of measurements of the absolute hearing thresholds of any sea turtle to waterborne sounds similar to airgun pulses. In the absence of relevant absolute threshold data, we cannot estimate how far away an airgun array might be audible. Moein et al. (1994) and Lenhardt (2002) reported TTS for loggerhead turtles exposed to many airgun pulses (see § 3.4.4 of the PEIS). This suggests that sounds from an airgun array might cause temporary hearing impairment in sea turtles if they do not avoid the (unknown) radius where TTS occurs (see Nelms et al. 2016). However, exposure duration during the proposed surveys would be much less than during the aforementioned studies. Also, recent monitoring studies show that some sea turtles do show localized movement away from approaching airguns. At short distances from the source, received sound level diminishes rapidly with increasing distance. In that situation, even a small-scale avoidance response could result in a significant reduction in sound exposure.

The U.S. Navy has proposed the following criteria for the onset of hearing impairment for sea turtles: 232 dB re 1 μ Pa SPL (peak) and 204 dB re 1 μ Pa²·s SEL_{cum} (weighted) for PTS; and 226 dB peak and 189 dB weighted SEL for TTS (USN 2017). Although it is possible that exposure to airgun sounds could cause mortality or mortal injuries in sea turtles close to the source, this has not been demonstrated and seems highly unlikely (Popper et al. 2014), especially because sea turtles appear to be resistant to explosives (Ketten et al. 2005 *in* Popper et al. 2014). Nonetheless, Popper et al. (2014) proposed sea turtle mortality/mortal injury criteria of 210 dB SEL or >207 dB_{peak} for sounds from seismic airguns; however,

these criteria were largely based on impacts of pile-driving sound on fish.

The PSOs stationed on the *Langseth* would watch for sea turtles, and airgun operations would be shut down if a turtle enters the designated EZ.

4.1.1.2 Possible Effects of Other Acoustic Sources

The Kongsberg EM 122 MBES and Knudsen Chirp 3260 SBP would be operated from the source vessel during the proposed surveys. Information about this equipment was provided in § 2.2.3.1 of the PEIS. A review of the expected potential effects (or lack thereof) of MBESs, SBPs, and pingers on marine mammals and sea turtles appears in § 3.4.4.3, § 3.6.4.3, § 3.7.4.3, § 3.8.4.3, and Appendix E of the PEIS.

There has been some recent attention given to the effects of MBES on marine mammals, as a result of a report issued in September 2013 by an IWC independent scientific review panel linking the operation of an MBES to a mass stranding of melon-headed whales off Madagascar (Southall et al. 2013). During May–June 2008, ~100 melon-headed whales entered and stranded in the Loza Lagoon system in northwest Madagascar at the same time that a 12-kHz MBES survey was being conducted ~65 km away off the coast. In conducting a retrospective review of available information on the event, an independent scientific review panel concluded that the Kongsberg EM 120 MBES was the most plausible behavioral trigger for the animals initially entering the lagoon system and eventually stranding. The independent scientific review panel, however, identified that an unequivocal conclusion on causality of the event was not possible because of the lack of information about the event and a number of potentially contributing factors. Additionally, the independent review panel report indicated that this incident was likely the result of a complicated confluence of environmental, social, and other factors that have a very low probability of occurring again in the future, but recommended that the potential be considered in environmental planning. It should be noted that this event is the first known marine mammal mass stranding closely associated with the operation of an MBES. Leading scientific experts knowledgeable about MBES expressed concerns about the independent scientific review panel analyses and findings (Bernstein 2013).

Reference has also been made that two beaked whales stranded in the Gulf of California in 2002 were observed during a seismic survey in the region by the R/V *Ewing* (Malakoff 2002, Cox et al. 2006 *in* PEIS:3-136), which used a similar MBES system. As noted in the PEIS, however, “The link between the stranding and the seismic surveys was inconclusive and not based on any physical evidence” (Hogarth 2002, Yoder 2002 *in* PEIS:3-190).

Lurton (2016) modeled MBES radiation characteristics (pulse design, source level, and radiation directivity pattern) applied to a low-frequency (12-kHz), 240-dB source-level system like that used on the *Langseth*. Using Southall et al. (2007) thresholds, he found that injury impacts were possible only at very short distances, e.g., at 5 m for maximum SPL and 12 m for cumulative SEL for cetaceans; corresponding distances for behavioral response were 9 m and 70 m. For pinnipeds, “all ranges are multiplied by a factor of 4” (Lurton 2016:209).

There is no available information on marine mammal behavioral response to MBES sounds (Southall et al. 2013) or sea turtle responses to MBES systems. Much of the literature on marine mammal response to sonars relates to the types of sonars used in naval operations, including low-frequency, mid-frequency, and high-frequency active sonars (see review by Southall et al. 2016). However, the MBES sounds are quite different from naval sonars. Ping duration of the MBES is very short relative to naval sonars. Also, at any given location, an individual marine mammal would be in the beam of the MBES for much less time given the generally downward orientation of the beam and its narrow fore-aft beamwidth; naval sonars often use near-horizontally-directed sound. In addition, naval sonars have higher duty cycles. These factors would all reduce the sound energy received from the MBES relative to that from naval sonars.

In the fall of 2006, an Ocean Acoustic Waveguide Remote Sensing (OAWRS) experiment was

carried out in the Gulf of Maine (Gong et al. 2014); the OAWRS emitted three frequency-modulated (FM) pulses centered at frequencies of 415, 734, and 949 Hz (Risch et al. 2012). Risch et al. (2012) found a reduction in humpback whale song in the Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary during OAWRS activities that were carried out ~200 km away; received levels in the sanctuary were 88–110 dB re 1 μ Pa. In contrast, Gong et al. (2014) reported no effect of the OAWRS signals on humpback whale vocalizations in the Gulf of Maine. Range to the source, ambient noise, and/or behavioral state may have differentially influenced the behavioral responses of humpbacks in the two areas (Risch et al. 2014).

Deng et al. (2014) measured the spectral properties of pulses transmitted by three 200-kHz echosounders and found that they generated weaker sounds at frequencies below the center frequency (90–130 kHz). These sounds are within the hearing range of some marine mammals, and the authors suggested that they could be strong enough to elicit behavioral responses within close proximity to the sources, although they would be well below potentially harmful levels. Hastie et al. (2014) reported behavioral responses by gray seals to echosounders with frequencies of 200 and 375 kHz. Short-finned pilot whales increased their heading variance in response to an EK60 echosounder with a resonant frequency of 38 kHz (Quick et al. 2017), and significantly fewer beaked whale vocalizations were detected while an EK60 echosounder was active vs. passive (Cholewiak et al. 2017).

Despite the aforementioned information that has recently become available, this EA is in agreement with the assessment presented in § 3.4.7, 3.6.7, 3.7.7, and 3.8.7 of the PEIS that operation of MBESs, SBPs, and pingers is not likely to impact marine mammals and is not expected to affect sea turtles, (1) given the lower acoustic exposures relative to airguns and (2) because the intermittent and/or narrow downward-directed nature of these sounds would result in no more than one or two brief ping exposures of any individual marine mammal or sea turtle given the movement and speed of the vessel. Also, for sea turtles, the associated frequency ranges are above their known hearing range.

4.1.1.3 Other Possible Effects of Seismic Surveys

Other possible effects of seismic surveys on marine mammals and/or sea turtles include masking by vessel noise, disturbance by vessel presence or noise, and injury or mortality from collisions with vessels or entanglement in seismic gear.

Vessel noise from the *Langseth* could affect marine animals in the proposed survey areas. Houghton et al. (2015) proposed that vessel speed is the most important predictor of received noise levels, and Putland et al. (2017) also reported reduced sound levels with decreased vessel speed. Sounds produced by large vessels generally dominate ambient noise at frequencies from 20–300 Hz (Richardson et al. 1995). However, some energy is also produced at higher frequencies (Hermannsen et al. 2014); low levels of high-frequency sound from vessels have been shown to elicit responses in harbor porpoise (Dyndo et al. 2015). Increased levels of ship noise also affect foraging by porpoise (Teilmann et al. 2015; Wisniewska et al. 2018). Wisniewska et al. (2018) suggest that a decrease in foraging success could have long-term fitness consequences.

Ship noise, through masking, can reduce the effective communication distance of a marine mammal if the frequency of the sound source is close to that used by the animal, and if the sound is present for a significant fraction of time (e.g., Richardson et al. 1995; Clark et al. 2009; Jensen et al. 2009; Gervaise et al. 2012; Hatch et al. 2012; Rice et al. 2014; Dunlop 2015; Erbe et al. 2015; Jones et al. 2017; Putland et al. 2017; Cholewiak et al. 2018). In addition to the frequency and duration of the masking sound, the strength, temporal pattern, and location of the introduced sound also play a role in the extent of the masking (Branstetter et al. 2013, 2016; Finneran and Branstetter 2013; Sills et al. 2017). Branstetter et al. (2013) reported that time-domain metrics are also important in describing and predicting masking. In order to compensate for increased ambient noise, some cetaceans are known to increase the source levels of their

calls in the presence of elevated noise levels from shipping, shift their peak frequencies, or otherwise change their vocal behavior (e.g., Parks et al. 2011, 2012, 2016a,b; Castellote et al. 2012; Melcón et al. 2012; Azzara et al. 2013; Tyack and Janik 2013; Luís et al. 2014; Sairanen 2014; Papale et al. 2015; Bittencourt et al. 2016; Dahlheim and Castellote 2016; Gospić and Picciulin 2016; Gridley et al. 2016; Heiler et al. 2016; Martins et al. 2016; O'Brien et al. 2016; Tenessen and Parks 2016). Similarly, harbor seals increased the minimum frequency and amplitude of their calls in response to vessel noise (Matthews 2017); however, harp seals did not increase their call frequencies in environments with increased low-frequency sounds (Terhune and Bosker 2016).

Holt et al. (2015) reported that changes in vocal modifications can have increased energetic costs for individual marine mammals. A negative correlation between the presence of some cetacean species and the number of vessels in an area has been demonstrated by several studies (e.g., Campana et al. 2015; Culloch et al. 2016; Oakley et al. 2017). Based on modeling, Halliday et al. (2017) suggested that shipping noise can be audible more than 100 km away and could affect the behavior of a marine mammal at a distance of 52 km in the case of tankers.

Baleen whales are thought to be more sensitive to sound at these low frequencies than are toothed whales (e.g., MacGillivray et al. 2014), possibly causing localized avoidance of the proposed survey areas during seismic operations. Reactions of gray and humpback whales to vessels have been studied, and there is limited information available about the reactions of right whales and rorquals (fin, blue, and minke whales). Reactions of humpback whales to boats are variable, ranging from approach to avoidance (Payne 1978; Salden 1993). Baker et al. (1982, 1983) and Baker and Herman (1989) found humpbacks often move away when vessels are within several kilometers. Humpbacks seem less likely to react overtly when actively feeding than when resting or engaged in other activities (Krieger and Wing 1984, 1986). Increased levels of ship noise have been shown to affect foraging by humpback whales (Blair et al. 2016). Fin whale sightings in the western Mediterranean were negatively correlated with the number of vessels in the area (Campana et al. 2015). Minke whales and gray seals have shown slight displacement in response to construction-related vessel traffic (Anderwald et al. 2013).

Many odontocetes show considerable tolerance of vessel traffic, although they sometimes react at long distances if confined by ice or shallow water, if previously harassed by vessels, or have had little or no recent exposure to ships (Richardson et al. 1995). Dolphins of many species tolerate and sometimes approach vessels (e.g., Anderwald et al. 2013). Some dolphin species approach moving vessels to ride the bow or stern waves (Williams et al. 1992). Physical presence of vessels, not just ship noise, has been shown to disturb the foraging activity of bottlenose dolphins (Pirotta et al. 2015) and blue whales (Lesage et al. 2017). Sightings of striped dolphin, Risso's dolphin, sperm whale, and Cuvier's beaked whale in the western Mediterranean were negatively correlated with the number of vessels in the area (Campana et al. 2015).

There are few data on the behavioral reactions of beaked whales to vessel noise, though they seem to avoid approaching vessels (e.g., Würsig et al. 1998) or dive for an extended period when approached by a vessel (e.g., Kasuya 1986). Based on a single observation, Aguilar Soto et al. (2006) suggest foraging efficiency of Cuvier's beaked whales may be reduced by close approach of vessels. Tyson et al. (2017) suggested that a juvenile green sea turtle dove during vessel passes and remained still near the sea floor.

The PEIS concluded that project vessel sounds would not be at levels expected to cause anything more than possible localized and temporary behavioral changes in marine mammals or sea turtles, and would not be expected to result in significant negative effects on individuals or at the population level. In addition, in all oceans of the world, large vessel traffic is currently so prevalent that it is commonly considered a usual source of ambient sound.

Another concern with vessel traffic is the potential for striking marine mammals or sea turtles (e.g.,

Redfern et al. 2013). Information on vessel strikes is reviewed in § 3.4.4.4, § 3.6.4.4, and § 3.8.4.4 of the PEIS. Wiley et al. (2016) concluded that reducing ship speed is one of the most reliable ways to avoid ship strikes. Similarly, Currie et al. (2017) found a significant decrease in close encounters with humpback whales in the Hawaiian Islands, and therefore reduced likelihood of ship strike, when vessels speeds were below 12.5 kts. However, McKenna et al. (2015) noted the potential absence of lateral avoidance demonstrated by blue whales and perhaps other large whale species to vessels. The PEIS concluded that the risk of collision of seismic vessels or towed/deployed equipment with marine mammals or sea turtles exists but is extremely unlikely, because of the relatively slow operating speed (typically 7–9 km/h) of the vessel during seismic operations, and the generally straight-line movement of the seismic vessel. There has been no history of marine mammal vessel strikes with the R/V *Langseth*, or its predecessor, R/V *Maurice Ewing* over the last two decades.

Entanglement of sea turtles in seismic gear is also a concern (Nelms et al. 2016). There have been reports of turtles being trapped and killed between the gaps in tail-buoys offshore from West Africa (Weir 2007); however, these tailbuoys are significantly different than those used on the *Langseth*. In April 2011, a dead olive ridley turtle was found in a deflector foil of the seismic gear on the *Langseth* during equipment recovery at the conclusion of a survey off Costa Rica, where sea turtles were numerous. Such incidents are possible, but that was the only case of sea turtle entanglement in seismic gear for the *Langseth*, which has been conducting seismic surveys since 2008, or for its predecessor, R/V *Maurice Ewing*, during 2003–2007. Towing the seismic equipment during the proposed surveys is not expected to significantly interfere with sea turtle movements, including migration.

4.1.1.4 Mitigation Measures

Several mitigation measures are built into the proposed seismic survey as an integral part of the planned activity. These measures include the following: ramp up of the airgun array; typically two, however a minimum of one dedicated observer maintaining a visual watch during all daytime airgun operations; two observers for 30 min before and during ramp ups; PAM during the day and night to complement visual monitoring (unless the system and back-up systems are damaged during operations); and power downs (or if necessary shut downs) when mammals, diving/foraging ESA-listed seabirds, or sea turtles are detected in or about to enter designated EZ. These mitigation measures are described in § 2.4.4.1 of the PEIS and summarized earlier in this document, in § II (2.1.3). The fact that the airgun array, because of its design, would direct the majority of the energy downward, and less energy laterally, is also an inherent mitigation measure.

As a result of the very small population size of North Pacific right whales, the acoustic source would be shut down for North Pacific Right whales observed at any distance from the vessel, and would only operate in North Pacific right whale critical habitat during daylight hours, to facilitate the ability of PSOs to observe any right whales that may be present. L-DEO would shutdown for a calf or aggregation of large whales (defined as 6 or more mysticetes or sperm whales) observed at any distance during operations. Operations would also avoid exposing sea otters and their critical habitat from ensonification levels of 160 dB re 1 μ Pa SPL or greater (Level B zone) to avoid take. Observers would also watch for any impacts the acoustic sources may have on fish.

Previous and subsequent analysis of the potential impacts take account of these planned mitigation measures. It would not be meaningful to analyze the effects of the planned activity without mitigation, as the mitigation (and associated monitoring) measures are a basic part of the activity, and would be implemented under the Proposed Action.

4.1.1.5 Potential Numbers of Cetaceans Exposed to Received Sound Levels ≥ 160 dB

All takes would be anticipated to be Level B “takes by harassment” as described in § I, involving

temporary changes in behavior. As required by NMFS, Level A takes have been requested; given the small EZ and the proposed mitigation measures to be applied, injurious takes would not be expected. (However, as noted earlier and in the PEIS, there is no specific information demonstrating that injurious Level A “takes” would occur even in the absence of the planned mitigation measures.) In the sections below, we describe the methods used to estimate the number of potential exposures to Level A and Level B threshold and present estimates of the numbers of marine mammals that could be affected during the proposed seismic survey. The estimates are based on consideration of the number of marine mammals that could be disturbed appreciably by the seismic survey in the GOA. The main sources of distributional and numerical data used in deriving the estimates are described in the next subsection.

The Level B estimates are based on a consideration of the number of marine mammals that could be within the area around the operating airgun array where received levels of sound ≥ 160 dB re $1 \mu\text{Pa}_{\text{rms}}$ are predicted to occur (see Table 1). The estimated numbers are based on the densities (individuals per unit area) of marine mammals expected to occur in the survey area in the absence of a seismic survey. To the extent that marine mammals tend to move away from seismic sources before the sound level reaches the criterion level and tend not to approach an operating airgun array, these estimates likely overestimate the numbers actually exposed to the specified level of sound. The overestimation is expected to be particularly large when dealing with the higher sound level criteria, i.e., the PTS thresholds (Level A), as animals are more likely to move away when received levels are higher. Thus, they are less likely to approach within the PTS threshold radii than they are to approach within the considerably larger ≥ 160 dB (Level B) radius.

For the proposed survey, we consulted with NMFS regarding which marine mammal density sources to use for developing take estimates. In response, NMFS recommended the use of habitat-based stratified marine mammal densities developed by the U.S. Navy for assessing potential impacts of training activities in the GOA (DoN 2014). Alternative density estimates available for species in this region are not stratified by water depth and therefore do not reflect the known variability in species distribution relative to habitat features. Consistent with Rone et al. (2014), four strata were defined: Inshore: all waters < 1000 m deep; Slope: from 1000 m water depth to the Aleutian trench/subduction zone; Offshore: waters offshore of the Aleutian trench/subduction zone; Seamount: waters within defined seamount areas. Densities corresponding to these strata were based on data from several different sources, including Navy funded line-transect surveys in the GOA as described below and in Appendix B.

To develop densities specific to the GOA, the Navy conducted two comprehensive marine mammal surveys in the Temporary Marine Activities Area (TMAA) in the GOA prior to 2014. The first survey was conducted from 10 to 20 April 2009 and the second was from 23 June to 18 July 2013. Both surveys used systematic line-transect survey protocols including visual and acoustic detection methods (Rone et al. 2010; Rone et al. 2014). The data were collected in four strata that were designed to encompass the four distinct habitats within the TMAA and greater GOA. Rone et al. (2014) provided stratified line-transect density estimates used in this analysis for fin, humpback, blue, sperm, and killer whales, as well as northern fur seals (Table 8). Data from a subsequent survey in 2015 were used to calculate alternative density estimates for several species (Rone et al. 2017) and the density estimates for Dall’s porpoise used here were taken from that source.

DoN (2014) derived gray whale densities in two zones, nearshore (0–2.25 n.mi from shore) and offshore (from 2.25–20 n.mi. from shore). In our calculations, the nearshore density was used to represent the inshore zone and the offshore density was used to represent the slope zone.

Harbor porpoise densities in DoN (2014) were derived from Hobbs and Waite (2010) which included additional shallow water depth strata. The density estimate from the 100 m to 200 m depth strata was used to represent the entire inshore zone (< 1000 m) in this analysis. Similarly, harbor seals typically remain close

to shore so minimal estimates were used for the three deep water zones and a one thousand fold increase of the minimal density was used to represent the entire inshore zone (DoN 2014).

TABLE 8. Densities of marine mammals that could be exposed to Level B and Level A thresholds for NMFS defined hearing groups during the proposed GOA survey. Species in *italics* are listed under the ESA.

Species	Estimated Density (#/1000 km ²)			
	Inshore <1000 m	Slope (1000 m to Aleutian Trench)	Offshore (Offshore of Aleutian Trench)	Seamount (In Defined Seamount Areas)
LF Cetaceans				
<i>North Pacific right whale</i>	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
Humpback whale	129.00	0.20	1.00	1.00
<i>Blue whale</i>	0.50	0.50	0.50	2.00
<i>Fin whale</i>	71.00	14.00	21.00	5.00
<i>Sei whale</i>	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.10
Minke whale	0.60	0.60	0.60	0.60
Gray whale	48.57	2.43	0.00	0.00
MF Cetaceans				
<i>Sperm whale</i>	0.00	3.30	1.30	0.36
Killer whale	5.00	20.00	2.00	2.00
Pacific white-sided dolphin	20.80	20.80	20.80	20.80
Cuvier's beaked whale	2.20	2.20	2.20	2.20
Baird's beaked whale	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.50
Stejneger's beaked whale	0.01	1.42	1.42	1.42
Risso's dolphin	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
HF Cetaceans				
Harbor Porpoise	47.30	0.00	0.00	0.00
Dall's porpoise	218.00	196.00	37.00	24.00
Otariid Seals				
<i>Steller sea lion</i>	9.80	9.80	9.80	9.80
California sea lion	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
Northern fur seal	15.00	4.00	17.00	6.00
Phocid Seal				
Northern elephant seal	2.20	2.20	2.20	2.20
Harbor seal	10.00	0.01	0.01	0.01

Densities for Minke whale, Pacific white-sided dolphin, and Cuvier's and Baird's beaked whales were based on Waite (2003 *in* DoN 2009). Although sei whale sightings and Stejneger's beaked whale acoustic detections were recorded during the Navy funded GOA surveys, data were insufficient to calculate densities for these species, so predictions from a global model of marine mammals densities were used (Kaschner et al. 2012 *in* DoN 2014).

Steller sea lion and northern elephant seal densities were calculated using shore-based population estimates divided by the area of the GOA Large Marine Ecosystem (DoN 2014).

The North Pacific right whale, Risso's dolphin, and California sea lion are only rarely observed in or near the survey area, so minimal densities were used to represent their potential presence.

All densities were corrected for perception bias [$f(0)$] but only harbor porpoise densities were corrected for availability bias [$g(0)$], as described by the respective authors. There is some uncertainty related to the estimated density data and the assumptions used in their calculations, as with all density data estimates. However, the approach used here is based on the best available data that are stratified by the

water depth (habitat) zones present within the survey area. Alternative density estimates available for species in this region are not stratified by water depth and therefore do not reflect the known variability in species distribution relative to habitat features. The calculated exposures that are based on these densities are best estimates for the proposed survey.

