small numbers of certain species of marine mammals. While behavioral and avoidance reactions may be made by these species in response to the resultant noise from the airguns, these behavioral changes are expected to have a negligible impact on the affected species and stocks of marine mammals.

While the number of potential incidental harassment takes will depend on the distribution and abundance of marine mammals in the area of seismic operations, the number of potential harassment takings is estimated to be relatively small in light of the population sizes (see Tables 3, 4, and 5). NMFS anticipates the actual take of individuals to be even lower than the numbers depicted in the tables, because those numbers do not reflect either the implementation of the mitigation measures or the fact that some animals likely will avoid the sound at levels lower than those expected to result in harassment.

In addition, no take by death and/or injury is anticipated, and the potential for temporary or permanent hearing impairment will be avoided through the incorporation of the mitigation measures described in this document.

**Proposed Authorization**

NMFS proposes to issue an IHA to L–DEO for a marine seismic survey project in the ETP in April–August 2008, provided the previously mentioned mitigation, monitoring, and reporting requirements are incorporated.

**Dated:** February 28, 2008.

_Helen Golde_,

Deputy Director, Office of Protected Resources, National Marine Fisheries Service.

**ADDRESS:** Written comments may be sent to Gray’s Reef NMS (Research Area), 10 Ocean Science Circle, Savannah, GA 31411; or by facsimile to 912/598–2367; or to grnms.researcharea@noaa.gov.

**Scoping meetings will be held at:**

1. Camden Public Library, 6–8 p.m., March 18, 2008.
2. Armstrong Center, 6–8 p.m., March 20, 2008.
4. Stevens Wetlands Education Center, 6–8 p.m., March 25, 2008.
5. Best Western Sea Island Inn, 6–8 p.m., March 27, 2008.

**FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Becky Shortland (912) 598–2381 or Becky.Shortland@noaa.gov.

**SUMMARY:** The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s (NOAA) Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (ONMS) is preparing a draft environmental impact statement to consider the establishment of a research (control) area in Gray’s Reef National Marine Sanctuary (GRNMS). Activities are restricted within research areas in order to facilitate better understanding of resources and environmental processes. This notice announces the beginning of public scoping pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act. The public scoping process, including public scoping meetings, is intended to solicit information and comments on the range and significance of issues related to the establishment of a research area at Gray’s Reef. The results of this scoping process will assist NOAA in formulating alternatives for the draft environmental impact statement for the proposed research area. This notice contains times, dates, and locations for scoping meetings.

**DATES:** Comments will be considered if received by April 21, 2008.

**Proposed Authorization**

NMFS proposes to issue an IHA to L–DEO for a marine seismic survey project in the ETP in April–August 2008, provided the previously mentioned mitigation, monitoring, and reporting requirements are incorporated.


_Helen Golde_,

Deputy Director, Office of Protected Resources, National Marine Fisheries Service.

**BILLING CODE 3510–22–P**

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

Notice of Intent To Prepare a Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Gray’s Reef National Marine Sanctuary

**AGENCY:** Office of National Marine Sanctuaries, National Ocean Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Department of Commerce.

**ACTION:** Notice of intent to initiate public scoping.

**SUMMARY:** The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s (NOAA) Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (ONMS) is preparing a draft environmental impact statement to consider the establishment of a research (control) area in Gray’s Reef National Marine Sanctuary (GRNMS). Activities are restricted within research areas in order to facilitate better understanding of resources and environmental processes. This notice announces the beginning of public scoping pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act. The public scoping process, including public scoping meetings, is intended to solicit information and comments on the range and significance of issues related to the establishment of a research area at Gray’s Reef. The results of this scoping process will assist NOAA in formulating alternatives for the draft environmental impact statement for the proposed research area. This notice contains times, dates, and locations for scoping meetings.

**DATES:** Comments will be considered if received by April 21, 2008.

**Scoping meetings will be held at:**

1. Camden Public Library, 6–8 p.m., March 18, 2008.
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**ADDRESS:** Written comments may be sent to Gray’s Reef NMS (Research Area), 10 Ocean Science Circle, Savannah, GA 31411; or by facsimile to 912/598–2367; or to grnms.researcharea@noaa.gov.

**Scoping meetings will be held at:**

1. Camden Public Library, 1410 Highway 40 East, Kingsland, Georgia 31548.
2. Armstrong Center, 13040 Abercorn St., Savannah, Georgia 31419.
3. Statesboro Regional Library, 124 South Main St., Statesboro, Georgia 30458.
4. Stevens Wetlands Education Center, 600 Cedar St., Richmond Hill, Georgia 31324.
5. Best Western Sea Island Inn, 1015 Bay St., Beaufort, South Carolina 29902.

**FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Becky Shortland (912) 598–2381 or Becky.Shortland@noaa.gov.

**SUMPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** The National Marine Sanctuaries Act (NMSA), 16 U.S.C. 1431 et seq., authorizes the Secretary of Commerce (Secretary) to designate discrete areas of the marine environment as national marine sanctuaries to protect their special conservation, recreational, ecological, historical, cultural, archaeological, scientific, educational, or esthetic qualities. The NMSA is administered by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) through the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (ONMS).

The concept of a research (control) area within Gray’s Reef National Marine Sanctuary has been under discussion for several years. The concept was first raised in 1999 during the early stages of the GRNMS Management Plan review process at public scoping meetings and was raised again during public research workshops.

Subsequently, the Gray’s Reef Sanctuary Advisory Council (SAC), with the approval of the Sanctuary superintendent, formed a research area working group (RAWG) to further consider the concept. The Advisory Council’s recommendation to investigate the concept of a marine research area was adopted by GRNMS as a research and monitoring strategy for the Management Plan which was released in 2006.

The RAWG comprised representative constituents of Gray’s Reef including: researchers, academics, conservation groups, recreational anglers and divers, educators, commercial fishing, law enforcement and sanctuaries representatives. The working group met initially in May 2004, and then periodically over the course of a year, to discuss the concept in detail. The working group employed a consensus-driven, constituent-based process to address the concept of a marine research area. All participants discussed at length all issues, considerations, priorities and concerns for each step of the process.

The following recommendations were developed by the working group and were referred to the SAC. After reviewing and considering the recommendations, the SAC adopted and submitted them to NOAA GRNMS:

**Recommendation #1**

Significant research questions exist at Gray’s Reef National Marine Sanctuary that can only be addressed by establishing a control (research) area. Therefore, the research area concept should be further explored by NOAA through a public review process.

**Recommendation #2**

As many appropriate tools as feasible, especially a GIS (Geographic Information Systems, geographic and spatial analysis software) site evaluation tool and a RAWG should be used to investigate a research area with proper siting criteria.
Recommendation #3

Diversity of habitat with emphasis on high relief habitat should be the primary siting criterion. The RAWG should be maintained to support NOAA GRNMS in consideration of these various criteria (e.g., habitat, size, existing research and monitoring sites, bottom fishing data) in developing proposed options for a draft environmental impact statement.

Recommendation #4

Minimizing impacts to user communities including fishing, diving, research, and resource management should be a priority under the research area concept. Non-bottom impinging activities should not be viewed as conflicting with the primary objectives of a proposed research area. Based on the recommendations of the Advisory Council, NOAA has concluded that the research area concept should be further explored through a public review process. In the upcoming DEIS, NOAA will likely develop a range of alternatives for the creation of a research area, including a no-action alternative. If this action results in the creation of a research area