The estimated numbers of individuals potentially exposed are based on the 160-dB re 1 $\mu\text{Pa}_{\text{rms}}$ criterion for all marine mammals. It is assumed that marine mammals exposed to airgun sounds that strong could change their behavior sufficiently to be considered “taken by harassment”. Using the density estimates shown in Table 8, estimates of the number of marine mammals that potentially could be exposed to ≥ 160 dB re 1 $\mu\text{Pa}_{\text{rms}}$ during the proposed seismic survey in GOA if no animals moved away from the survey vessel are shown in Table 9. The *Requested Take Authorization* is given in the right-most column of Table 9. The North Pacific right whale and Risso’s dolphin were the only species for which the *Requested Take Authorization* was increased from the density-based calculations to mean group size based on Sheldon et al. (2005), Waite et al. (2003) and Wade et al. (2011a) for North Pacific right whale and Bradford et al. (2017) for Risso’s dolphin.

For all species, including those for which densities were not available or expected to be low, we have included a *Requested Take Authorization* for at least the mean group size for species where that number was higher than the calculated take. For the Stejneger’s beaked whale, which may be present but unlikely to be observed and for which no reasonable estimates of group size are available from this region, the *Requested Take Authorization* was increased to 5 individuals.

It should be noted that the exposure estimates assume that the proposed survey would be fully completed; in fact, the calculated takes **have been increased by 25%** by assuming additional survey operations would take place (see below). Thus, the following estimates of the numbers of marine mammals potentially exposed to sounds ≥ 160 dB re 1 $\mu\text{Pa}_{\text{rms}}$ are precautionary and probably overestimate the actual numbers of marine mammals that could be involved.

Consideration should be given to the hypothesis that delphinids are less responsive to airgun sounds than are mysticetes, as referenced in the NSF/USGS PEIS. The 160-dB (rms) criterion currently applied by NMFS, on which the Level B estimates are based, was developed primarily using data from gray and bowhead whales. The estimates of “takes by harassment” of delphinids are thus considered precautionary. Available data suggest that the current use of a 160-dB criterion could be improved upon, as behavioral response might not occur for some percentage of marine mammals exposed to received levels >160 dB, whereas other individuals or groups might respond in a manner considered as “taken” to sound levels <160 dB (NMFS 2013b). It has become evident that the context of an exposure of a marine mammal to sound can affect the animal’s initial response to the sound (NMFS 2013b).

TABLE 9. Densities and estimates of the possible numbers of marine mammals that could be exposed to Level B and Level A thresholds for various hearing groups during the proposed GOA survey.

Species	Calculated Take NMFS Daily Method ¹		Regional Population Size	Level B + Level A as % of Pop. ⁴	Requested Take Authorization ⁵
	Level B ²	Level A ³			
LF Cetaceans					
<i>North Pacific right whale</i> ⁶	1	1	400	1.0	4
Humpback whale	5,730	1	21,063	27.2	5,731
<i>Blue whale</i>	49	1	1,647	3.0	50
<i>Fin whale</i>	3,913	1	18,680	21.0	3,914
<i>Sei whale</i>	9	1	27,197	0.0	10
Minke whale	54	1	25,000	0.2	55
Gray whale	2,183	1	20,990	10.4	2,184
MF Cetaceans					
<i>Sperm whale</i>	86	1	26,300	0.3	87
Killer whale	587	1	8,500	6.9	588
Pacific white-sided dolphin	1,838	1	988,333	0.2	1,839
Cuvier's beaked whale	195	1	20,000	1.0	196
Baird's beaked whale	45	1	25,300	0.2	46
Stejneger's beaked whale ⁷	64	1	25,300	0.3	65
Risso's dolphin ⁸	1	1	838,000	0.0	17
HF Cetaceans					
Harbor Porpoise	2,090	3	79,261	2.6	2,093
Dall's porpoise	13,677	21	1,186,000	1.2	13,698
Otariid Seals					
<i>Steller sea lion</i>	866	1	53,303	1.6	867
California sea lion	1	1	296,750	0.0	2
Northern fur seal	1,184	1	1,100,000	0.1	1,185
Phocid Seal					
Northern elephant seal	195	1	239,000	0.1	196
Harbor seal	443	1	129,000	0.3	444

¹Take using NMFS daily method for calculating ensonified area: estimated density multiplied by the daily ensonified area to levels ≥ 160 dB re $1 \mu\text{Pa}_{\text{rms}}$ on one selected day (222 km) multiplied by the number of survey days (18 days), times 1.25; daily ensonified area = full 160-dB area minus ensonified area for the appropriate PTS thresholds. See text for more details.

²Level A takes if there were no mitigation measures.

³Level B takes, based on the 160-dB criterion, excluding exposures to sound levels equivalent to PTS thresholds.

⁴Requested Level A and B takes (used by NMFS as proxy for number of individuals exposed) expressed as % of population in the North Pacific (see Table 5).

⁵Requested take authorization is Level A plus Level B calculated takes, unless otherwise indicated.

⁶To avoid incidental take, a shutdown of operating airguns would occur upon sighting of a North Pacific right whale at any distance (see Mitigation), so no incidental take is expected; however, as a cautionary approach, two Level A and two Level B takes are requested. Two individuals is a conservative estimate of the group size of this species sighted in the Gulf of Alaska (Shelden et al. 2005; Waite et al. 2003; Wade et al. 2011a).

⁷Abundance estimate not available, but acoustic monitoring suggests Stejneger's beaked whales are at least as abundant as Baird's beaked whale in the GOA (Baumann-Pickering et al. 2014), so use of Baird's beaked whale abundance estimate should result in a cautionary estimate of the percent of the population potentially taken.

⁸Requested take authorization (Level B only) increased to mean group size.

⁹Calculated using area ensonified to ≥ 160 dB re $1 \mu\text{Pa}_{\text{rms}}$ in waters <40 m deep.

The number of marine mammals that could be exposed to airgun sounds with received levels ≥ 160 dB re $1 \mu\text{Pa}_{\text{rms}}$ (Level B) for marine mammals on one or more occasions have been estimated using a method required by NMFS for calculating the marine area that would be within the Level B threshold around the operating seismic source, along with the expected density of animals in the area. This method was

developed to account in some way for the number of exposures as well as the number of individuals exposed. It involves selecting a seismic trackline(s) that could be surveyed on one day (~222 km) with a proportion occurring in the marine mammal density zones (inshore, slope, offshore, and seamount) that is roughly similar to that of the entire survey. The area expected to be ensonified on that day was determined by entering the planned survey lines into a MapInfo GIS, using GIS to identify the relevant areas by “drawing” the applicable 160-dB (Table 1) and PTS threshold buffers (Table 2) around each line. The ensonified areas, increased by 25%, were then multiplied by the number of survey days (18 days). This is equivalent to adding an additional 25% to the proposed line km (Appendix D). The approach assumes that no marine mammals would move away or toward the trackline in response to increasing sound levels before the levels reach the specific thresholds as the *Langseth* approaches.

Per NMFS requirement, estimates of the numbers of cetaceans and pinnipeds that could be exposed to seismic sounds with received levels equal to Level A thresholds for various hearing groups (see Table 2), if there were no mitigation measures (power downs or shut downs when PSOs observed animals approaching or inside the EZs), are also given in Table 9. Those numbers likely overestimate actual Level A takes because the predicted Level A EZs are small and mitigation measures would further reduce the chances of, if not eliminate, any such takes. In addition, most marine mammals would move away from a sound source before they are exposed to sound levels that could result in a Level A take. Dall’s porpoise could be more susceptible to exposure to sound levels that exceed the PTS threshold than other marine mammals, as this species is known to approach vessels to bowride. However, Level A takes are considered highly unlikely for most marine mammal species that could be encountered in the proposed survey area.

The estimate of the number of marine mammals that could be exposed to seismic sounds with received levels ≥ 160 dB re 1 $\mu\text{Pa}_{\text{rms}}$ in the GOA survey area is 27,099 cetaceans and 2,037 pinnipeds (Table 9). That total includes 3,613 cetaceans listed as *endangered* under the ESA: 80 sperm whales, 9 sei whales, 3,480 fin whales, 44 blue whales, representing 0.3%, 0.03%, 18.6%, 2.7% of their regional populations, respectively. The total also includes 781 pinnipeds listed as endangered under the ESA, all of which are Stellar sea lions which represents 1.5% of the population. In addition, 277 beaked whales could be exposed. Most (52%) of the cetaceans potentially exposed would be porpoise; the Dalls’ porpoise is expected to be the most common marine mammal species in the area, with up to 12,172 exposed to ≥ 160 dB re 1 $\mu\text{Pa}_{\text{rms}}$, (1% of their regional populations).

4.1.1.6 Conclusions for Marine Mammals and Sea Turtles

The proposed seismic survey would involve towing a 36-airgun array with a total discharge volume of 6600 in³, which introduces pulsed sounds into the ocean. Routine vessel operations, other than the proposed seismic operations, are conventionally assumed not to affect marine mammals sufficiently to constitute “taking”.

Marine Mammals.—In § 3.6.7, § 3.7.7, § 3.8.7, and § 3.9.7, the PEIS concluded that airgun operations with implementation of the proposed monitoring and mitigation measures could result in a small number of Level B behavioral effects in some mysticete, odontocete, pinnipeds, and fissiped species and that Level A effects were highly unlikely. NMFS required the calculation of and request for potential Level A takes for the Proposed Action (following a different methodology than used in the PEIS and most previous analyses for NSF-funded seismic surveys). For recent NSF-funded seismic surveys, NMFS issued small numbers of Level A take for some marine mammal species for the remote possibility of low-level physiological effects; however, NMFS expected neither mortality nor serious injury of marine mammals to result from the surveys (NMFS 2015, 2016f,g, 2017a,f).

In this analysis, estimates of the numbers of marine mammals that could be exposed to airgun sounds during the proposed program have been presented, together with the requested “take authorization”. The

estimated numbers of animals potentially exposed to sound levels sufficient to cause Level A and/or B harassment are low percentages of the regional population sizes (Table 9). However, the relatively short-term exposures are unlikely to result in any long-term negative consequences for the individuals or their populations. Therefore, no significant impacts on marine mammals would be anticipated from the proposed activity, and it is not likely to adversely affect ESA-listed species.

In decades of seismic surveys carried out by the *Langseth* and its predecessor, the R/V *Ewing*, PSOs and other crew members have seen no seismic sound-related marine mammal injuries or mortality. Also, the actual numbers of animals potentially exposed to sound levels sufficient to cause disturbance (i.e., what would be considered takes) have almost always been much lower than the predicted and authorized takes. For example, during an NSF-funded, ~5000-km, 2-D seismic survey conducted by the *Langseth* off the coast of North Carolina in September–October 2014, only 296 cetaceans were observed within the predicted 160-dB zone and potentially taken, representing <2% of the 15,498 takes authorized by NMFS (RPS 2015). During a USGS-funded, ~2700 km, 2-D seismic survey conducted by the *Langseth* along the U.S. east coast in August–September 2014, only 3 unidentified dolphins were observed within the predicted 160-dB zone and potentially taken, representing <0.03% of the 11,367 authorized takes (RPS 2014b). During an NSF-funded ~3455 km, 2-D seismic survey conducted by the *Langseth* off the coast of Hawaii in 2018, no marine mammals were observed within the predicted 160-dB zone and potentially taken, representing 0% of the 11,068 takes authorized by NMFS (RPS *in prep.*). Furthermore, as defined, all animals exposed to sound levels >160 dB are Level B ‘takes’ whether or not a behavioral response occurred. The Level B estimates are thought to be conservative; thus, not all animals detected within this threshold distance would be expected to have been exposed to actual sound levels >160 dB.

Sea Turtles.—In § 3.4.7, the PEIS concluded that with implementation of the proposed monitoring and mitigation measures, no significant impacts of airgun operations are likely to sea turtle populations in any of the analysis areas, and that any effects are likely to be limited to short-term behavioral disturbance and short-term localized avoidance of an area of unknown size near the active airguns. In decades of seismic surveys carried out by the *Langseth* and its predecessor, the R/V *Ewing*, PSOs and other crew members have seen no seismic sound-related sea turtle injuries or mortality. Given the proposed activity, no significant impacts on sea turtles would be expected.

4.1.2 Direct Effects on Marine Invertebrates, Fish, and Fisheries, EFH, and Their Significance

Effects of seismic sound on marine invertebrates (crustaceans and cephalopods), marine fish, and their fisheries are discussed in § 3.2.4 and § 3.3.4 and Appendix D of the PEIS. Relevant new studies on the effects of sound on marine invertebrates, fish, and fisheries that have been published since the release of the PEIS are summarized below. Although research on the effects of exposure to airgun sound on marine invertebrates and fishes is increasing, many data gaps remain (Hawkins et al. 2015; Carroll et al. 2017), including how particle motion, rather than sound pressure level, affects invertebrates and fishes that are exposed to sound (Hawkins and Popper 2017; Popper and Hawkins 2018). In addition, vibrations from sounds may also have an effect on the epibenthos, but sensitivities are largely unknown (Roberts and Elliott 2017). However, activities directly contacting the seabed, such as drilling and pile driving, would be expected to have a greater impact than sound from an airgun array, although water depth would also factor into the degree of impact.

4.1.2.1 Effects of Sound on Marine Invertebrates

Effects of anthropogenic sounds on marine invertebrates are varied, ranging from no overt reactions to behavioral/physiological responses, injuries, or mortalities (Aguilar de Soto 2016; Carroll et al. 2016;

Edmonds et al. 2016; Weilgart 2017b). The available information suggests that invertebrates, particularly crustaceans, may be relatively resilient to airgun sounds (Day et al. 2016a,b). Fewtrell and McCauley (2012) exposed captive squid (*Sepioteuthis australis*) to pulses from a single airgun; the received sound levels ranged from 120–184 dB re 1 dB re 1 $\mu\text{Pa}^2 \cdot \text{s}$ SEL. Increases in alarm responses were seen at SELs >147–151 dB re 1 $\mu\text{Pa}^2 \cdot \text{s}$; the squid were seen to discharge ink or change their swimming pattern or vertical position in the water column.

Solé et al. (2013a,b) exposed four cephalopod species held in tanks to low-frequency (50–400 Hz) sinusoidal wave sweeps (with a 1-s sweep period for 2 h) with received levels of 157 ± 5 dB re 1 μPa and peak levels up to 175 dB re 1 μPa . Besides exhibiting startle responses, all four species examined received damage to the statocyst, which is the organ responsible for equilibrium and movement. The animals also showed stressed behavior, decreased activity, and loss of muscle tone (Solé et al. 2013a). To examine the contribution from near-field particle motion from the tank walls on the study, Solé et al. (2017) exposed common cuttlefish (*Sepia officinalis*) in cages in their natural habitat to 1/3 octave bands with frequencies centered at 315 Hz and 400 Hz and levels ranging from 139–141 dB re 1 μPa^2 . The study animals still incurred acoustic trauma and injury to statocysts, despite not being held in confined tanks with walls. A later study from this research group showed that statocyst damage was more severe in cephalopod hatchlings than in adults, suggesting a developmental period of greater sensitivity (Solé et al. 2018).

When New Zealand scallop (*Pecten novaezelandiae*) larvae were exposed to recorded seismic pulses, significant developmental delays were reported, and 46% of the larvae exhibited body abnormalities; it was suggested that the malformations could be attributable to cumulative exposure (Aguilar de Soto et al. 2013). Their experiment used larvae enclosed in 60-mL flasks suspended in a 2-m diameter by 1.3-m water depth tank and exposed to a playback of seismic sound at a distance of 5–10 cm.

There have been several *in situ* studies that have examined the effects of seismic surveys on scallops. Although most of these studies showed no short-term mortality in scallops (Harrington et al. 2010; Parry et al. 2002; Przeslawski et al. 2016, 2018), one study (Day et al. 2016a,b, 2017) did show adverse effects including an increase in mortality rates. Przeslawski et al. (2016, 2018) studied the potential impacts of an industrial seismic survey on commercial (*Pecten fumatus*) and doughboy (*Mimachlamys asperima*) scallops. *In situ* monitoring of scallops took place in the Gippsland Basin, Australia, using dredging and autonomous underwater vehicle deployment before the seismic survey, as well as two and ten months after the survey. The airgun array used in the study was a single 2530 in³ array made up of 16 airguns operating at 2000 psi with a maximum SEL of 146 dB re 1 $\mu\text{Pa}^2 \cdot \text{s}$ at 51 m depth. Overall, there was little to no detectable impact of the seismic survey on scallop health as measured by scallop shell size, adductor muscle diameter, gonad size, or gonad stage (Przeslawski et al. 2016). No scallop mortality related to airgun sounds was detected two or ten months after the seismic survey (Przeslawski et al. 2016, 2018).

Day et al. (2016a,b, 2017) exposed scallops (*P. fumatus*) and egg-bearing female spiny lobsters (*Jasus edwardsi*) at a location 10–12 m below the surface to airgun sounds. The airgun source was started ~1–1.5 km from the study subjects and passed over the animals; thus, the scallops and lobsters were exposed to airgun sounds as close as 5–8 m away and up to 1.5 km from the source. Three different airgun configurations were used in the field: 45 in³, 150 in³ (low pressure), and 150 in³ (high pressure), each with maximum peak-to-peak source levels of 191–213 dB re 1 μPa ; maximum cumulative SEL source levels were 189–199 dB re 1 $\mu\text{Pa}^2 \cdot \text{s}$. Exposure to seismic sound was found to significantly increase mortality in the scallops, especially over a chronic time scale (i.e., months post-exposure), although not beyond naturally occurring rates of mortality (Day et al. 2017). Non-lethal effects were also recorded, including changes in reflex behavior time, other behavioral patterns, haemolymph chemistry, and apparent damage to statocysts (Day et al. 2016b, 2017). However, the scallops were reared in suspended lantern nets rather than their

natural environment, which can result in higher mortality rates compared to benthic populations (Yu et al. 2010). The female lobsters were maintained until the eggs hatched; no significant differences were found in the quality or quantity of larvae for control versus exposed subjects, indicating that the embryonic development of spiny lobster was not adversely affected by airgun sounds (Day et al. 2016a,b). No mortalities were reported for control or exposed lobsters (Day et al. 2016a,b).

Fitzgibbon et al. (2017) also examined the impact of airgun exposure on spiny lobster through a companion study to the Day et al. (2016a,b, 2017) studies; the same study site, experimental treatment methodologies, and airgun exposures were used. The objectives of the study were to examine the haemolymph biochemistry and nutritional condition of groups of lobsters over a period of up to 365 days post-airgun exposure. Overall, no mortalities were observed across both the experimental and control groups; however, lobster total haemocyte count decreased by 23–60% for all lobster groups up to 120 days post-airgun exposure in the experimental group when compared to the control group. A lower haemocyte count increases the risk of disease through a lower immunological response. The only other haemolymph parameter that was significantly affected by airgun exposure was the Brix index of haemolymph at 120 and 365 days post-airgun exposure in one of the experiments involving egg-laden females. Other studies conducted in the field have shown no effects on Dungeness crab larvae or snow crab embryos to seismic sounds (Pearson et al. 1994; DFO 2004; Morris et al. 2018).

Payne et al. (2015) undertook two pilot studies which (i) examined the effects of a seismic airgun recording in the laboratory on lobster (*Homarus americanus*) mortality, gross pathology, histopathology, serum biochemistry, and feeding; and (ii) examined prolonged or delayed effects of seismic airgun pulses in the laboratory on lobster mortality, gross pathology, histopathology, and serum biochemistry. For experiment (i), lobsters were exposed to peak-to-peak and root-mean-squared received sound levels of 180 dB re 1 μPa and 171 dB re 1 $\mu\text{Pa}_{\text{rms}}$, respectively. Overall there was no mortality, loss of appendages, or other signs of gross pathology observed in exposed lobster. No differences were observed in haemolymph, feeding, ovary histopathology, or glycogen accumulation in the hepatopancreas. The only observed differences were greater degrees of tubular vacuolation and tubular dilation in the hepatopancreas of the exposed lobsters. For experiment (ii), lobsters were exposed to 20 airgun shots per day for five successive days in a laboratory setting. The peak-to-peak and root-mean-squared received sound levels ranged from ~176–200 dB re 1 μPa and 148–172 dB re 1 $\mu\text{Pa}_{\text{rms}}$, respectively. The lobsters were returned to their aquaria and examined after six months. No differences in mortality, gross pathology, loss of appendages, hepatopancreas/ovary histopathology, or glycogen accumulation in the hepatopancreas were observed between exposed and control lobsters. The only observed difference was a slight statistically significant difference for calcium-protein concentration in the haemolymph, with lobsters in the exposed group having a lower concentration than the control group.

Celi et al. (2013) exposed captive red swamp crayfish (*Procambarus clarkia*) to linear sweeps with a frequency range of 0.1–25 kHz and a peak amplitude of 148 dB re 1 $\mu\text{Pa}_{\text{rms}}$ at 12 kHz for 30 min. They found that the noise exposure caused changes in the haemato-immunological parameters (indicating stress) and reduced agonistic behaviors. Wale et al. (2013a,b) showed increased oxygen consumption and effects on feeding and righting behavior of shore crabs when exposed to ship sound playbacks.

McCauley et al. (2017) conducted a 2-day study to examine the potential effects of sound exposure of a 150 in³ airgun on zooplankton off the coast of Tasmania; they concluded that exposure to airgun sound decreased zooplankton abundance compared to control samples, and caused a two- to three-fold increase in adult and larval zooplankton mortality. They observed impacts on the zooplankton as far as 1.2 km from the exposure location – a much greater impact range than previously thought; however, there was no consistent decline in the proportion of dead zooplankton as distance increased and received levels

decreased. The conclusions by McCauley et al. (2017) were based on a relatively small number of zooplankton samples, and more replication is required to increase confidence in the study findings. Richardson et al. (2017) presented results of a modeling exercise intended to investigate the impact of exposure to airgun sound on zooplankton over a much larger temporal and spatial scale than that employed by McCauley et al. (2017). The exercise modeled a hypothetical survey over an area 80 km by 36 km during a 35-day period. Richardson et al. (2017) postulated that the decrease in zooplankton abundance observed by McCauley et al. (2017) could have been due to active avoidance behavior by larger zooplankton. The modeling results did indicate that there would be substantial impact on the zooplankton populations at a local spatial scale but not at a large spatial scale; zooplankton biomass recovery within the exposure area and out to 15 km occurred 3 days after completion of the seismic survey.

Leite et al. (2016) reported observing a dead giant squid (*Architeuthis dux*) while undertaking marine mammal observation work aboard a seismic vessel conducting a seismic survey in offshore Brazil. The seismic vessel was operating a 48-airgun array with a total volume of 5085 in³. As no further information on the squid could be obtained, it is unknown whether the airgun sounds played a factor in the death of the squid.

Heyward et al. (2018) monitored corals *in situ* before and after exposure to a 3D seismic survey; the maximum SEL and SPL_{0-pk} were 204 dB re 1 $\mu\text{Pa}^2\cdot\text{s}$ and 226 dB re 1 μPa . No macroscopic effects on soft tissues or the skeleton were noted days or months after the survey.

4.1.2.2 Effects of Sound on Fish

Potential impacts of exposure to airgun sound on marine fishes have been reviewed by Popper (2009), Popper and Hastings (2009a,b), Fay and Popper (2012), and Weilgart (2017b); they include pathological, physiological, and behavioral effects. Radford et al. (2014) and Putland et al. (2017) noted that masking of key environmental sounds or social signals could also be a potential negative effect from sound. Popper et al. (2014) presented guidelines for seismic sound level thresholds related to potential effects on fish. The effect types discussed include mortality, mortal injury, recoverable injury, temporary threshold shift, masking, and behavioral effects. Seismic sound level thresholds were discussed in relation to fish without swim bladders, fish with swim bladders, and fish eggs and larvae. Hawkins and Popper (2017) cautioned that particle motion as well as sound pressure should be considered when assessing the effects of underwater sound on fishes.

Bui et al. (2013) examined the behavioral responses of Atlantic salmon (*Salmo salar* L.) to light, sound, and surface disturbance events. They reported that the fish showed short-term avoidance responses to the three stimuli. Salmon that were exposed to 12 Hz sounds and/or surface disturbances increased their swimming speeds.

Peña et al. (2013) used an omnidirectional fisheries sonar to determine the effects of a 3-D seismic survey off Vesterålen, northern Norway, on feeding herring (*Clupea harengus*). They reported that herring schools did not react to the seismic survey; no significant changes were detected in swimming speed, swim direction, or school size when the drifting seismic vessel approached the fish from a distance of 27 km to 2 km over a 6-h period. Peña et al. (2013) attributed the lack of response to strong motivation for feeding, the slow approach of the seismic vessel, and an increased tolerance to airgun sounds.

Miller and Cripps (2013) used underwater visual census to examine the effect of a seismic survey on a shallow-water coral reef fish community in Australia. The census took place at six sites on the reef before and after the survey. When the census data collected during the seismic program were combined with historical data, the analyses showed that the seismic survey had no significant effect on the overall abundance or species richness of reef fish. This was in part attributed to the design of the seismic survey (e.g., ≥ 400 m buffer zone around reef), which reduced the impacts of seismic sounds on the fish

communities by exposing them to relatively low SELs (<187 dB re 1 $\mu\text{Pa}^2 \cdot \text{s}$).

Fewtrell and McCauley (2012) exposed pink snapper (*Pagrus auratus*) and trevally (*Pseudocaranx dentex*) to pulses from a single airgun; the received sound levels ranged from 120–184 dB re 1 dB re 1 $\mu\text{Pa}^2 \cdot \text{s}$ SEL. Increases in alarm responses were seen in the fish at SELs >147–151 dB re 1 $\mu\text{Pa}^2 \cdot \text{s}$; the fish swam faster and formed more cohesive groups in response to the airgun sounds.

Hastings and Miksis-Olds (2012) measured the hearing sensitivity of caged reef fish following exposure to a seismic survey in Australia. When the auditory evoked potentials (AEP) were examined for fish that had been in cages as close as 45 m from the pass of the seismic vessel and at water depth of 5 m, there was no evidence of TTS in any of the fish examined, even though the cumulative SELs had reached 190 dB re 1 $\mu\text{Pa}^2 \cdot \text{s}$.

Radford et al. (2016) conducted experiments examining how repeated exposures of different sounds to European seabass (*Dicentrarchus labrax*) can reduce the fishes' response to that sound. They exposed post-larval seabass to playback recordings of seismic survey sound (single strike SEL 144 dB re 1 $\mu\text{Pa}^2 \cdot \text{s}$) in large indoor tanks containing underwater speakers. Their findings indicated that short-term exposure of seismic sound increased the ventilation rate (i.e., opercular beat rate [OBR]) of seabass that were not previously exposed to seismic relative to seabass in controlled, ambient sound conditions. Fish that were reared in tanks that were repeatedly exposed to seismic sound over a 12-week period exhibited a reduced OBR response to that sound type, but fish exposed over the same time period to pile-driving noise displayed a reduced response to both seismic and pile-driving noise. An increased ventilation rate is indicative of greater stress in seabass; however, there was no evidence of mortality or effects on growth of the seabass throughout the 12-week study period.

Przeslawski et al. (2016) studied the potential behavioral impacts of an industrial seismic survey in the Gippsland Basin, Australia, on three shark species: tiger flathead (*Neoplitycephalus richardsoni*), gummy shark (*Mustelus antarcticus*), and swellshark (*Cephaloscyllium laticeps*). Sharks were captured and tagged with acoustic tags before the survey and monitored for movement via acoustic telemetry within the seismic area. The energy source used in the study was a single 2530 in³ array made up of 16 airguns operating at 2000 psi with a maximum SEL of 146 dB re 1 $\mu\text{Pa}^2 \cdot \text{s}$ at 51 m depth. Flathead and gummy sharks were observed to move in and around the acoustic receivers while the airguns in the survey were active; however, most sharks left the study area within 2 days of being tagged. The authors of the study did not attribute this behavior to avoidance, possibly because the study area was relatively small. Overall, there was little conclusive evidence of the seismic survey impacting shark behavior, though flathead shark did show increases in swim speed that was regarded by the authors as a startle response to the airguns operating within the area.

Popper et al. (2016) conducted a study that examined the effects of exposure to seismic airgun sound on caged pallid sturgeon (*Scaphirhynchus albus*) and paddlefish (*Polyodon spathula*); the maximum received peak SPL in this study was 224 dB re 1 μPa . Results of the study indicated no mortality, either during or seven days after exposure, and no statistical differences in effects on body tissues between exposed and control fish.

Andrews et al. (2014) conducted functional genomic studies on the inner ear of Atlantic salmon (*Salmo salar*) that had been exposed to seismic airgun sound. The airguns had a maximum SPL of ~145 dB re 1 $\mu\text{Pa}^2/\text{Hz}$ and the fish were exposed to 50 discharges per trial. The results provided evidence that fish exposed to seismic sound either increased or decreased their expressions of different genes, demonstrating that seismic sound can affect fish on a genetic level.

Sierra-Flores (2015) examined broadcast sound as a short-term stressor in Atlantic cod (*Gadus morhua*) using cortisol as a biomarker. An underwater loudspeaker emitted SPLs ranging from

104–110 dB re 1 $\mu\text{Pa}_{\text{rms}}$. Plasma cortisol levels of fish increased rapidly with sound exposure, returning to baseline levels 20–40 min post-exposure. A second experiment examined the effects of long-term sound exposure on Atlantic cod spawning performance. Tanks were stocked with male and female cod and exposed daily to six noise events, each lasting one hour. The noise exposure had a total SPL of 133 dB re 1 μPa . Cod eggs were collected daily and measured for egg quality parameters as well as egg cortisol content. Total egg volume, floating fraction, egg diameter and egg weight did not appear to be negatively affected by sound exposure. However fertilization rate and viable egg productivity were reduced by 40% and 50%, respectively, compared with the control group. Mean egg cortisol content was found to be 34% greater in the exposed group as compared to the control group. Elevated cortisol levels inhibit reproductive physiology for males and can result in a greater frequency of larval deformities for spawning females.

4.1.2.3 Effects of Sound on Fisheries

Handegard et al. (2013) examined different exposure metrics to explain the disturbance of seismic surveys on fish. They applied metrics to two experiments in Norwegian waters, during which fish distribution and fisheries were affected by airguns. Even though the disturbance for one experiment was greater, the other appeared to have the stronger SEL, based on a relatively complex propagation model. Handegard et al. (2013) recommended that simple sound propagation models should be avoided and that the use of sound energy metrics like SEL to interpret disturbance effects should be done with caution. In this case, the simplest model (exposures per area) best explained the disturbance effect.

Hovem et al. (2012) used a model to predict the effects of airgun sounds on fish populations. Modeled SELs were compared with empirical data and were then compared with startle response levels for cod. This work suggested that in the future, particular acoustic-biological models could be useful in designing and planning seismic surveys to minimize disturbance to fishing. Their preliminary analyses indicated that seismic surveys should occur at a distance of 5–10 km from fishing areas, in order to minimize potential effects on fishing.

In their introduction, Løkkeborg et al. (2012) described three studies in the 1990s that showed effects on fisheries. Results of a study off Norway in 2009 indicated that fishes reacted to airgun sound based on observed changes in catch rates during seismic shooting; gillnet catches increased during the seismic shooting, likely a result of increased movement of exposed fish, whereas longline catches decreased overall (Løkkeborg et al. 2012).

Streever et al. (2016) completed a Before-After/Control-Impact (BACI) study in the nearshore waters of Prudhoe Bay, Alaska in 2014 which compared fish catch rates during times with and without seismic activity. The air gun arrays used in the geophysical survey had sound pressure levels of 237 dB re 1 $\mu\text{Pa}_{\text{a0-p}}$, 243 dB re 1 $\mu\text{Pa}_{\text{p-p}}$, and 218 dB re 1 $\mu\text{Pa}_{\text{rms}}$. Received SPL $_{\text{max}}$ ranged from 107–144 dB re 1 μPa , and received SEL $_{\text{cum}}$ ranged from 111–141 dB re 1 $\mu\text{Pa}^2\text{-s}$ for air gun pulses measured by sound recorders at four fyke net locations. They determined that fyke nets closest to air gun activities showed decreases in catch per unit effort (CPUE) while nets further away from the air gun source showed increases in CPUE.

Przeslawski et al. (2016) studied the potential impacts of an industrial seismic survey in the Gippsland Basin, Australia, on catches in the Danish seine and gillnet fishing sectors for 15 fish species. Catch data were examined from 3 years before the seismic survey to six months after completion of the survey in an area 13,000 km 2 which encompassed survey area. Overall, no significant adverse impacts of the seismic survey on catch rates were noted. Six of the 15 species were actually found to have increased catch rates.

Paxton et al. (2017) examined the effects of seismic sounds on the distribution and behavior of fish on a temperate reef during a seismic survey conducted in the Atlantic Ocean on the inner continental shelf of North Carolina. Hydrophones were set up near the seismic vessel path to measure SPLs, and a video

camera was set up to observe fish abundances and behaviors. Received SPLs were estimated at ~202–230 dB re 1 μ Pa. Overall abundance of fish was lower when undergoing seismic activity as opposed to days when no seismic occurred. Only one fish was observed to exhibit a startle response to the airgun shots. The authors claim that although the study was based on limited data, it contributes evidence that normal fish use of reef ecosystems is reduced when they are impacted by seismic sounds.

Morris et al. (2018) conducted a two-year (2015–2016) BACI study examining the effects of 2-D seismic exploration on catch rates of snow crab (*Chionoecetes opilio*) along the eastern continental slope (Lilly Canyon and Carson Canyon) of the Grand Banks of Newfoundland, Canada. The airgun array used was operated from a commercial seismic exploration vessel; it had a total volume of 4880 in³, horizontal zero-to-peak SPL of 251 dB re 1 μ Pa, and SEL of 229 dB re 1 μ Pa²·s. The closest approach of the survey vessel to the treatment site in 2015 (year 1 of the study) was 1465 m during 5 days of seismic operations; in 2016 (year 2), the vessel passed within 100 m of the treatment site but the exposure lasted only 2 h. Overall, the findings indicated that the sound from the commercial seismic survey did not significantly reduce snow crab catch rates during days or weeks following exposure. Morris et al. (2018) attributed the natural temporal and spatial variations in the marine environment as a greater influence on observed differences in catch rates between control and experimental sites than exposure to seismic survey sounds.

4.1.2.4 Conclusions for Invertebrates, Fish, Fisheries, and EFH

The newly available information does not affect the outcome of the effects assessment as presented in the PEIS. The PEIS concluded that there could be changes in behavior and other non-lethal, short-term, temporary impacts, and injurious or mortal impacts on a small number of individuals within a few meters of a high-energy acoustic source, but that there would be no significant impacts of NSF-funded marine seismic research on populations. The PEIS also concluded that seismic surveys could cause temporary, localized reduced fish catch to some species, but that effects on commercial and recreation fisheries would not be significant.

Interactions between the proposed survey and fishing operations in the proposed survey area are expected to be limited. There could be a possible conflict with the *Langseth*'s towed equipment entangling with fishing gear. Fishing activities could occur within the proposed survey area; however, vessels actively fishing would need to maintain a safe distance from the *Langseth* and the towed seismic equipment. Conflicts would be avoided through communication with the fishing community before and during the survey. PSOs would also watch for any impacts the acoustic sources may have on fish during the survey.

Given the proposed activity, no significant impacts on marine invertebrates, marine fish, their fisheries, and EFH would be expected, and the survey is not likely to adversely affect ESA-listed species. In decades of seismic surveys carried out by the *Langseth* and its predecessor, the R/V *Ewing*, PSOs and other crew members have not observed any seismic sound-related fish or invertebrate injuries or mortality.

4.1.3 Direct Effects on Seabirds and Their Significance

The underwater hearing of seabirds (including loons, scaups, gannets, and ducks) has recently been investigated, and the peak hearing sensitivity was found to be between 1500 and 3000 Hz (Crowell 2016). The best sensitivity of underwater hearing for great cormorants was found to be at 2 kHz, with a hearing threshold of 71 dB re 1 μ Pa_{rms} (Hansen et al. 2017). Great cormorants were also found to respond to underwater sounds and may have special adaptations for hearing underwater (Johansen et al. 2016; Hansen et al. 2017). African penguins (*Spheniscus demersus*) outfitted with GPS loggers showed strong avoidance of preferred foraging areas and had to forage further away and increase their foraging effort when a seismic survey was occurring within 100 km of the breeding colony (Pichegru et al. 2017). However, the birds resumed their normal behaviors when seismic operations concluded.

Potential effects of seismic sound and other aspects of seismic operations (collisions, entanglement, and ingestion) on seabirds are discussed in § 3.5.4 of the PEIS. The PEIS concluded that there could be transitory disturbance, but that there would be no significant impacts of NSF-funded marine seismic research on seabirds or their populations. The acoustic source would be powered or shut down in the event an ESA-listed seabird were observed diving or foraging within the designated EZ. Given the proposed activity, no significant impacts on seabirds would be expected, and the survey is not likely to adversely affect ESA-listed seabird species. In decades of seismic surveys carried out by the *Langseth* and its predecessor, the R/V *Ewing*, PSOs and other crew members have seen no seismic sound-related seabird injuries or mortality.

4.1.4 Indirect Effects on Marine Mammals, Sea Turtles, Seabirds and Fish and Their Significance

The proposed seismic operations would not result in any permanent impact on habitats used by marine mammals, sea turtles, seabirds, or fish, including EFH, or to the food sources they use. The main impact issue associated with the proposed activity would be temporarily elevated anthropogenic sound levels and the associated direct effects on these species, as discussed above.

During the proposed seismic survey, only a small fraction of the available habitat would be ensonified at any given time. Disturbance to fish species and invertebrates would be short-term, and fish would return to their pre-disturbance behavior once the seismic activity ceased. Thus, the proposed survey would have little impact on the abilities of marine mammals or sea turtles to feed in the area where seismic work is planned. No significant indirect impacts on marine mammals, sea turtles, seabirds, or fish would be expected.

4.1.5 Possible Effects on Subsistence Hunting and Fishing

Subsistence hunting and fishing continue to feature prominently in the household economies and social welfare of some Alaskan residents, particularly among those living in small, rural villages (Wolfe and Walker 1987). Subsistence remains the basis for Alaska Native culture and community. In rural Alaska, subsistence activities are often central to many aspects of human existence from patterns of family life to artistic expression and community religious and celebratory activities.

Marine mammals are hunted legally in Alaskan waters by coastal Alaska Natives. In the GOA, the marine mammals that are hunted are Steller sea lions, harbor seals, and northern sea otters. In 2011–2012, 37 harbor seals were taken from the North Kodiak Stock and 126 harbor seals were taken from the South Kodiak Stock by communities on Kodiak Island (Muto et al. 2016). The number taken from the Cook Inlet/Shelikof Strait Stock for 2011–2012 is unknown, but an average of 233 were taken from this stock annually during 2004–2008 (Muto et al. 2016). The seasonal distribution of harbor seal takes by Alaska Natives typically shows two distinct hunting peaks — one during spring and one during fall and early winter; however, seals are taken in all months (Wolfe et al. 2012). In general, the months of highest harvest are September through December, with a smaller peak in February/March (Wolfe et al. 2012). Harvests are traditionally low from May through August, when harbor seals are raising pups and molting.

In 2008, 19 steller sea lions were taken in the Kodiak Island region and 9 were taken along the South Alaska Peninsula (Wolfe et al. 2009). As of 2009, data on community subsistence harvests are no longer being collected consistently so few data are available. Wolfe et al. (2012) reported an estimated 20 sea lions taken by hunters on Kodiak Island in 2011. The most recent 5-year period with data available (2004–2008) shows an annual average catch of 172 steller sea lions for all areas in Alaska combined except the Pribilof Islands in the Bering Sea (Muto et al. 2018). Sea lions are taken from Kodiak Island in low numbers year round (Wolfe et al. 2012).

Sea otters are harvested by Alaska Native hunters from southeast Alaska to the Aleutian Islands. The USFWS monitors the harvest of sea otters in Alaska. For 2006–2010, the average subsistence takes of northern sea otters were 293 animals for the Southcentral Alaska Stock, 447 animals for the Southeast Alaska Stock, and 76 for the Southwest Alaska Stock (USFWS 2014b,c,d). During 2010–2014, hunters from Kodiak took 236 sea otters (USFWS 2014e). The subsistence harvest of sea otters occurs year-round in coastal communities throughout the GOA. However, there is a general reduction in harvest during the summer months (D. Willoya, The Alaska Sea Otter and Steller Sea Lion Commission, pers. comm.). Hunters are required to obtain tags for sea otter pelts from designated USFWS taggers located in all harvesting villages. Harvests can take place from a large geographic area surrounding each sea otter harvesting village (D. Willoya, pers. comm.).

An endangered DPS of beluga whales occurs in Cook Inlet. Although these belugas have been hunted in the past, harvesting of this population is currently not permitted, because of the small population size (see § III). Gray whales are not hunted within the project area. Some of the gray whales that migrate through the GOA in spring and late autumn are hunted in Russian waters, and a very limited subsistence hunt has occurred in recent years off Washington. Any small-scale disturbance effects that might occur in the GOA as a result of the proposed activity would have no effect on the hunts for gray whales in those distant locations.

The proposed project could potentially impact the availability of marine mammals for harvest in a small area immediately around the *Langseth*, and for a very short time period during seismic operations. Considering the limited time that the planned seismic surveys would take place close to shore, where most subsistence harvest of marine mammals occurs, the proposed project is not expected to have any significant impacts to the availability of Steller sea lions, harbor seals, or sea otters for subsistence harvest. The potential to negatively impact subsistence hunting would be minimized through outreach and avoidance during the survey.

Subsistence fisheries, on average, provide ~275 pounds of food per person per year in rural Alaska (ADF&G 2014a). Of the estimated 34.3 million pounds of wild foods harvested in rural Alaska communities annually, subsistence fisheries contribute 53.2% from finfish and 3.2% from shellfish (ADF&G 2014a). In the rural communities along the GOA, salmon species are the most targeted subsistence fish, making up 31.8% of total subsistence harvests (ADF&G 2014a). In 2012, 935,470 salmon were harvested by subsistence fishers in Alaska (ADF&G 2012). Most of the salmon harvest consisted of chum salmon (39%), followed by sockeye (37%), coho (9%), chinook (8%), and pink (7%) (ADF&G 2012). The three management areas that fall within the study area (Kodiak, Alaska Peninsula, and Chignik) each contributed 5% or less to the total subsistence salmon harvest in 2015 (Fall et al. 2018). Set gillnets are the preferred subsistence harvest method for salmon, and there are no restrictions on specific streams, nor are there daily or annual limits to the number of fish taken; there are restrictions to keep subsistence and commercial fisheries separate (ADF&G 2005). Bottomfish, Pacific herring, smelt, crustaceans, and mollusks are also caught by subsistence fishers in the northwestern GOA.

In 2014, the subsistence catch of halibut made up 2.3% of the total harvest, with 4506 subsistence fishers taking 40,698 halibut, totaling 760,469 pounds (ADF&G 2014b). The majority of the catch (71%) was taken by setline, and 29% was taken by hand-operated fishing gear (ADF&G 2014b). Regulatory area 2C (Southeast Alaska) took the greatest percentage of the harvest (56%), followed by 3A (Southcentral Alaska; 32%) and 4E (East Bering Sea; 9%) (ADF&G 2014b). Rockfish and lingcod are also taken by subsistence halibut fishers (Fall and Koster 2008).

Seismic surveys can, at times, cause changes in the catchability of fish (see subsection (4.1.5), above). L-DEO would minimize the potential to negatively impact the subsistence fish harvest by avoiding areas

where subsistence fishers are fishing, if requested or viewed necessary.

4.1.6 Direct Effects on Recreational Fisheries and Their Significance

Sportfishing is an economically important industry in Alaska, with an average of 1.27 million fish caught annually during 2008–2017 in southcentral Alaska's saltwater regions, which include the Kodiak/Aleutians area where the seismic survey is proposed to take place (ADF&G 2018d). King, sockeye, and chum salmon availability begins in May with peaks in June and July. However, sport fishing generally occurs relatively close to shore and is thus unlikely to be impacted by the majority of the proposed survey activity.

4.1.7 Direct Effects on Recreational SCUBA Divers and Dive Sites and Their Significance

Recreational diving is a small industry in Alaska, and because the proposed survey would occur prior to the peak tourist season, recreational diving is unlikely to be impacted.

4.1.8 Cumulative Effects

Cumulative effects refer to the impacts on the environment that result from a combination of past, existing, and reasonably foreseeable projects and human activities. Cumulative effects can result from multiple causes, multiple effects, effects of activities in more than one locale, and recurring events. Human activities, when conducted separately or in combination with other activities, could affect marine animals in the study area. However, understanding cumulative effects is complex because of the animals' extensive habitat ranges, and the difficulty in monitoring populations and determining the level of impacts that may result from certain activities. According to Nowacek et al. (2015), cumulative impacts have a high potential of disturbing marine mammals. Wright and Kyhn (2014) proposed practical management steps to limit cumulative impacts, including minimizing exposure by reducing exposure rates and levels. The results of the cumulative impacts analysis in the PEIS indicated that there would not be any significant cumulative effects to marine resources from the proposed NSF-funded marine seismic research, including the combined use of airguns with MBES, SBP, and acoustic pingers. However, the PEIS also stated that, "A more detailed, cruise-specific cumulative effects analysis would be conducted at the time of the preparation of the cruise-specific EAs, allowing for the identification of other potential activities in the areas of the proposed seismic survey that may result in cumulative impacts to environmental resources." Here we focus on activities (e.g., research, vessel traffic, and fisheries) that could impact animals specifically in the proposed survey area.

4.1.8.1 Past and Future Research Activities

The 2011 Alaska *Langseth* Experiment to Understand the Megathrust (ALEUT) seismic survey acquired two refraction profiles separated by 250 km with a 6600 in³ tuned airgun array. In total, the program acquired 3500 km of multichannel seismic (MCS) profiles and two ~300 km long OBS refraction profiles that were acquired coincident with two of the MCS profiles. The data were of good quality and provided a baseline for a much denser acquisition that would allow 3D regional seismic imaging. To date, no previous refraction data have been acquired across the SW Kodiak asperity; the depth velocity structure remains unknown in this area.

An Electro-magnetic(EM)/Magneto-telluric (MT) experiment (PI: Kerry Key, NSF funded project) is planned to be conducted in spring 2019 in this region. The main goal of this marine EM/MT project is to track fluids along the megathrust and within the incoming oceanic plate. Profiles are coincident with the two ALEUT refraction profiles.

4.1.8.2 Naval Activities

The U.S. Navy currently conducts training exercises in the GOA in its Temporary Maritime Activities Area (TMAA). The TMAA encompasses 145,482 km² of sea surface and subsurface areas as well as the overlying airspace (DoN 2011). The TMAA is located south of PWS and east of Kodiak Island, and 44 km south of the Kenai Peninsula (DoN 2011). Navy activities occur in the area during the April to October period and consist of one large-scale military exercise lasting up to 21 days (DoN 2016). The 2019 military exercise is currently scheduled to occur 13-24 May.

During Navy operations in 2019, marine mammals and sea turtles within the TMAA could be exposed to sounds from training exercises, including mid- and high-frequency sonars and impulsive detonations. The main impact associated with naval operations is the addition of underwater noise to oceanic ambient noise levels. The proposed seismic survey area is located to the southwest of the TMAA and the survey is proposed for early June. Thus there is no geographic or temporal overlap with the 2019 TMAA exercises. Marine animals could only be exposed to sounds from airguns and Navy training exercises if they were to travel from one area to the other, and exposure could not happen simultaneously.

The Navy uses both passive and active sonars during its operations. Passive sonars detect sound waves by using hydrophones and can indicate the presence and movement of submarines. Active sonars transmit sound that reflects off objects and returns to the receiving system. Mid-frequency sonars, as proposed for use in the GOA, operate at frequencies between 1 and 10 kHz; these are designed to detect submarines in tactical operation scenarios (DoN 2011). There are increasing indications that some beaked whales tend to strand when naval exercises involving mid-frequency sonar operation are ongoing nearby (e.g., Simmonds and Lopez-Jurado 1991; Frantzis 1998; NOAA and USN 2001; Jepson et al. 2003; Hildebrand 2005; Barlow and Gisiner 2006). These strandings may be in part a disturbance response, although auditory or other injuries or other physiological effects may also be involved (see §IV *Strandings and Mortality*). Seismic survey sounds, in contrast, are quite different from the naval sonars that are proposed for use in the GOA TMAA in 2019.

4.1.8.3 Vessel Traffic

Vessel traffic in the proposed study area would consist of fishing vessels, as well as other commercial (cargo), wildlife cruise, and pleasure vessels. The GOA is a very busy shipping route. A total of 41.2 million tons of waterborne cargo were handled at Alaskan ports in 2017, including domestic and foreign exports and imports, and intrastate shipments (WCSC 2018). Six Alaskan ports were ranked among the busiest U.S. ports by cargo tonnage in 2017 (AAPA 2018): Valdez, Nikishka, Kivilina, Anchorage, Ketchikan, and Unalaska Island.

The Alaska Marine Highway System (AMHS) provides year-round service to over 30 communities in Alaska, as well as Bellingham, WA, and Prince Rupert, B.C. Ports located within the proposed GOA study area include Chignik, Sand Point, and King Cove on the Alaska Peninsula, and Port Lions, Old Harbor, Ouzinkie, and Kodiak on Kodiak Island. The AMHS currently operates eleven vessels, and the busiest months in Southwest Alaska are June and July (AMHS 2015). In 2015, the AMHS carried a total of 288,133 passengers and 100,547 vehicles (AMHS 2015). The bulk of this is in Southeast Alaska, with 65,133 passengers and 26,148 vehicles carried in Southwest Alaska in 2015 (AMHS 2015). In 2015, AMHS vessels travelled >200,000 km in Southwest Alaska (AMHS 2015).

The total transit distance of ~4700 km (including ~300 km transit to and from port and ~4400 km of survey effort) by the *Langseth* would be small relative to total transit length for vessels operating in the general regions around the proposed survey area. Thus, the addition of the seismic source vessel traffic to existing shipping and fishing operations (see below) is expected to result in a only a minor increase in overall ship traffic.

4.1.8.4 Fisheries Interactions

The commercial fisheries in the general area of the proposed survey are described in § III. The primary contributions of fishing to potential cumulative impacts on marine mammals and sea turtles involve noise, potential entanglement, and removal of prey items (e.g., Reeves et al. 2003).

Entanglement in fishing gear can lead to serious injury or mortality of some marine mammals. Section 118 of the MMPA requires all commercial fisheries to be placed in one of three categories based on the level of incidental take of marine mammals relative to the Potential Biological Removal (PBR) for each marine mammal stock. Category I, II, and III fisheries are those for which the combined take is $\geq 50\%$, 1%–50%, and $< 1\%$, respectively, of PBR for a particular stock. In 2018, all groundfish fisheries in the GOA were listed as Category III fisheries, except for sablefish longline fishery, which is Category II because of sperm whale bycatch (83 FR 5349). Additionally, some salmon drift and set gillnet fisheries are listed in Category II.

The highest annual mortality rate of any cetacean in Alaska attributable to commercial fisheries is the harbor porpoise. In NOAA Fisheries most recent stock assessment harbor porpoises of the GOA stock had a minimum total annual mortality rate of 74 animals; incidental takes of Dall's porpoise are also high, with a minimum mean of 38 animals taken annually (Muto et al. 2018). The highest minimum mean annual mortality rate for baleen whales in Alaska fisheries was reported for the humpback whale, at 8.5 whales. A photographic study in southeast Alaska showed that at least 2 of 28 humpback whales seen in both 2003 and 2004 had new entanglement scars in 2004 (Neilson et al. 2005). Of a total of 179 individuals seen during both years, at least 53% showed some kind of scarring from fishing gear entanglement (Neilson et al. 2005). The minimum mean annual mortality rate for sperm whales in Alaska fisheries is 3.8 animals. Small numbers of fin and killer whales also succumb to commercial fisheries annually (Muto et al. 2018).

Of the pinniped species, the highest incidental mean annual mortality rates attributable to commercial fisheries have been reported for the Western Stock of Steller sea lions (31) and the PWS stock of harbor seals (24) (Muto et al. 2018). Raum-Suryan et al. (2009) reported that Steller sea lions get entangled in and ingest fishing gear; packing and rubber bands were the most common neck entanglements, followed by rope, nets, and monofilament line. Ingested fishing gear consisted mainly of salmon fishery flashers, longline gear, hook and line, spinners/spoons, and bait hooks (Raum-Suryan et al. 2009). The incidence of entanglement was determined to be 0.26%.

Lewis et al. (2004) estimated that 30,000 to 75,000 loggerheads are taken as bycatch in longlines in 2000 in the Pacific; although the estimate for leatherbacks was lower (20,000 to 40,000). Entanglement of sea turtles in seismic gear is also a concern; there have been reports of turtles being trapped and killed between the gaps in tail-buoys offshore of West Africa (Weir 2007). The probability of entanglements would be a function of turtle density in the study area, which is expected to be low. Towing of hydrophone streamers or other equipment is not expected to significantly interfere with sea turtle movements, including migration, unless they were to become entrapped as indicated above.

Entanglement in fishing gear and hooking can also lead to mortality of seabirds. Between 2009 and 2014, six short-tailed albatross mortalities were reported during commercial fishing activities in Alaska during both hook-and-line and longline fishing (Good et al. 2017). Bycatch of marbled murrelet in Alaska gillnet fisheries may be substantial, on the order of hundreds of birds annually, and was listed as the second most important human cause for this species' decline in its 2006 Alaska status review (Piatt et al. 2007).

There might also be some localized avoidance by marine mammals of fishing vessels near the proposed seismic survey area. The proposed operations in the survey area would be limited (up to 18 days), and the addition of the proposed survey to existing commercial fishing operations is expected to result in only a negligible increase in overall disturbance effects on marine mammals and sea turtles. The addition

of the *Langseth's* operations to existing fishing operations would result in no increase in serious injuries or mortality to marine mammals or sea turtles.

4.1.8.5 Whaling and Harvesting

Marine mammals are legally hunted in Alaskan waters by coastal Alaska Natives. In the GOA, the only marine mammals that are currently hunted are Steller sea lions, harbor seals, and sea otters. The hunt is described in § 4.1.5, above. Considering the limited time that the planned seismic surveys would take place close to shore relative to the year-round, widespread nature of subsistence hunting, the proposed project is not expected to have any significant impacts to the availability of Steller sea lions, harbor seals, or sea otters for subsistence harvest. Also, the planned project would not result in directed lethal takes of marine mammals.

4.1.8.6 Tourism

Tourism employed almost 40,000 people in Alaska in 2014–2015, representing 9% of employment and 5% of labor income statewide, with visitor spending totaling \$1.94 billion (McDowell Group 2016). Over two million people visited Alaska during that time, with almost half as cruise ship passengers. Visitor spending in southwest Alaska, however, represented only 5% of the total (\$93 million) and ~1500 jobs, with a smaller industry here than in southcentral and southeastern Alaska. However, in contrast to other areas, wildlife viewing and fishing were the activities most commonly reported by tourists visiting the Kodiak area (McDowell Group 2017). Whalewatching and sportfishing are both important tourist activities from Kodiak and north throughout the Kenai Peninsula. The primary tourist season in Alaska is from May through September, with peak season mid-June to mid-August. Because the proposed survey is planned to take place, for the most part, before the peak tourist season, overall effects on tourism would likely be small. Additionally, the survey would occur primarily offshore, out of the viewshed of the coast and beyond the range of most whale watching and sportfishing activities.

4.1.9 Unavoidable Impacts

Unavoidable impacts to the species of marine mammals and turtles occurring in the proposed survey area would be limited to short-term, localized changes in behavior of individuals. For marine mammals, some of the changes in behavior may be considered to fall within the MMPA definition of “Level B Harassment” (behavioral disturbance; no serious injury or mortality). TTS is a temporary phenomenon that does not involve injury, and if it were to occur, it would be limited to a few individuals and is unlikely to have long-term consequences for the few individuals involved. No long-term or significant impacts would be expected on any of these individual marine mammals or turtles, or on the populations to which they belong. Effects on recruitment or survival would be expected to be (at most) negligible.

4.1.10 Coordination with Other Agencies and Processes

4.1.10.1 National Environmental Protection Act

This EA was prepared by LGL on behalf of L-DEO and NSF pursuant to NEPA. NSF posted a Draft Environmental Assessment (Draft EA) on the NSF website for a 30-day public comment period from 1 April thru 1 May 2019. NSF contacted several organizations to help identify potential interested parties in the survey area (e.g., Marine Mammal Commission, Kodiak Agent Alaska Sea Grant Marine Advisory Program College of Fisheries and Ocean Sciences University of Alaska Fairbanks). Based on recommendations from this outreach effort, web searches, and past contacts for similar work in the region, NSF sent notices about the availability of the Draft EA to potential interested parties (e.g., regional marine mammal commissions, fisheries organizations). No comments were received during the public comment period or after.

4.1.10.2 Endangered Species Act

Potential impacts to marine mammals, endangered species, and critical habitat were assessed in the document; therefore, it was used to support the ESA Section 7 consultation process with NMFS and USFWS.

On 1 February 2019, NSF requested formal consultation under ESA Section 7 for the Proposed Action with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) as endangered and threatened species and critical habitat under USFWS jurisdiction could occur within the survey area, including northern sea otter critical habitat (Section 3.2.1.2); northern sea otter (*Enhydra lutris*; Section 3.3.4.1); and seabirds (Section 3.5), both the short-tailed Albatross (*Phoebastria albatrus*; Section 3.5.1) and Steller's eider (*Polysticta stelleri*; Section 3.5.2). As originally designed, the Proposed Action had the potential for sea otter take and overlap with sea otter critical habitat. After initial consultation discussions with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), however, the Proposed Action was modified to avoid sea otter critical habitat and sea otter take. On 7 April 2019, NSF revised its ESA Section 7 request for the Proposed Action from formal to informal consultation, concluding the proposed activities may affect but were not likely to adversely affect marine species or critical habitat under USFWS jurisdiction pursuant to Section 7 of the ESA of 1973 (16 U.S.C. 1531- 1544), as amended, and that no further consultation with USFWS was required. NSF received confirmation from USFWS on 7 May 2019 that the proposed activity may affect but was not likely to adversely affect endangered species or their designated critical habitats under their jurisdiction (Appendix F).

On 16 November 2019, NSF submitted a formal consultation request to NMFS under Section 7 of the ESA. NSF and NMFS staff held biweekly meetings to discuss the Proposed Action and matters related to the consultation. Consultation is anticipated to be completed prior to the proposed survey start date and a Biological Opinion/Incidental Take Statement issued.

4.1.10.3 Marine Mammal Protection Act

On 19 November 2018, L-DEO submitted on behalf of NSF, L-DEO, and the researchers and their institutions to NMFS an IHA application pursuant to the MMPA for “taking by harassment” (disturbance) of small numbers of marine mammals, for the proposed seismic survey. NSF and NMFS staff held biweekly meetings to discuss the Proposed Action and matters related to the IHA application. As part of the IHA process, NMFS posted a Notice of Intent to issue an IHA in the Federal Register with a 30-day public comment period. Public comments from two entities were received through this process. An IHA is anticipated to be issued prior to the proposed survey start date.

NSF also contacted USFWS pursuant to the MMPA regarding potential for sea otter take and overlap with sea otter critical habitat. After initial discussions with USFWS, however, the Proposed Action was modified to avoid sea otter critical habitat and sea otter take. Specifically, operations would avoid exposing sea otters and their critical habitat from ensonification levels of 160 dB re 1 μ Pa SPL or greater (Level B zone) to avoid take.

4.1.10.4 Naval Activities

L-DEO would coordinate with the Navy, as necessary, to avoid any space-use conflict.

4.1.10.5 Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act – Essential Fish Habitat (EFH)

Although NSF anticipated no significant impacts to EFH, as the proposed activities may affect EFH found in the water column, in accordance with the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act NSF requested consultation with NMFS on 1 March 2019. In an email dated 20 March 2019, NMFS concluded the Proposed Action would not adversely effect EFH and no further consultation

per section 305 of the Magnuson-Stevens Act was necessary (Appendix E).

4.2 No Action Alternative

An alternative to conducting the proposed activity is the “No Action” Alternative, i.e., do not issue an IHA and do not conduct the operations. If the research were not conducted, the “No Action” alternative would result in no disturbance to marine mammals, ESA-listed seabirds, or sea turtles attributable to the proposed activity; however, valuable data about the marine environment. Research that would contribute to our understanding of the architecture for the subduction zone and variability in slip behavior of the Alaska Peninsula subduction zone, and that would add to the comprehensive assessment of geohazards for the GOA region, such as earthquake and tsunami hazards, would not be conducted. The No Action Alternative would not meet the purpose and need for the proposed activity.

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APPENDIX A: DETERMINATION OF MITIGATION ZONES

APPENDIX A: DETERMINATION OF MITIGATION ZONES

During the planning phase, mitigation zones for the proposed marine seismic survey were calculated based on modeling by L-DEO for both the exclusion zones (EZ) for Level A takes and safety zones (160 dB re $1\mu\text{Pa}_{\text{rms}}$) for Level B takes. Received sound levels have been predicted by L-DEO's model (Diebold et al. 2010, provided as Appendix H in the PEIS) as a function of distance from the 36-airgun array and for a single 1900LL 40-in³ airgun, which would be used during power downs; all models used a 12-m tow depth. This modeling approach uses ray tracing for the direct wave traveling from the array to the receiver and its associated source ghost (reflection at the air-water interface in the vicinity of the array), in a constant-velocity half-space (infinite homogeneous ocean layer, unbounded by a seafloor). In addition, propagation measurements of pulses from the 36-airgun array at a tow depth of 6 m have been reported in deep water (~1600 m), intermediate water depth on the slope (~600–1100 m), and shallow water (~50 m) in the Gulf of Mexico (GoM) in 2007–2008 (Tolstoy et al. 2009; Diebold et al. 2010).

For deep and intermediate-water cases, the field measurements cannot be used readily to derive mitigation radii, as at those sites the calibration hydrophone was located at a roughly constant depth of 350–500 m, which may not intersect all the sound pressure level (SPL) isopleths at their widest point from the sea surface down to the maximum relevant water depth for marine mammals of ~2000 m. Figures 2 and 3 in Appendix H of the PEIS show how the values along the maximum SPL line that connects the points where the isopleths attain their maximum width (providing the maximum distance associated with each sound level) may differ from values obtained along a constant depth line. At short ranges, where the direct arrivals dominate and the effects of seafloor interactions are minimal, the data recorded at the deep and slope sites are suitable for comparison with modeled levels at the depth of the calibration hydrophone. At longer ranges, the comparison with the mitigation model—constructed from the maximum SPL through the entire water column at varying distances from the airgun array—is the most relevant. The results are summarized below.

In deep and intermediate-water depths, comparisons at short ranges between sound levels for direct arrivals recorded by the calibration hydrophone and model results for the same array tow depth are in good agreement (Fig. 12 and 14 in Appendix H of the PEIS). Consequently, isopleths falling within this domain can be predicted reliably by the L-DEO model, although they may be imperfectly sampled by measurements recorded at a single depth. At greater distances, the calibration data show that seafloor-reflected and sub-seafloor-refracted arrivals dominate, whereas the direct arrivals become weak and/or incoherent (Fig. 11, 12, and 16 in Appendix H of the PEIS). Aside from local topography effects, the region around the critical distance (~5 km in Fig. 11 and 12, and ~4 km in Fig. 16 in Appendix H of the PEIS) is where the observed levels rise closest to the mitigation model curve. However, the observed sound levels are found to fall almost entirely below the mitigation model curve (Fig. 11, 12, and 16 in Appendix H of the PEIS). Thus, analysis of the GoM calibration measurements demonstrates that although simple, the L-DEO model is a robust tool for conservatively estimating mitigation radii. In shallow water (<100 m), the depth of the calibration hydrophone (18 m) used during the GoM calibration survey was appropriate to sample the maximum sound level in the water column, and the field measurements reported in Table 1 of Tolstoy et al. (2009) for the 36-airgun array at a tow depth of 6 m can be used to derive mitigation radii.

The proposed surveys would acquire data with the 36-airgun array at a maximum tow depth of 12 m. For deep water (>1000 m), we use the deep-water radii obtained from L-DEO model results down to a maximum water depth of 2000 m. The radii for intermediate water depths (100–1000 m) are derived from the deep-water ones by applying a correction factor (multiplication) of 1.5, such that observed levels at very near offsets fall below the corrected mitigation curve (Fig. 16 in Appendix H of the PEIS). The shallow-water radii are obtained by scaling the empirically derived measurements from the GoM calibration survey

to account for the differences in tow depth between the calibration survey (6 m) and the proposed survey (12 m); whereas the shallow water in the GoM may not exactly replicate the shallow water environment at the proposed survey site, it has been shown to serve as a good and very conservative proxy (Crone et al. 2014). A simple scaling factor is calculated from the ratios of the isopleths determined by the deep-water L-DEO model, which are essentially a measure of the energy radiated by the source array.

For the 36-airgun array, the 150-dB Sound Exposure Level (SEL)² corresponds to deep-water maximum radii of 10,553 m for 12-m tow depth (Fig. A-1) and 7244 m for a 6-m tow depth (Fig. A-2), yielding a scaling factor of 1.4568 to be applied to the shallow-water 6-m tow depth results. Similarly, the 165 dB SEL corresponds to deep-water maximum radii of 1864 m for 12-m tow depth (Fig. A-1) and 1284 m for for 6-m tow depth (Fig. A-2), yielding a scaling factor of 1.4517. The 185 SEL corresponds to deep-water maximum radii of 181 m for 12-m tow depth (Fig. A-1) and 126 m for 6-m tow depth (Fig. A-2), yielding a scaling factor of 1.4331. Measured 160-, 175-, and 195-dB re $1\mu\text{Pa}_{\text{rms}}$ distances in shallow water for the 36-airgun array towed at 6 m depth were 17.5 km, 2.84 km, and 0.24 km, respectively, based on a 95th percentile fit (Tolstoy et al. 2009). Multiplying by the scaling factors to account for the tow depth difference between 6 and 12 m yields distances of 25,494 m, 4123 m, and 344 m for the 160-, 175-, and 195-dB sound levels, respectively.

Measurements have not been reported for the single 40-in³ airgun. L-DEO model results are used to determine the 160-dB_{rms} radius for the 40-in³ airgun at a 12-m tow depth in deep water (Fig. A-3). For intermediate-water depths, a correction factor of 1.5 was applied to the deep-water model results. For shallow water, a scaling of the field measurements obtained for the 36-airgun array was used. The 150-dB SEL level corresponds to a deep-water radius of 431 m for the 40-in³ airgun at 12-m tow depth (Fig. A-3) and 7244 for the 36-airgun array at 6-m tow depth (Fig. A-2), yielding a scaling factor of 0.0595. Similarly, the 165-dB SEL level corresponds to a deep-water radius of 77 m for the 40-in³ airgun at 12-m tow depth (Fig. A-3) and 1284 m for the 36-airgun array at 6-m tow depth (Fig. A-2), yielding a scaling factor of 0.060. The 185-dB SEL level corresponds to a deep-water radius of 7.5 m for the 40-in³ airgun at 12-m tow depth (Fig. A-3) and 126.3 m for the 36-airgun array at 6-m tow depth (Fig. A-2), yielding a scaling factor of 0.0594. Measured 160-, 175-, and 195-dB re $1\mu\text{Pa}_{\text{rms}}$ distances in shallow water for the 36-airgun array towed at 6-m depth were 17.5 km, 2.8 km, and 240 m, respectively, based on a 95th percentile fit (Tolstoy et al. 2009). Multiplying by the scaling factors to account for the difference in array sizes and tow depths yields distances of 1041 m, 170 m, and 14 m, respectively.

² SEL (measured in dB re $1\mu\text{Pa}^2 \cdot \text{s}$) is a measure of the received energy in the pulse and represents the SPL that would be measured if the pulse energy were spread evenly across a 1-s period. Because actual seismic pulses are less than 1 s in duration in most situations, this means that the SEL value for a given pulse is usually lower than the SPL calculated for the actual duration of the pulse. In this EA, we assume that rms pressure levels of received seismic pulses would be 10 dB higher than the SEL values predicted by L-DEO's model.

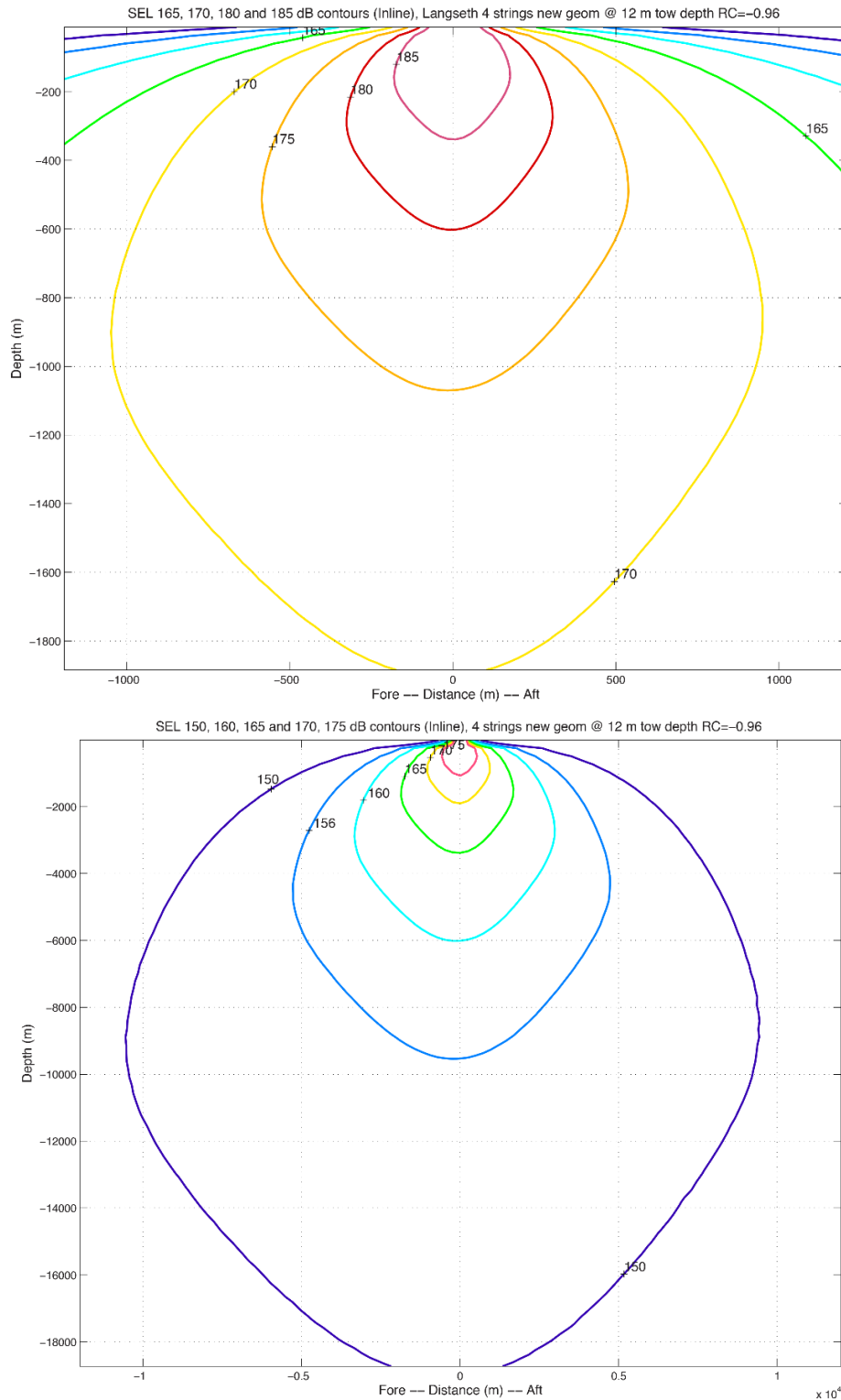


FIGURE A-1. Modeled deep-water received sound exposure levels (SELs) from the 36-airgun array at a 12-m tow depth planned for use during the proposed survey in the Gulf of Alaska. Received rms levels (SPLs) are expected to be ~10 dB higher. For example, the radius to the 150-dB SEL isopleth is a proxy for the 160-dB rms isopleth. The upper plot is a zoomed-in version of the lower plot.

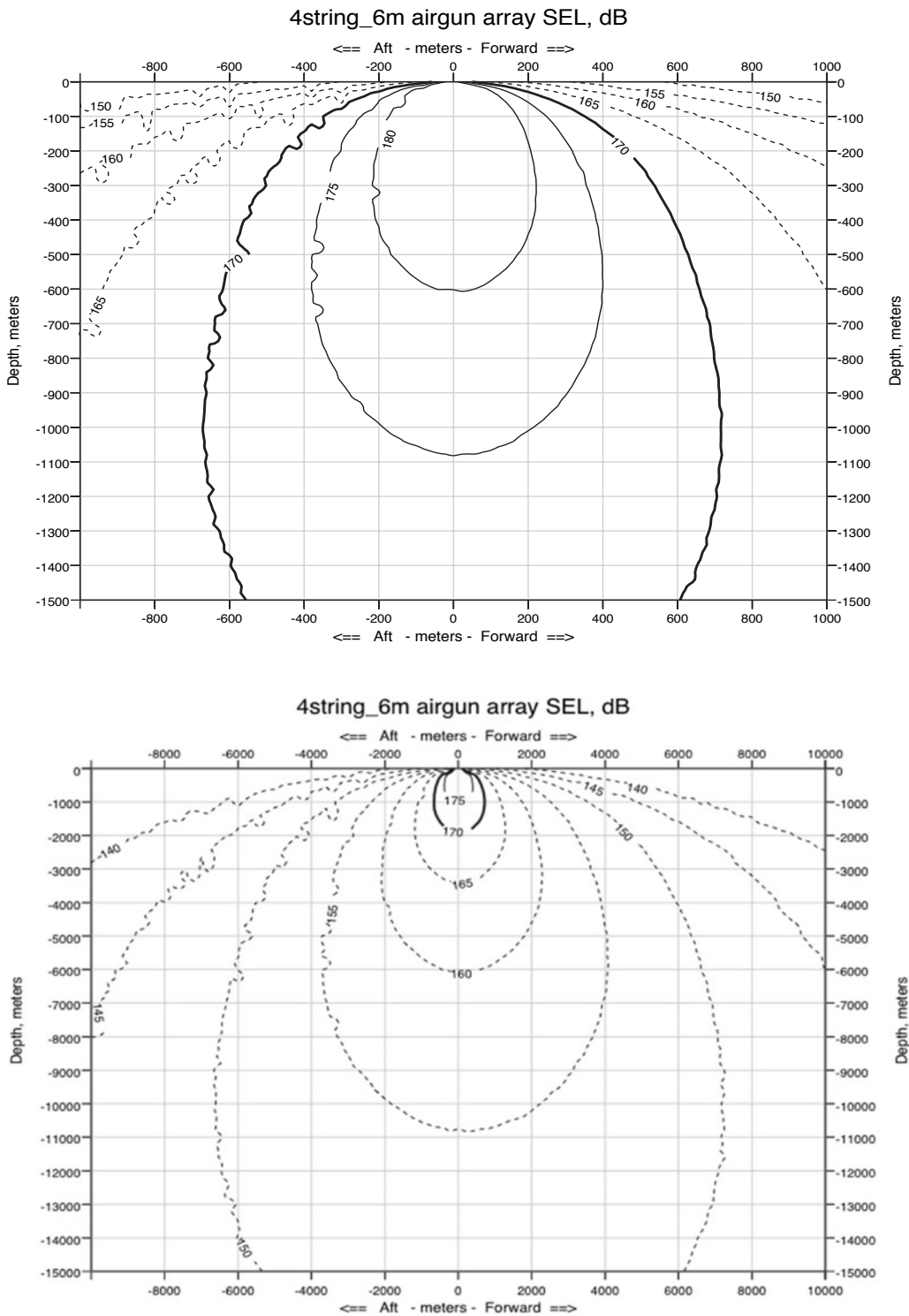


Figure A-2. Modeled deep-water received sound exposure levels (SELs) from the 36-airgun array at a 6-m tow depth used during the GoM calibration survey. Received rms levels (SPLs) are expected to be ~10 dB higher. For example, the radius to the 150 dB SEL isopleth is a proxy for the 160-dB rms isopleth. The upper plot is a zoomed-in version of the lower plot.

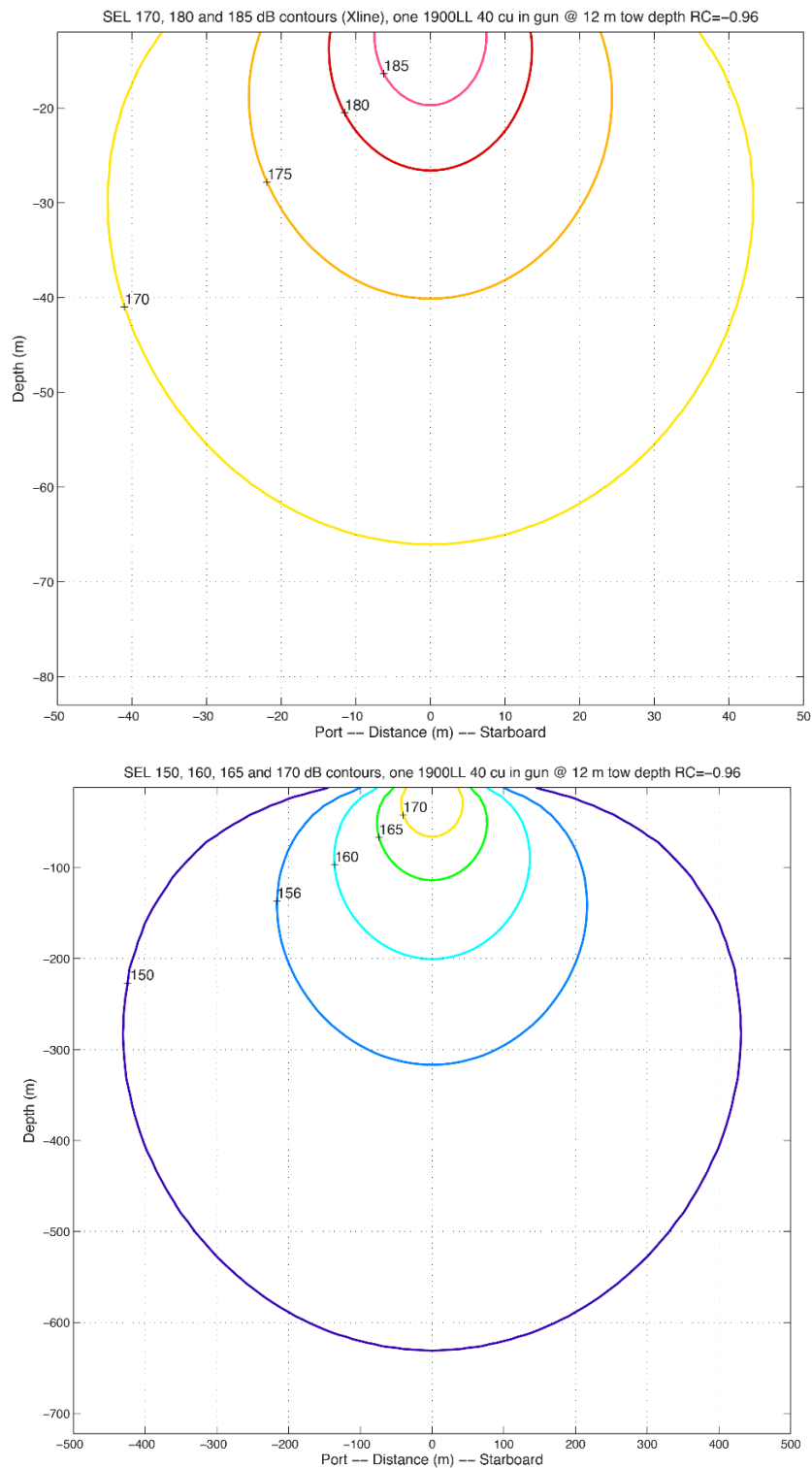


FIGURE A-3. Modeled deep-water received SELs from a single 40-in³ airgun towed at a 12-m depth, which is planned for use as a mitigation airgun during the proposed survey in the Gulf of Alaska. Received rms levels (SPLs) are expected to be ~10 dB higher. For example, the radius to the 150-dB SEL isopleth is a proxy for the 160-dB rms isopleth. The upper plot is a zoomed-in version of the lower plot.

Table A-1 shows the distances at which the 160-dB re $1\mu\text{Pa}_{\text{rms}}$ sound levels are expected to be received for the 36-airgun array and the single (mitigation) airgun. The 160-dB level is the behavioral disturbance criterion (Level B) that is used by NMFS to estimate anticipated takes for marine mammals. A recent retrospective analysis of acoustic propagation of *Langseth* sources in a coastal/shelf environment from the Cascadia Margin off Washington suggests that predicted (modeled) radii (using an approach similar to that used here) for *Langseth* sources were 2–3 times larger than measured in shallow water, so in fact, as expected, were very conservative (Crone et al. 2014). Similarly, data collected by Crone et al. (2017) during a survey off New Jersey in 2014 and 2015 confirmed that *in situ* measurements and estimates of the 160- and 180-dB distances collected by the *Langseth* hydrophone streamer were 2–3 times smaller than the predicted operational mitigation radii. In fact, five separate comparisons conducted of the L-DEO model with *in situ* received levels³ have confirmed that the L-DEO model generated conservative EZs, resulting in significantly larger EZs than required by National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s (NOAA) National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS).

In July 2016, NMFS released new technical guidance for assessing the effects of anthropogenic sound on marine mammal hearing (NMFS 2016). The new guidance established new thresholds for permanent threshold shift (PTS) onset or Level A Harassment (injury), for marine mammal species. The new noise exposure criteria for marine mammals account for the newly-available scientific data on temporary threshold shifts (TTS), the expected offset between TTS and PTS thresholds, differences in the acoustic frequencies to which different marine mammal groups are sensitive, and other relevant factors, as summarized by Finneran (2016). For impulsive sources, onset of PTS was assumed to be 15 dB or 6 dB higher when considering SEL_{cum} and SPL_{flat} , respectively. The new guidance incorporates marine mammal auditory weighting functions (Fig. A-4) and dual metrics of cumulative sound exposure level (SEL_{cum} over 24 hours) and peak sound pressure levels (SPL_{flat}). Different thresholds are provided for the various hearing groups, including low-frequency (LF) cetaceans (e.g., baleen whales), mid-frequency (MF) cetaceans (e.g., most delphinids), high-frequency (HF) cetaceans (e.g., porpoise and *Kogia* spp.), phocids underwater (PW), and otariids underwater (OW). As required by NMFS (2016), the largest distance of the dual criteria (SEL_{cum} or Peak SPL_{flat}) was used to calculate takes and Level A threshold distances. The new guidance did not alter the current threshold, 160 dB re $1\mu\text{Pa}_{\text{rms}}$, for Level B harassment (behavior).

The SEL_{cum} for the *Langseth* array is derived from calculating the modified farfield signature. The farfield signature is often used as a theoretical representation of the source level. To compute the farfield signature, the source level is estimated at a large distance directly below the array (e.g., 9 km), and this level is back projected mathematically to a notional distance of 1 m from the array’s geometrical center. However, it has been recognized that the source level from the theoretical farfield signature is never physically achieved at the source when the source is an array of multiple airguns separated in space (Tolstoy et al. 2009). Near the source (at short ranges, distances <1 km), the pulses of sound pressure from each individual airgun in the source array do not stack constructively as they do for the theoretical farfield signature. The pulses from the different airguns spread out in time such that the source levels observed or modeled are the result of the summation of pulses from a few airguns, not the full array

³ L-DEO surveys off the Yucatán Peninsula in 2004 (Barton et al. 2006; Diebold et al. 2006), in the Gulf of Mexico in 2008 (Tolstoy et al. 2009; Diebold et al. 2010), off Washington and Oregon in 2012 (Crone et al. 2014), and off New Jersey in 2014 and 2015 (Crone et al. 2017).

TABLE A-1. Level B. Predicted distances to which sound levels ≥ 160 -dB re $1 \mu\text{Pa}_{\text{rms}}$ could be received during the proposed survey in the GOA. The 160-dB criterion applies to all hearing groups of marine mammals.

Source and Volume	Tow Depth (m)	Water Depth (m)	Predicted distances (in m) to the 160-dB Received Sound Level
Single Bolt airgun, 40 in ³	12	>1000 m	431 ¹
		100–1000 m	647 ²
		<100 m	1,041 ³
4 strings, 36 airguns, 6600 in ³	12	>1000 m	6,733 ¹
		100–1000 m	10,100 ²
		<100 m	25,494 ³

¹ Distance is based on L-DEO model results.

² Distance is based on L-DEO model results with a $1.5 \times$ correction factor between deep and intermediate water depths.

³ Distance is based on empirically derived measurements in the GoM with scaling applied to account for differences in tow depth.

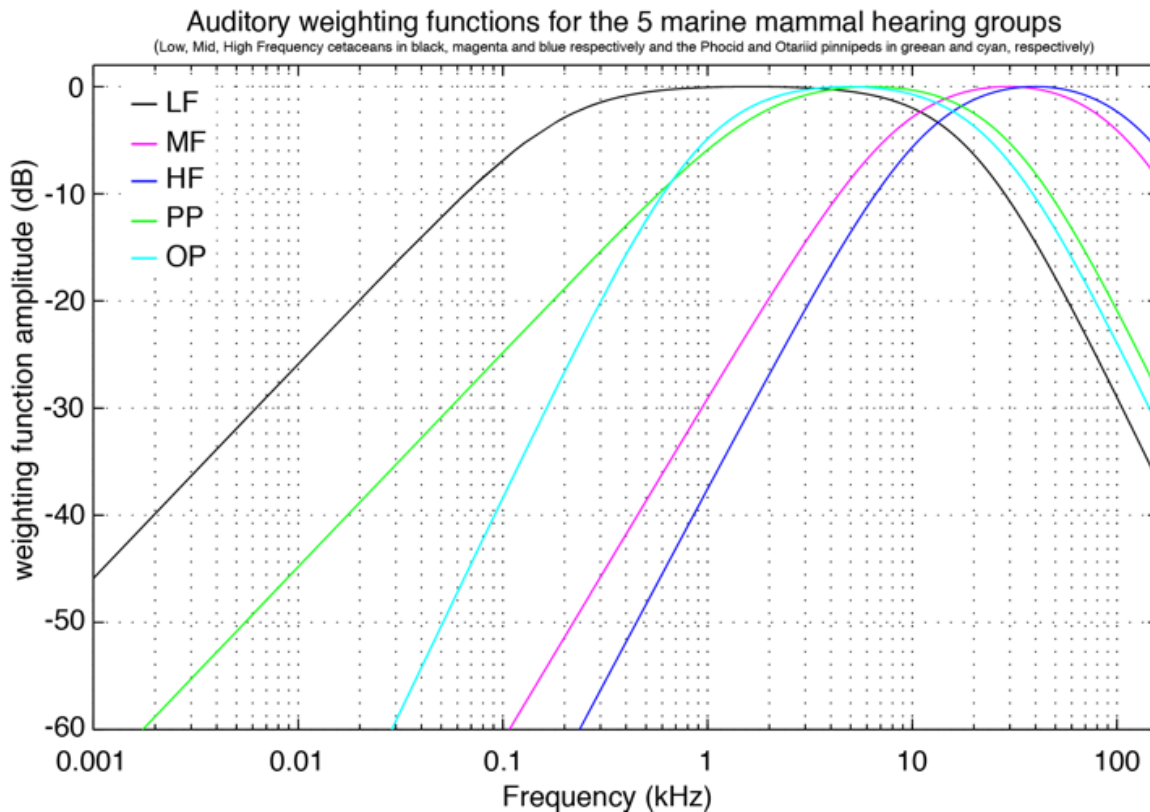


FIGURE A-4. Auditory weighting functions for five marine mammal hearing groups from the NMFS Technical Guidance Spreadsheet.

(Tolstoy et al. 2009). At larger distances, away from the source array center, sound pressure of all the airguns in the array stack coherently, but not within one time sample, resulting in smaller source levels (a few dB) than the source level derived from the farfield signature. Because the farfield signature does not take into account the large array effect near the source and is calculated as a point source, the farfield signature is not an appropriate measure of the sound source level for large arrays.

To estimate SEL_{cum} and Peak SPL, we used the acoustic modeling developed at L-DEO (same as used for Level B takes) with a small grid step in both the inline and depth directions. The propagation modeling takes into account all airgun interactions at short distances from the source including interactions between subarrays which we do using the NUCLEUS software to estimate the notional signature and the MATLAB software to calculate the pressure signal at each mesh point of a grid.

PTS onset acoustic thresholds estimated in the NMFS User Spreadsheet rely on overriding the default values and calculating individual adjustment factors (dB) based on the modified farfield and by using the difference between levels with and without weighting functions for each of the five categories of hearing groups. The new adjustment factors in the spreadsheet allow for the calculation of SEL_{cum} isopleths in the spreadsheet and account for the accumulation (Safe Distance Methodology) using the source characteristics (source velocity and duty) after Sivle et al. (2014). A source velocity of 2.57222 m/s and a 1/Repetition rate of 155.2355 s were used as inputs to the NMFS User Spreadsheet for calculating the distances to the SEL_{cum} PTS thresholds (Level A) for the 36-airgun array and the single 40-in³ mitigation airgun.

For the LF cetaceans during operations with the 36-airgun array, we estimated a new adjustment value by computing the distance from the geometrical center of the source to where the 183 dB SEL_{cum} isopleth is the largest. We first ran the modeling for a single shot without applying any weighting function; we then ran the modeling for a single shot with the LF cetacean weighting function applied to the full spectrum. The difference between these values provides an adjustment factor of -12.91 dB assuming a propagation of $20\log_{10}(\text{Radial distance})$ (Table A-2).

However, for MF and HF cetaceans, and OW and PW pinnipeds, the modeling for a single shot with the weighted function applied leads to 0-m isopleths; the adjustment factors thus cannot be derived the same way as for LF cetaceans. Hence, for MF and HF cetaceans, and OW and PW pinnipeds, the difference between weighted and unweighted spectral source levels at each frequency up to 3 kHz was integrated to actually calculate these adjustment factors in dB. These calculations also account for the accumulation (Safe Distance Methodology) using the source characteristics (duty cycle and speed) after Sivle et al. (2014).

For the 36-airgun array, the results for single shot SEL source level modeling are shown in Table A-2. The weighting function calculations, thresholds for SEL_{cum} , and the distances to the PTS thresholds for the 36-airgun array are shown in Table A-3. Figure A-5 shows the impact of weighting functions by hearing group. Figures A-5–A-7 show the modeled received sound levels for single shot SEL without applying auditory weighting functions for various hearing groups. Figure A-8 shows the modeled received sound levels for single shot SEL with weighting for LF cetaceans.

The thresholds for Peak SPL_{flat} for the 36-airgun array, as well as the distances to the PTS thresholds, are shown in Table A-4. Figures A-10–A-12 show the modeled received sound levels to the Peak SPL_{flat} thresholds, for a single shot. A summary of the Level A threshold distances are shown in Table A-5.

TABLE A-2. Results for single SEL source level modeling for the 36-airgun array with and without applying weighting functions to the five hearing groups. The modified farfield signature is estimated using the

distance from the source array geometrical center to where the SEL_{cum} threshold is the largest. A propagation of $20 \log_{10}$ (Radial distance) is used to estimate the modified farfield SEL.

SEL_{cum} Threshold	183	185	155	185	203
Radial Distance (m) (no weighting function)	315.5691	246.4678	8033.2	246.4678	28.4413
Modified Farfield SEL	232.9819	232.8352	233.0978	232.8352	232.0790
Radial Distance (m) (with weighting function)	71.3752	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
Adjustment (dB)	-12.91	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.

* Propagation of $20 \log R$. N.A. means not applicable or not available.

For the single 40 in³ mitigation airgun, the results for single shot SEL source level modeling are shown in Table A-6. The weighting function calculations, thresholds for SEL_{cum} , and the distances to the PTS thresholds for the 40 in³ airgun are shown in Table A-7. Figure A-13 shows the impact of weighting functions by hearing group for the single mitigation airgun. Figures A-14–A-15 show the modeled received sound levels for single shot SEL without applying auditory weighting functions for various hearing groups. Figure A-16 shows the modeled received sound levels for single shot SEL with weighting for LF cetaceans. The thresholds for Peak SPL_{flat} for the 40 in³ airgun, as well as the distances to the PTS thresholds, are shown in Table A-8. Figures A-17–A-18 show the modeled received sound levels to the Peak SPL_{flat} thresholds, for a single shot.

Table A-9 shows the distances at which the 175- and 195-dB re $1 \mu Pa_{rms}$ sound levels are expected to be received for the 36-airgun array, and a single airgun, based on L-DEO modeling. The 195-dB distance would be used as the EZ for sea turtles, as required by NMFS. The 175-dB level is used by NMFS, based on data from the USN (2017), to determine behavioral disturbance for turtles.

TABLE A-3. Results for single shot SEL source level modeling for the 36-airgun array with weighting function calculations for the SEL_{cum} criteria, as well as resulting isopleths to thresholds for various hearing groups.

STEP 1: GENERAL PROJECT INFORMATION						
PROJECT TITLE	R/V Langseth (Airgun shooting Supplement to Alaska Amphibious Community Seismic Experiment (AACSE))					
PROJECT/SOURCE INFORMATION	source : 4 string 36 element 6600 cu.in of the R/V Langseth at a 12m towed depth. Shot interval of 399.3 m.					
Please include any assumptions	Source velocity of 5 knots					
PROJECT CONTACT						
STEP 2: WEIGHTING FACTOR ADJUSTMENT				Specify if relying on source-specific WFA, alternative weighting/dB adjustment, or if using default value		
Weighting Factor Adjustment (kHz) [‡]	NA		Override WFA: Using LDEO modeling			
[‡] Broadband: 95% frequency contour percentile (kHz) OR Narrowband: frequency (kHz); For appropriate default WFA: See INTRODUCTION tab						
			† If a user relies on alternative weighting/dB adjustment rather than relying upon the WFA (source-specific or default), they may override the Adjustment (dB) (row 6Z), and enter the new value directly. However, they must provide additional support and documentation supporting this modification.			
STEP 3: SOURCE-SPECIFIC INFORMATION						
NOTE: Choose either F1 OR F2 method to calculate isopleths (not required to fill in sage boxes for both)			NOTE: LDEO modeling relies on Method F2			
F2: ALTERNATIVE METHOD [†] TO CALCULATE PK and SEL _{cum} (SINGLE STRIKE/SHOT/PULSE EQUIVALENT)						
SEL _{cum}						
Source Velocity (meters/second)	2.57222					
1/Repetition rate [^] (seconds)	155.2355					
[†] Methodology assumes propagation of 20 log R; Activity duration (time) independent						
[^] Time between onset of successive pulses.						
	Modified farfield SEL	232.9819	232.8352	233.0978	232.8352	232.079
	Source Factor	1.27997E+21	1.23745E+21	1.31459E+21	1.23745E+21	1.0397E+21
RESULTANT ISOPLETHS*						
[*] Impulsive sounds have dual metric thresholds (SEL _{cum} & PK). Metric producing largest isopleth should be used.						
Hearing Group	Low-Frequency Cetaceans	Mid-Frequency Cetaceans	High-Frequency Cetaceans	Phocid Pinnipeds	Otarid Pinnipeds	
SEL _{cum} Threshold	183	185	155	185	203	
PTS SEL _{cum} Isopleth to threshold (meters)	40.1	0.0	0.1	1.3	0.0	
WEIGHTING FUNCTION CALCULATIONS						
Weighting Function Parameters	Low-Frequency Cetaceans	Mid-Frequency Cetaceans	High-Frequency Cetaceans	Phocid Pinnipeds	Otarid Pinnipeds	
a	1	1.6	1.8	1	2	
b	2	2	2	2	2	
f ₁	0.2	8.8	12	1.9	0.94	
f ₂	19	110	140	30	25	
C	0.13	1.2	1.36	0.75	0.64	
Adjustment (dB) [†]	-12.91	-56.70	-66.07	-25.65	-32.62	OVERRIDE Using LDEO Modeling

†For LF cetaceans, the adjustment factor (dB) is derived by estimating the radial distance of the 183-dB isopleth without applying the weighting function and a second time with applying the weighting function. Adjustment was derived using a propagation of 20*log₁₀ (Radial distance) and the modified farfield signature. For MF and HF cetaceans and pinnipeds, the difference between weighted–unweighted spectral source levels at each frequency was integrated to calculate adjustment factors (see spectrum levels in Figure A-5).

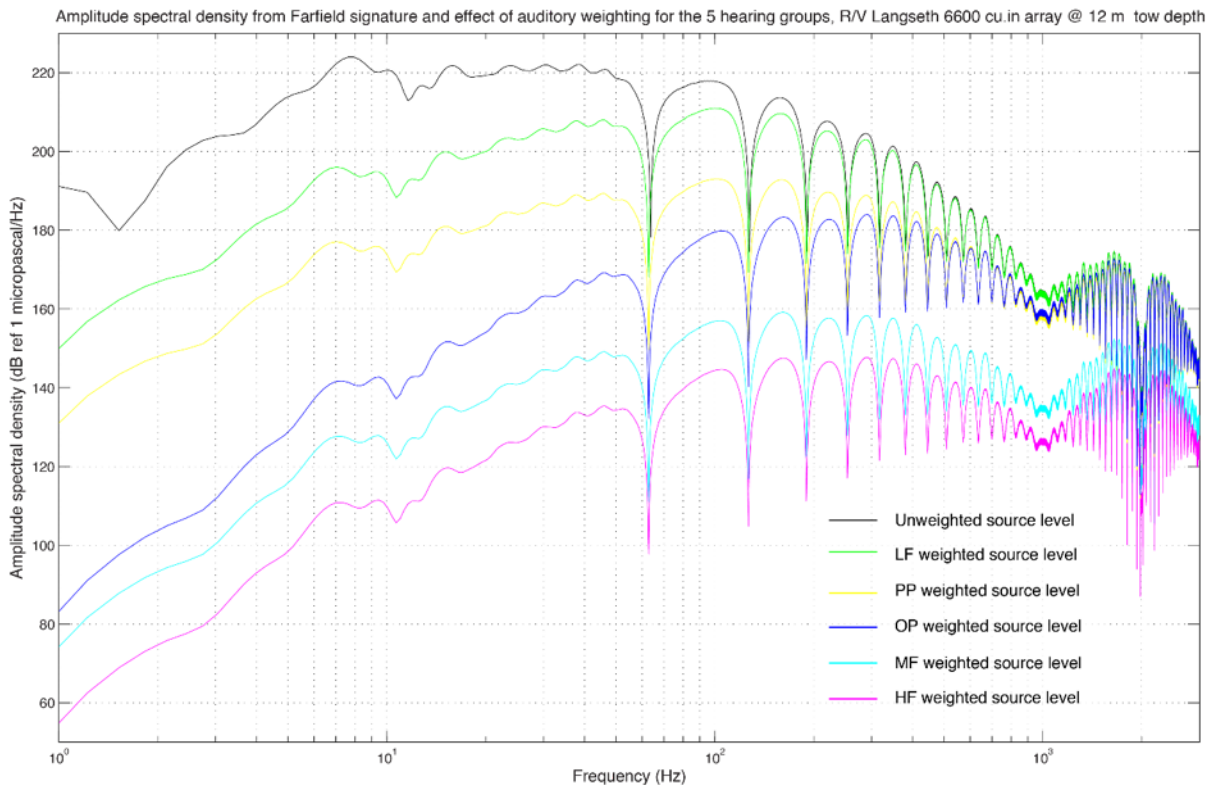


FIGURE A-5. Modeled amplitude spectral density of the 36-airgun array farfield signature. Amplitude spectral density before (black) and after (colors) applying the auditory weighting functions for LF, MF, and HF cetaceans, Phocid Pinnipeds (PP), and Otariid Pinnipeds (OP). Modeled spectral levels are used to calculate the difference between the unweighted and weighted source level at each frequency and to derive the adjustment factors for the hearing groups as inputs into the NMFS User Spreadsheet.

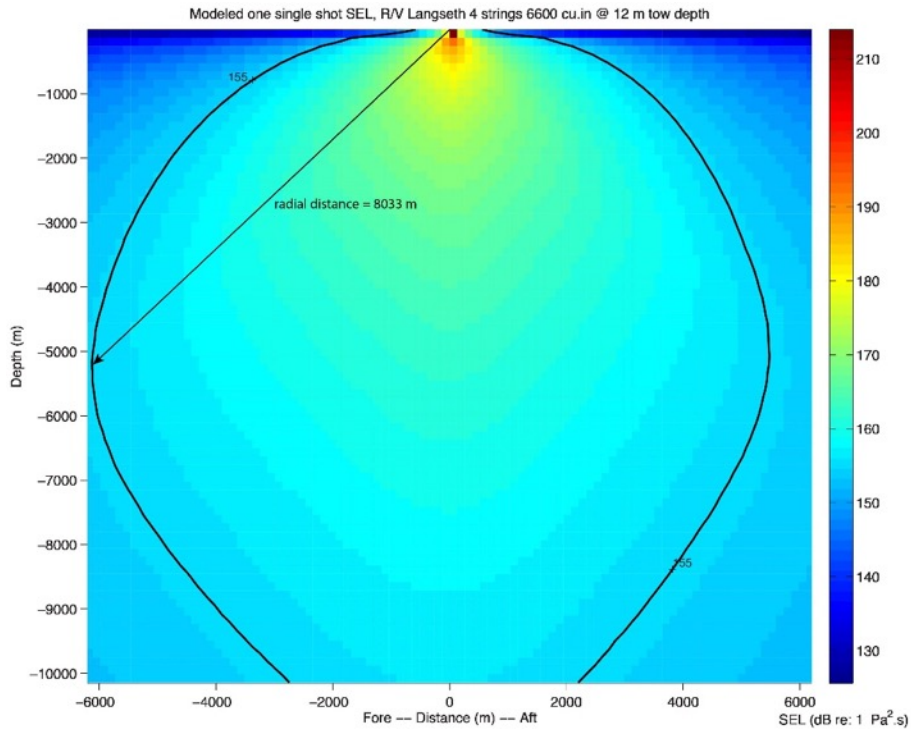


FIGURE A-6. Modeled received sound levels (SELs) in deep water from the 36-airgun array. The plot provides the radial distance from the geometrical center of the source array to the 155-dB SEL isopleth (8033 m). Radial distance allows us to determine the modified farfield SEL using a propagation of $20\log_{10}(\text{radial distance})$.

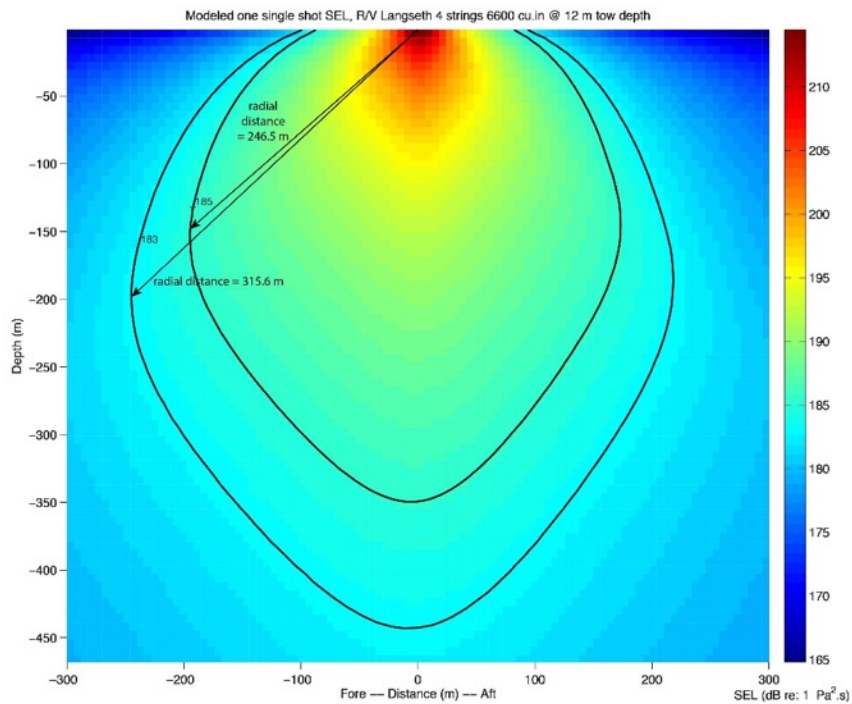


FIGURE A-7. Modeled received sound levels (SELs) in deep water from the 36-airgun array. The plot provides the radial distance from the geometrical center of the source array to the 183–185-dB SEL

isopleths (315.6 and 246.5 m, respectively).

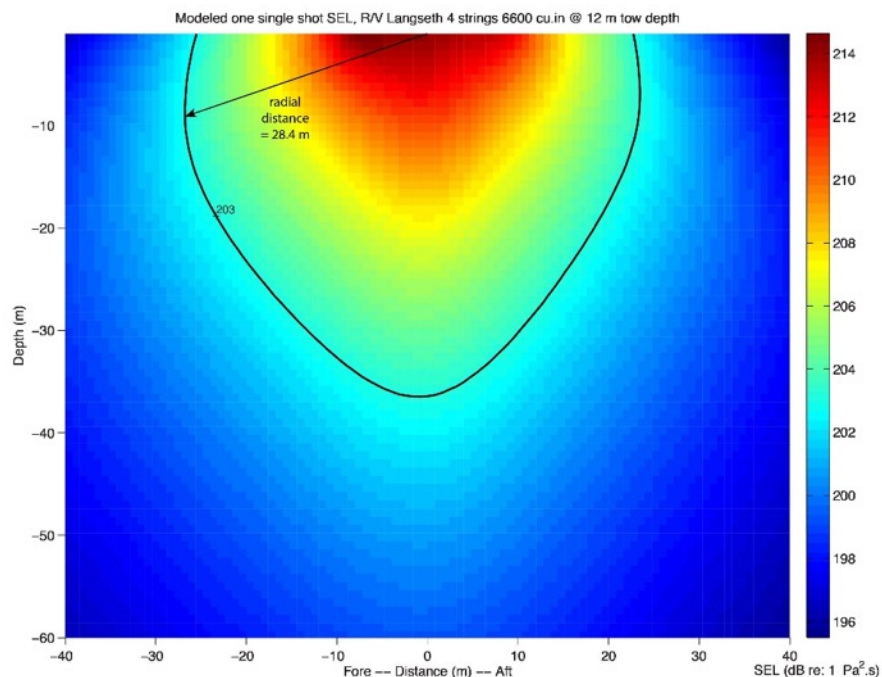


FIGURE A-8. Modeled received sound levels (SELs) in deep water from the 36-airgun array. The plot provides the radial distance from the geometrical center of the source array to the 203-dB SEL isopleth (28.4 m).

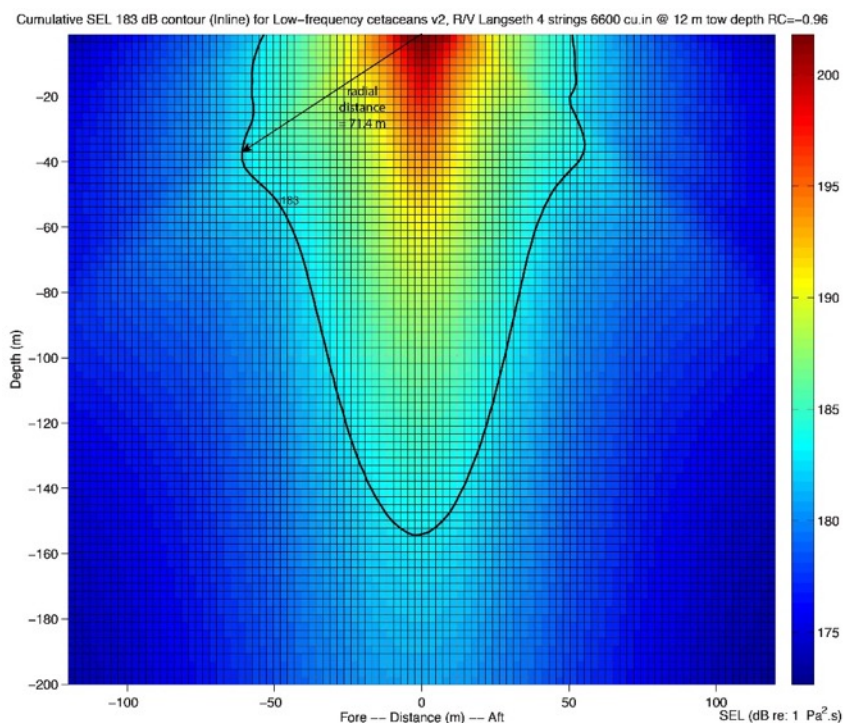


FIGURE A-9. Modeled received sound exposure levels (SELs) from the 36-airgun array at a 12-m tow depth,

after applying the auditory weighting function for the LF cetaceans hearing group following the NMFS Technical Guidance. The plot provides the radial distance to the 183-dB SEL_{cum} isopleth for one shot. The difference in radial distances between Fig. A-7 and this figure (71.4 m) allows us to estimate the adjustment in dB.

TABLE A-4. NMFS Level A acoustic thresholds (Peak SPL_{flat}) for impulsive sources for marine mammals and predicted distances to Level A thresholds for various marine mammal hearing groups that could be received from the 36-airgun array during the proposed survey in the GOA.

Hearing Group	Low-Frequency Cetaceans	Mid-Frequency Cetaceans	High-Frequency Cetaceans	Phocid Pinnipeds	Otariid Pinnipeds
Peak Threshold	219	230	202	218	232
Radial Distance to Threshold (m)	45.00	13.57	364.67	51.59	10.62
Modified Farfield Peak SPL	252.06	252.65	253.24	252.25	252.52
PTS Peak Isopleth (Radius) to Threshold (m)	38.9	13.6	268.3	43.7	10.6

N.A. means not applicable or not available.

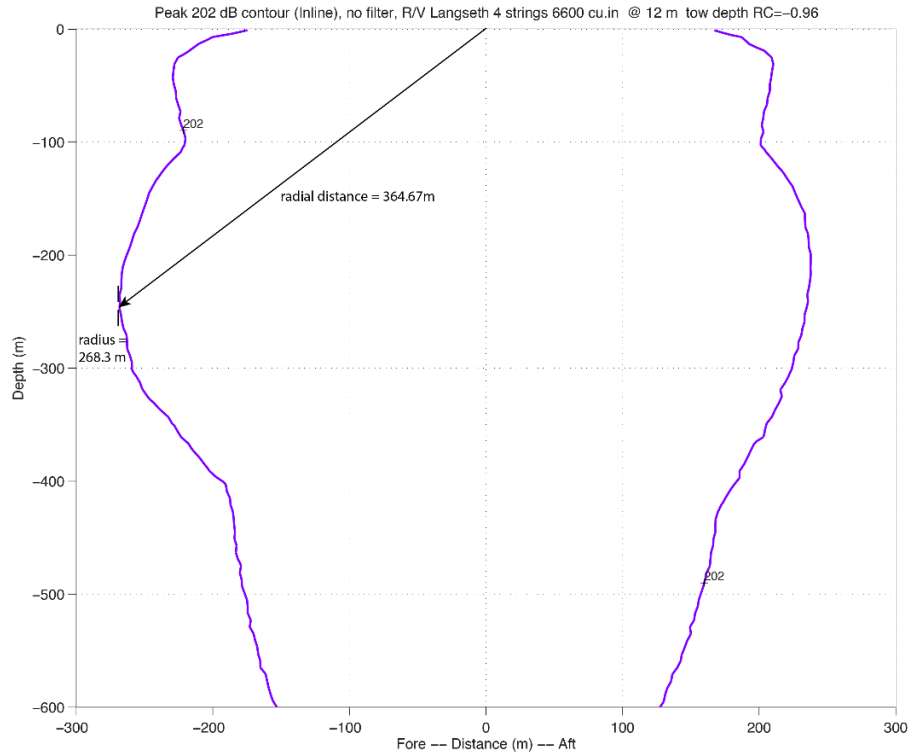


FIGURE A-10. Modeled deep-water received Peak SPL from the 36-airgun array at a 12-m tow depth. The plot provides the distance to the 202-dB Peak isocontour.

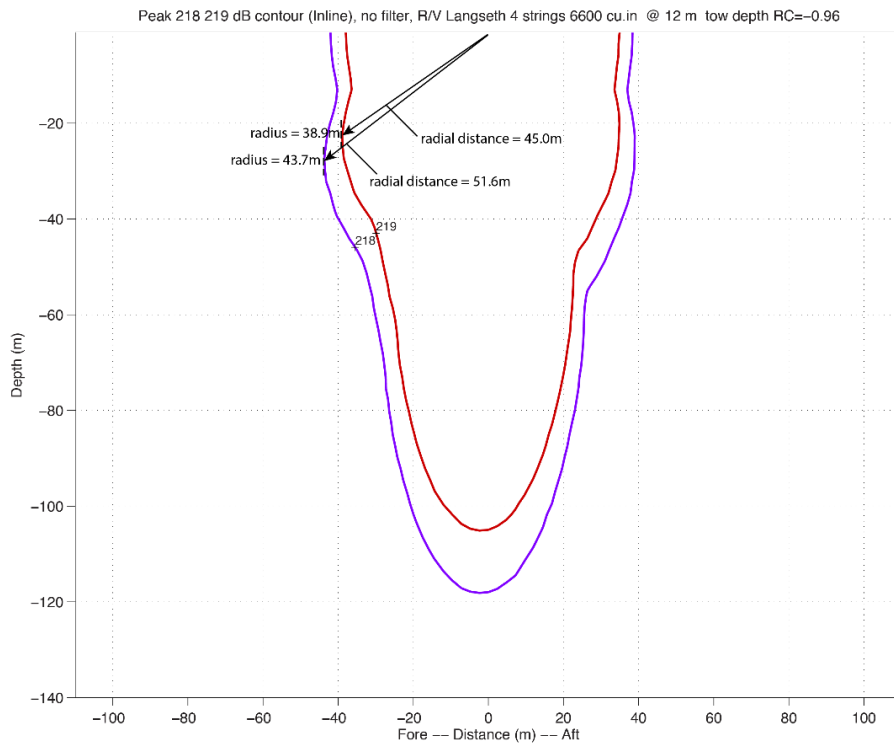


FIGURE A-11. Modeled deep-water received Peak SPL from the 36-airgun array at a 12-m tow depth. The plot provides the distances to the 218- and 219-dB Peak isocontours.

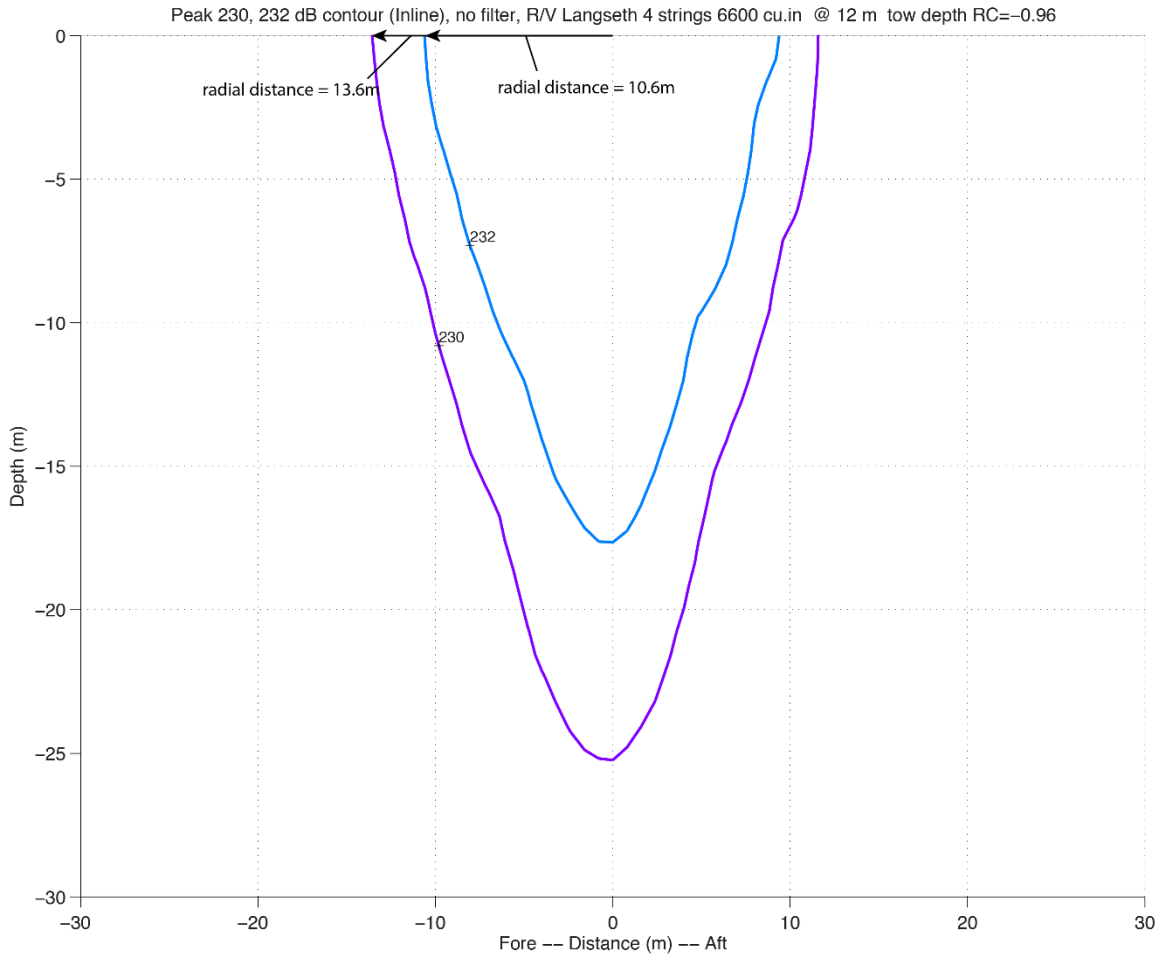


FIGURE A-12. Modeled deep-water received Peak SPL from the 36-airgun array at a 12-m tow depth. The plot provides the distances to the 230- and 232-dB Peak isopleths.

TABLE A-5. Level A threshold distances for different marine mammal hearing groups. As required by NMFS (2016), the largest distance (in bold) of the dual criteria (SEL_{cum} or $Peak\ SPL_{flat}$) was used to calculate takes and Level A threshold distances.

Level A Threshold Distances (m) for Various Hearing Groups					
36-airgun array; 6600 in ³	Low-Frequency Cetaceans	Mid-Frequency Cetaceans	High-Frequency Cetaceans	Phocid Pinnipeds	Otariid Pinnipeds
PTS SEL_{cum}	40.1	0	0.1	1.3	0
PTS Peak	38.9	13.6	268.3	43.7	10.6

TABLE A-6. Results for single shot SEL source level modeling for the 40 in³ airgun with and without applying weighting function to the various hearing groups. The modified farfield signature is estimated using the distance from the source array geometrical center to where the SEL_{cum} threshold is the largest. A propagation of 20 log₁₀ (Radial distance) is used to estimate the modified farfield SEL.

SEL _{cum} Threshold	183	185	155	185	203
Distance (m) (no weighting function)	9.9893	7.8477	294.0371	7.8477	0.9278
Modified Farfield SEL*	202.9907	202.8948	204.3680	202.8948	202.3491
Distance (m) (with weighting function)	2.3852	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
Adjustment (dB)	-12.44	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.

*Propagation of 20 log R. N.A. means not applicable or not available.

Amplitude spectral density from Farfield signature and effect of auditory weighting for the 5 hearing groups, one 40 cu.in 1900 LL airgun @ 12 m tow depth

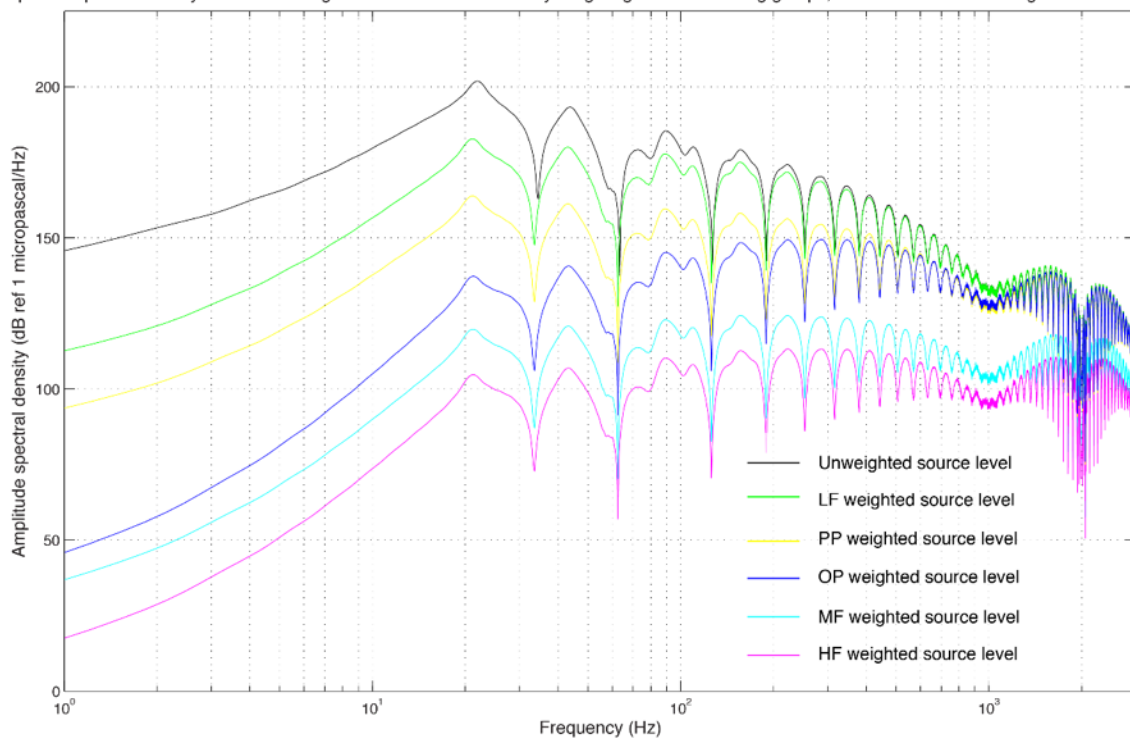


FIGURE A-13. Modeled amplitude spectral density of the 40-in³ airgun farfield signature. Amplitude spectral density before (black) and after (colors) applying the auditory weighting functions for LF, MF, and HF cetaceans, Phocid Pinnipeds (PP), and Otariid Pinnipeds (OP). Modeled spectral levels are used to calculate the difference between the unweighted and weighted source level at each frequency and to derive the adjustment factors for the hearing groups as inputs into the NMFS User Spreadsheet.

TABLE A-7. Results for single shot SEL source level modeling for the single 40-in³ mitigation airgun with weighting function calculations for the SEL_{cum} criteria, as well as resulting isopleths to thresholds for various hearing groups.

STEP 1: GENERAL PROJECT INFORMATION						
PROJECT TITLE	R/V Langseth mitigation gun					
PROJECT/SOURCE INFORMATION	one 40 cu.in 1900LL airgun @ a 12 m tow depth					
Please include any assumptions						
PROJECT CONTACT						
STEP 2: WEIGHTING FACTOR ADJUSTMENT				Specify if relying on source-specific WFA, alternative weighting/dB adjustment, or if using default value		
Weighting Factor Adjustment (kHz) [†]	NA		Override WFA: Using LDEO modeling			
[†] Broadband: 95% frequency contour percentile (kHz) OR Narrowband: frequency (kHz); For appropriate default WFA: See INTRODUCTION tab						
				[†] If a user relies on alternative weighting/dB adjustment rather than relying upon the WFA (source-specific or default), they may override the Adjustment (dB) (row 62), and enter the new value directly. However, they must provide additional support and documentation supporting this modification.		
STEP 3: SOURCE-SPECIFIC INFORMATION						
NOTE: Choose either F1 OR F2 method to calculate isopleths (not required to fill in sage boxes for both)				NOTE: LDEO modeling relies on Method F2		
F2: ALTERNATIVE METHOD ¹ TO CALCULATE PK and SEL _{cum} (SINGLE STRIKE/SHOT/PULSE EQUIVALENT)						
SEL _{cum}						
Source Velocity (meters/second)	2.57222	5 knots				
1/Repetition rate [^] (seconds)	155.2355					
¹ Methodology assumes propagation of 20 log R; Activity duration (time) independent; Time between onset of successive pulses.						
	Modified farfield SEL	202.9907	202.8948	204.368	202.8948	202.3491
	Source Factor	1.28256E+18	1.25455E+18	1.7612E+18	1.25455E+18	1.10642E+18
RESULTANT ISOPLETHS*						
*Impulsive sounds have dual metric thresholds (SEL _{cum} & PK). Metric producing largest isopleth should be used.						
	Hearing Group	Low-Frequency Cetaceans	Mid-Frequency Cetaceans	High-Frequency Cetaceans	Phocid Pinnipeds	Otarid Pinnipeds
	SEL _{cum} Threshold	183	185	155	185	203
	PTS SEL _{cum} Isopleth to threshold (meters)	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
WEIGHTING FUNCTION CALCULATIONS						
	Weighting Function Parameters	Low-Frequency Cetaceans	Mid-Frequency Cetaceans	High-Frequency Cetaceans	Phocid Pinnipeds	Otarid Pinnipeds
	a	1	1.6	1.8	1	2
	b	2	2	2	2	2
	f ₁	0.2	8.8	12	1.9	0.94
	f ₂	19	110	140	30	25
	c	0.13	1.2	1.36	0.75	0.64
	Adjustment (dB) [†]	-12.44	-60.85	-70.00	-30.09	-36.69
 OVERRIDE Using LDEO Modeling						

[†]For LF cetaceans, the adjustment factor (dB) is derived by estimating the radial distance of the 183-dB isopleth without applying the weighting function and a second time with applying the weighting function. Adjustment was derived using a propagation of 20*log₁₀ (Radial distance) and the modified farfield signature. For MF and HF cetaceans and pinnipeds, the difference between weighted–unweighted spectral source levels at each frequency was integrated to calculate adjustment factors (see spectrum levels in Figure A-13).

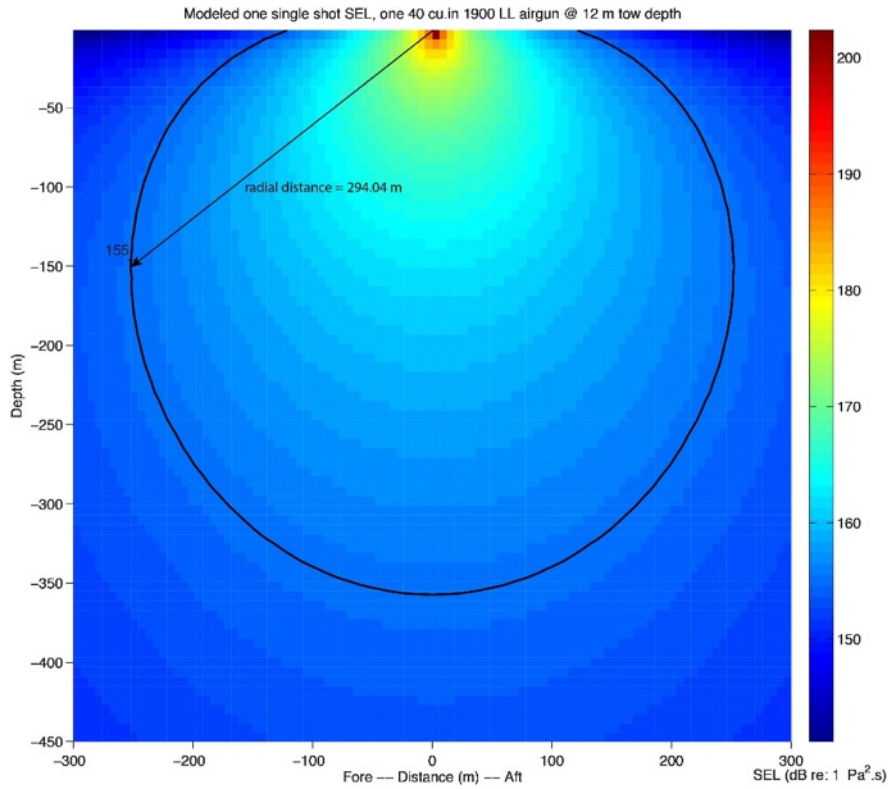


FIGURE A-14. Modeled received sound levels (SELs) in deep water from one 40-in³ airgun at a 12-m tow depth. The plot provides the distance from the geometrical center of the source array to the 155-dB SEL isopleth (294.04 m).

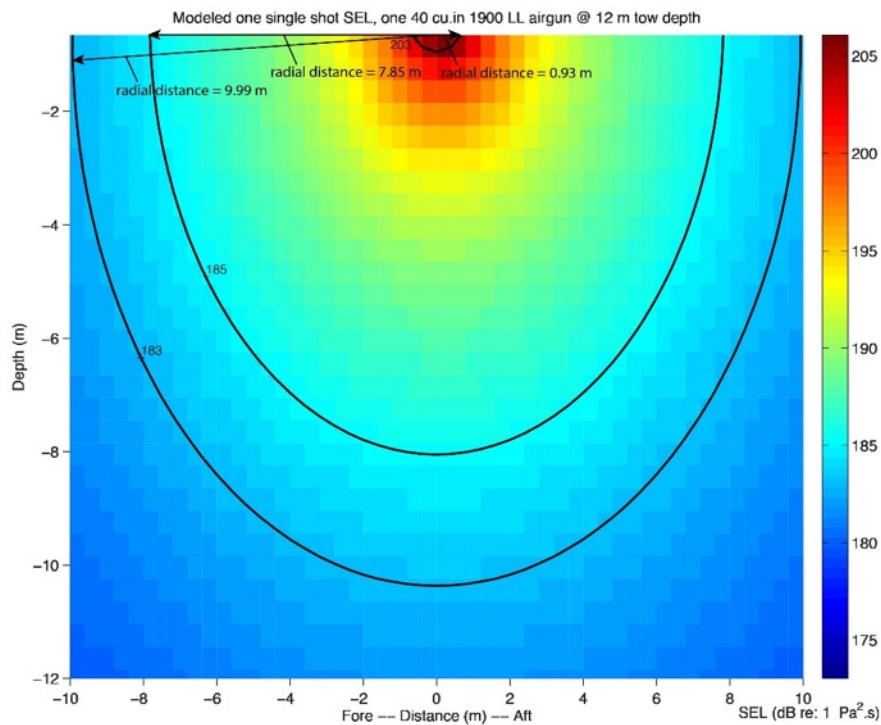


FIGURE A-15. Modeled received sound levels (SELs) in deep water from one 40-in³ airgun at a 12-m tow

depth. The plot provides the distance from the geometrical center of the source array to the 183–185 dB and 203 dB SEL isopleths.

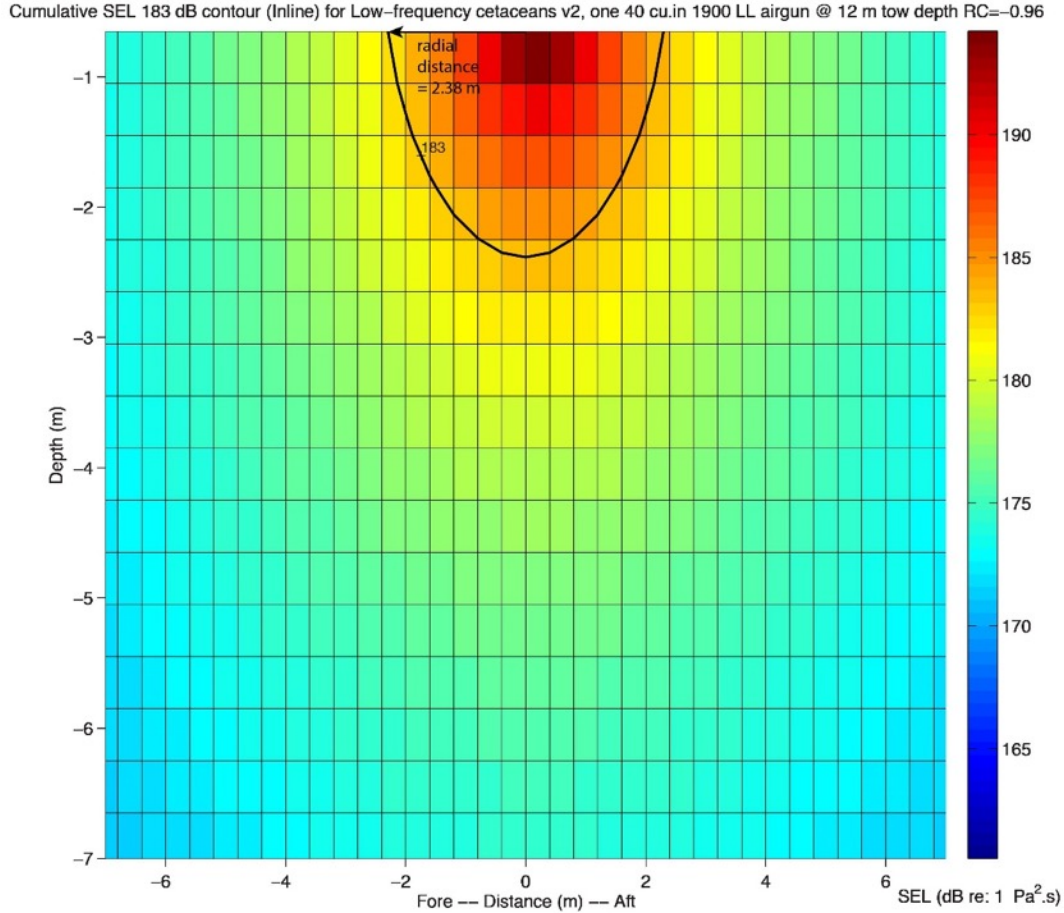


FIGURE A-16. Modeled received sound exposure levels (SELs) from one 40-in³ mitigation at a 12-m tow depth, after applying the auditory weighting function for the LF cetaceans hearing group following the NMFS Technical Guidance. The plot provides the radial distance to the 183-dB SEL_{cum} isopleth for one shot. The difference in radial distances between Fig. A-15 and this figure allows us to estimate the adjustment in dB.

TABLE A-8. NMFS Level A acoustic thresholds (Peak SPL_{flat}) for impulsive sources for marine mammals and predicted distances to Level A thresholds for various marine mammal hearing groups that could be received from the 40-in³ airgun during the proposed seismic survey in the GOA.

Hearing Group	Low-Frequency Cetaceans	Mid-Frequency Cetaceans	High-Frequency Cetaceans	Phocid Pinnipeds	Otariid Pinnipeds
Peak Threshold	219	230	202	218	232
Radial Distance to Threshold (m)	1.76	N.A.	12.47	1.98	N.A.
Modified Farfield Peak	223.93	N.A.	223.92	223.95	N.A.
PTS Peak Isopleth (Radius) to Threshold (m)	1.76	N.A.	12.5	1.98	N.A.

N.A. means not applicable or not available.

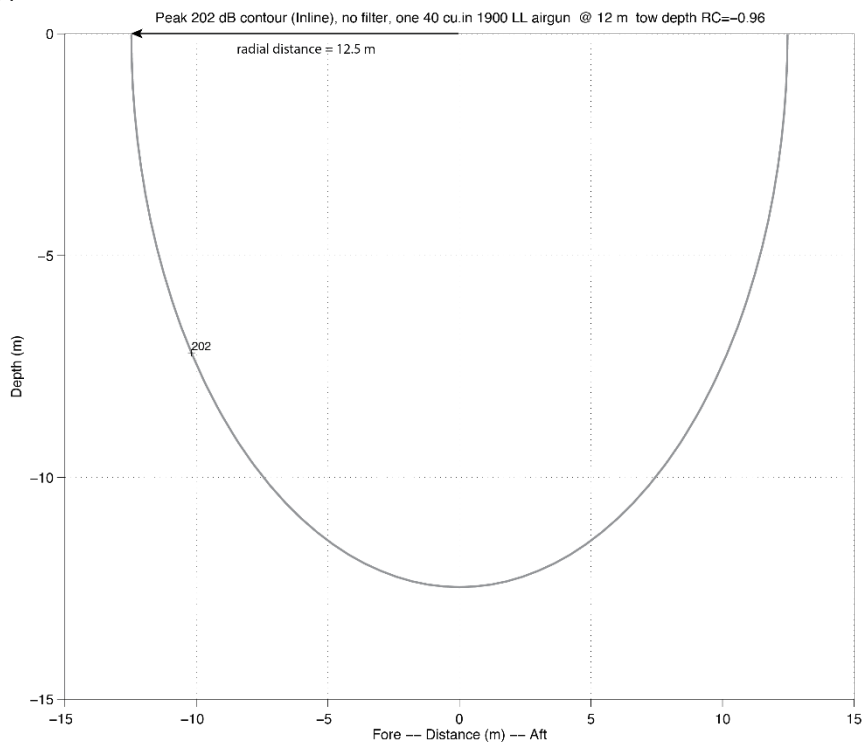


FIGURE A-17. Modeled deep-water received Peak SPL from one 40 in³ airgun at a 12-m tow depth. The plot provides the radial distance from the source geometrical center to the 202-dB Peak isopleth.

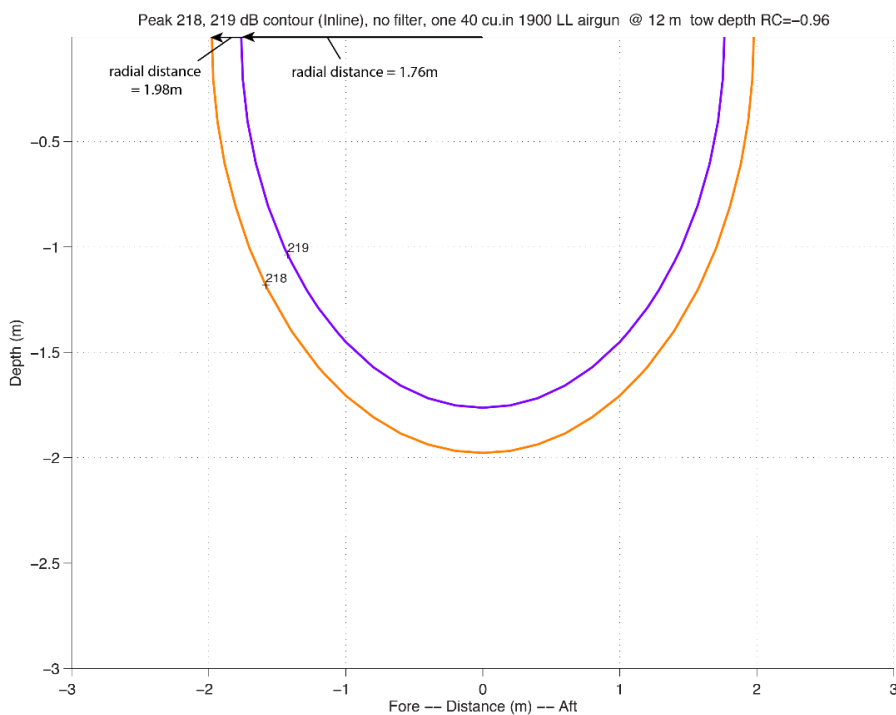


FIGURE A-18. Modeled deep-water received Peak SPL from one 40 in³ airgun at a 12-m tow depth. The plot provides the radial distances from the source geometrical center to the 218 and 219-dB Peak isopleths.

TABLE A-9. Sea turtle thresholds recommended by NMFS. Predicted distances to which sound levels ≥ 195 - and 175-dB re 1 $\mu\text{Pa}_{\text{rms}}$ could be received during the proposed survey in the GOA.

Source and Volume	Tow Depth (m)	Water Depth (m)	Predicted distances (in m) to Received Sound Levels	
			195 dB	175 dB
Single Bolt airgun, 40 in ³	12	>1000 m	8 ¹ (100 ³)	77 ¹
		100–1000 m	11 ² (100 ³)	116 ²
		<100 m	14 ⁴ (100 ³)	170 ⁴
4 strings, 36 airguns, 6600 in ³	12	>1000 m	181 ¹	1,864 ¹
		100–1000 m	272 ¹	2,796 ²
		<100 m	344 ⁴	4,123 ⁴

¹ Distance is based on L-DEO model results.

² Distance is based on L-DEO model results with a 1.5 × correction factor between deep and intermediate water depths.

³ An EZ of 100 m would be used as the shut-down distance for sea turtles, as specified for low-energy sources in the PEIS.

⁴ Distance is based on empirically derived measurements in the GoM with scaling applied to account for differences in tow depth.

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APPENDIX B: MARINE MAMMAL DENSITIES

Sources of Marine Mammal Densities

For the proposed survey, we consulted with NMFS regarding which marine mammal density sources to use for developing take estimates. In response, NMFS recommended the use of habitat-based stratified marine mammal densities developed by the U.S. Navy for assessing potential impacts of training activities in the GOA (DoN 2014). Alternative density estimates available for species in this region are not stratified by water depth and therefore do not reflect the known variability in species distribution relative to habitat features. To develop densities specific to the GOA, the Navy conducted two comprehensive marine mammal surveys in the Temporary Marine Activities Area (TMAA) in the GOA prior to 2014. The first survey was conducted from 10 to 20 April 2009 and the second was from 23 June to 18 July 2013. Both surveys used systematic line-transect survey protocols including visual and acoustic detection methods (Rone et al. 2010; Rone et al. 2014). The data were collected in four strata that were designed to encompass the four distinct habitats within the TMAA and greater GOA: Inshore – all waters <1000 m deep; Slope – from 1000 m water depth to the Aleutian trench/subduction zone; Offshore – waters offshore of the Aleutian trench/subduction zone; Seamount – waters within defined seamount areas (Rone et al. 2014).

Rone et al. (2014) provided stratified line-transect density estimates used in this analysis for fin, humpback, blue, sperm, and killer whales, as well as northern fur seals (Table B-1). Abundance estimates for unidentified large whales were prorated among blue, fin, and humpback whales within each stratum and proportionately incorporated into each species density estimate. Data from a subsequent survey in 2015 were used to calculate alternative density estimates for several species (Rone et al. 2017); however, the reported densities for blue, fin and humpback whales were not prorated for unidentified large whale sightings so the densities from Rone et al. (2014) were maintained. The density estimates for Dall's porpoise in Rone et al. (2017) were somewhat larger than those in Rone et al. (2014), so the larger densities were used as a cautionary approach.

There were insufficient sightings data from the 2009, 2013 and 2015 line-transect surveys to calculate reliable density estimates for other marine mammal species in the GOA. DoN (2014) derived gray whale densities in two zones, nearshore (0–2.25 n.mi from shore) and offshore (from 2.25–20 n.mi. from shore). In our calculations, the nearshore density was used to represent the Inshore zone and the offshore density was used to represent the Slope zone. This approach assumes a higher density of gray whales across a larger area and should yield a conservative estimate of potential exposures.

Harbor porpoise densities in DoN (2014) were derived from Hobbs and Waite (2010) which included additional shallow water depth strata. The density estimate from the 100 m to 200 m depth strata was used to represent the entire Inshore zone (<1000 m) in this analysis. Similarly, harbor seals typically remain close to shore so minimal estimates were used for the three deep water zones and a one thousand fold increase of the minimal density was used to represent the entire inshore zone (DoN 2014).

Densities for Minke whale, Pacific white-sided dolphin, and Cuvier's and Baird's beaked whales were based on Waite (2003; *in* DoN 2009). Although sei whale sightings and Stejneger's beaked whale acoustic detections were recorded during the Navy funded GOA surveys, data were insufficient to calculate densities for these species, so predictions from a global model of marine mammals densities were used (DoN 2014). Steller sea lion and northern elephant seal densities were calculated using shore-based population estimates divided by the area of the GOA Large Marine Ecosystem (DoN 2014). The North Pacific right whale, Risso's dolphin, and California sea lion are only rarely observed in or near the survey area, so minimal densities were used to represent their potential presence.

All densities were corrected for perception bias [$f(0)$] but only harbor porpoise densities were corrected for availability bias [$g(0)$], as described by the respective authors.

TABLE B-1. Densities of marine mammals in the Gulf of Alaska survey area. Species listed as "Endangered" under the ESA are in italics.

Species	Estimated Density (#/1000 km ²)				Source
	Inshore <1000 m	Slope (1000 m to Aleutian Trench)	Offshore (Offshore of Aleutian Trench)	Seamount (In Defined Seamount Areas)	
LF Cetaceans					
<i>North Pacific right whale</i>	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	DoN (2014)
Humpback whale	129.00	0.20	1.00	1.00	Rone et al. (2014)
<i>Blue whale</i>	0.50	0.50	0.50	2.00	Rone et al. (2014)
<i>Fin whale</i>	71.00	14.00	21.00	5.00	Rone et al. (2014)
<i>Sei whale</i>	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.10	DoN (2014)
Minke whale	0.60	0.60	0.60	0.60	Waite (2003) <i>in</i> DoN (2009)
Gray whale	48.57	2.43	0.00	0.00	DoN (2014)
MF Cetaceans					
<i>Sperm whale</i>	0.00	3.30	1.30	0.36	DoN (2014)
Killer whale	5.00	20.00	2.00	2.00	Rone et al. (2014)
Pacific white-sided dolphin	20.80	20.80	20.80	20.80	Waite (2003) <i>in</i> DoN (2009)
Cuvier's beaked whale	2.20	2.20	2.20	2.20	Waite (2003) <i>in</i> DoN (2009)
Baird's beaked whale	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.50	Waite (2003) <i>in</i> DoN (2009)
Stejneger's beaked whale	0.01	1.42	1.42	1.42	DoN (2014)
Risso's dolphin	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	DoN (2014)
HF Cetaceans					
Harbor Porpoise	47.30	0.00	0.00	0.00	Hobbs and Waite (2010) <i>in</i> DoN (2014)
Dall's porpoise	218.00	196.00	37.00	24.00	Rone et al. (2017)
Otariid Seals					
<i>Steller sea lion</i>	9.80	9.80	9.80	9.80	DoN (2014)
California sea lion	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	DoN (2014)
Northern fur seal	15.00	4.00	17.00	6.00	Rone et al. (2014)
Phocid Seal					
Northern elephant seal	2.20	2.20	2.20	2.20	DoN (2014)
Harbor seal	10.00	0.01	0.01	0.01	DoN (2014)

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APPENDIX C: MARINE MAMMAL TAKE CALCULATIONS

TABLE C-1. Densities of marine mammals and areas ensonified above threshold levels used to calculate potential takes from the proposed Gulf of Alaska survey. Species listed as "Endangered" under the ESA are in italics.

Species	Estimated Density (#/1000 km ²)					NMFS Level B 160 dB Daily Ensonified Area				Level A Ensonified Area (km ²)				Total Level B Takes	Total Level A Takes	Total Takes	% of Pop. (Total Takes)
	Inshore <1000 m	Slope 1000 m to Aleutian Trench	Offshore of Aleutian Trench	Seamount Within Defined Seamount Areas	Regional Population Size	Inshore <1000 m	Slope 1000 m to Aleutian Trench	Offshore of Aleutian Trench	Seamount Within Defined Seamount Areas	Inshore <1000 m	Slope 1000 m to Aleutian Trench	Offshore of Aleutian Trench	Seamount Within Defined Seamount Areas				
LF Cetaceans																	
<i>North Pacific right whale</i>	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	400	2,454	855	1,449	150	7	7	1	4	1	1	4	1.00
Humpback whale	129.00	0.20	1.00	1.00	21,063	2,454	855	1,449	150	7	7	1	4	5,730	1	5,731	27.21
<i>Blue whale</i>	0.50	0.50	0.50	2.00	1,647	2,454	855	1,449	150	7	7	1	4	49	1	50	3.04
<i>Fin whale</i>	71.00	14.00	21.00	5.00	18,680	2,454	855	1,449	150	7	7	1	4	3,913	1	3,914	20.95
<i>Sei whale</i>	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.10	27,197	2,454	855	1,449	150	7	7	1	4	9	1	10	0.04
Mink whale	0.60	0.60	0.60	0.60	25,000	2,454	855	1,449	150	7	7	1	4	54	1	55	0.22
Gray whale	48.57	2.43	0.00	0.00	20990	2,454	855	1,449	150	7	7	1	4	2,183	1	2,184	10.40
MF Cetaceans																	
<i>Sperm whale</i>	0.00	3.30	1.30	0.36	26,300	2,454	855	1,449	150	2	2	0	1	86	1	87	0.33
Killer whale	5.00	20.00	2.00	2.00	8,500	2,454	855	1,449	150	2	2	0	1	587	1	588	6.92
Pacific white-sided dolphin	20.80	20.80	20.80	20.80	988,333	2,454	855	1,449	150	2	2	0	1	1,838	1	1,839	0.19
Cuvier's beaked whale	2.20	2.20	2.20	2.20	20,000	2,454	855	1,449	150	2	2	0	1	195	1	196	0.98
Baird's beaked whale	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.50	25,300	2,454	855	1,449	150	2	2	0	1	45	1	46	0.18
Stejneger's beaked whale ¹	0.01	1.42	1.42	1.42	25,300	2,454	855	1,449	150	2	2	0	1	64	1	65	0.26
Risso's dolphin	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	838,000	2,454	855	1,449	150	2	2	0	1	1	1	17	0.00
HF Cetaceans																	
Harbor Porpoise	47.30	0.00	0.00	0.00	79,261	2,454	855	1,449	150	49	43	5	25	2,090	3	2,093	2.64
Dall's porpoise	218.00	196.00	37.00	24.00	1,186,000	2,454	855	1,449	150	49	43	5	25	13,677	21	13,698	1.15
Otariid Seals																	
<i>Steller sea lion</i>	9.80	9.80	9.80	9.80	53,303	2,454	855	1,449	150	2	2	0	1	866	1	867	1.63
California sea lion	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	296,750	2,454	855	1,449	150	2	2	0	1	1	1	2	0.00
Northern fur seal	15.00	4.00	17.00	6.00	1,100,000	2,454	855	1,449	150	2	2	0	1	1,184	1	1,185	0.11
Phocid Seal																	
Northern elephant seal	2.20	2.20	2.20	2.20	239,000	2,454	855	1,449	150	8	7	1	4	195	1	196	0.08
Harbor seal	10.00	0.01	0.01	0.01	129,000	2,454	855	1,449	150	8	7	1	4	443	1	444	0.34

¹ Abundance estimate not available, but acoustic monitoring suggests Stejneger's beaked whales are at least as abundant as Baird's beaked whale in the GOA (Baumann-Pickering et al. 2014), so use of Baird's beaked whale abundance estimate should result in a cautionary estimate of the percent of the population potentially taken.

APPENDIX D: ENSONIFIED AREAS FOR MARINE MAMMAL TAKE CALCULATIONS

TABLE D-1. Areas ensonified above threshold levels used to calculate potential takes from the proposed Gulf of Alaska survey.

Survey Zone	Criteria	Daily Ensonified Area (km ²)	Total Survey Days	25% Increase	Total Ensonified Area (km ²)	Relevant Isopleth (m)
Shallow (<40 m)	160 dB	474.8	18	1.25	10,683.7	25,493
Inshore (<1000 m) ¹	160 dB	1963.1	18	1.25	44,170.3	10,100
Slope (1000 m to Aleutian Trench)	160 dB	684.1	18	1.25	15,392.8	6,733
Offshore (Offshore of Aleutian Trench)	160 dB	1159.5	18	1.25	26,087.8	6,733
Seamount (Within Defined Seamount Areas)	160 dB	119.8	18	1.25	2,695.2	6,733
All zones	LF Cetacean	19.6	18	1.25	441.1	40.1
All zones	MF Cetacean	6.6	18	1.25	149.6	13.6
All zones	HF Cetacean	131.1	18	1.25	2,950.8	268.3
All zones	Otariid	5.2	18	1.25	116.6	10.6
All zones	Phocid	21.4	18	1.25	480.6	43.7

¹ Includes area ensonified above 160 dB in waters <100 m deep using an isopleth distance of 25,493 m.

APPENDIX E: NMFS EFH CONSULTATION LETTER

From: Matthew Eagleton - NOAA Federal <matthew.eagleton@noaa.gov>
Sent: Wednesday, March 20, 2019 4:13 PM
To: Smith, Holly E. <hesmith@nsf.gov>
Cc: Lydia Ames - NOAA Federal <lydia.ames@noaa.gov>
Subject: Re: [EXTERNAL] - Re: Essential Fish Habitat Consultation Request - NSF Marine Geophysical Survey GOA June 2019

Holly,

NMFS HCD has reviewed your EFH information and project. Also, we have coordinated your work through our science center (so they are aware). After review, HCD feels your work will NOT adversely effect EFH and no further consultation specific to Sec 305 of the MSA\EFH is necessary. We also offer the following information for your notes:

Thanks to Rebecca Rueter (Alaska Fisheries Science Center.) She doesn't think the AFSC serves a role in this matter.

Thanks to LTJG Lydia Ames; she notified the NOAA Office of Marine and Aviation Operations (OMAO). She received confirmation that they are aware of this action; she talked to the Operations Chief LCDR Carl Rhodes and he informed all ships that you would possibly be operating in that area this summer. As suspected, there's not much action that needs to be taken on their part apart from awareness. He also sent the application/EFH Assessment up the chain of OMAO for good measure.

Please contact Lydia (907)-271-5502 or myself if more is needed.

Matt

From: "Smith, Holly E." <hesmith@nsf.gov>
Date: Friday, March 1, 2019 at 2:40 PM
To: "matthew.eagleton@noaa.gov" <matthew.eagleton@noaa.gov>
Cc: "Smith, Holly E." <hesmith@nsf.gov>
Subject: Essential Fish Habitat Consultation Request - NSF Marine Geophysical Survey GOA June 2019

Mr. Eagleton - Attached to this email, please find a request for Essential Fish Habitat consultation for a proposed marine geophysical survey to be conducted in the Gulf of Alaska by the National Science Foundation in June 2019. If you have any questions about the proposed project, or if this request needs to be submitted elsewhere, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Regards,
Holly Smith

Environmental Compliance Officer
National Science Foundation
2415 Eisenhower Avenue
Alexandria, Virginia 22314
(703) 292-7713

APPENDIX F: USFWS ESA CONSULTATION LETTER



United States Department of the Interior
U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Anchorage Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office
4700 BLM Road
Anchorage, Alaska 99507-2546



IN REPLY REFER TO:
FWS/AFES/AFWCO

May 7, 2019

Ms. Holly Smith
Environmental Compliance Officer
National Science Foundation
2415 Eisenhower Avenue
Alexandria, Virginia 22314

Subject: NSF Marine Geophysical Survey by the R/V *Marcus G. Langseth* in the Gulf of Alaska, 2019 (Consultation 2019-I-0159)

Dear Ms. Smith:

Thank you for requesting section 7 consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), pursuant to the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq., as amended; ESA) by correspondence received April 7, 2019. The National Science Foundation (NSF) has proposed to conduct a high-energy marine geophysical survey in the Gulf of Alaska within the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EZ). The proposed seismic survey would be conducted on the research vessel (R/V) *Marcus G. Langseth* (*Langseth*), owned by NSF and operated by Columbia University's Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory (L-DEO). The proposed survey would collect two dimensional (2-D) marine seismic data with an array of 36 airguns deployed as an energy source and total discharge volume of approximately 6,600 cubic inches. The receiving system for the returning acoustic signals would be ocean bottom seismometers (already deployed for a research activity currently underway). The potential effects of the proposed activity would primarily be a result of the operation of the airgun array, and would be associated with increased underwater anthropogenic sounds, which could result in avoidance behavior by ESA listed species.

The NSF has determined that these projects may affect, but are not likely to adversely affect, the federally endangered short-tailed albatross (*Phoebastria albatrus*), endangered Steller's eider (*Polysticta stelleri*) or its critical habitat, and threatened southwest distinct population segment of the northern sea otter (*Enhydra lutris kenyoni*) or its critical habitat. Protection measures designed to mitigate the potential environmental impacts to marine mammals, sea turtles, and seabirds would include the following: ramp ups; typically two (but a minimum of one) dedicated

Ms. Holly Smith

2

Protected Species Observers (PSOs) maintaining a visual watch during all daytime airgun operations; two PSOs before and during ramp ups; no start-ups during poor visibility or at night unless the exclusion zone and passive acoustic monitoring (PAM) system have been monitored for 30 minutes with no detections; PAM via towed hydrophones during both day and night to complement visual monitoring; and power downs (or if necessary shut downs) when ESA-listed species are detected in or about to enter designated exclusion zones. The L-DEO and its contractors are committed to applying these measures in order to minimize effects on marine mammals, sea turtles, seabirds, and fish, and other potential environmental impacts. The airguns are an inherent mitigation measure because they direct the majority of the energy downward, rather than laterally. Effects to sea otter critical habitat would be avoided by designing survey lines that avoid the ensonification of sea otter critical habitat above 160 dB re 1 μ Pa SPL. Steller's eider critical habitat does not occur within the proposed study area.

The Service agrees that the proposed avoidance and minimization measures should reduce any potential effects to listed species, with all remaining effects expected to be either insignificant or discountable. Therefore, the Service concurs with NSF's determination that proposed project activities are not likely to adversely affect any listed species or their designated critical habitats. Based on your request and our response, requirements of section 7 of the ESA have been satisfied. However, if new information reveals project impacts that may affect listed species or critical habitat in a manner or to an extent not previously considered, or if this action is subsequently modified in a manner which was not considered in this assessment, or if a new species is listed or critical habitat designated that may be affected by the proposed action, section 7 consultation must be reinitiated.

This letter relates only to federally listed or proposed species and/or designated or proposed critical habitat under jurisdiction of the Service. It does not address species under the jurisdiction of the National Marine Fisheries Service, or other legislation or responsibilities under the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act, Marine Mammal Protection Act, Clean Water Act, National Environmental Policy Act, or Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act.

Thank you for your coordination in meeting our joint responsibilities under the ESA. If you have any questions regarding Service endangered species requirements relative to this project, please contact Ms. Libby Benolkin at 907-271-2718 or at elizabeth_benolkin@fws.gov.

Sincerely,



Douglass M. Cooper
Branch Chief, Ecological Service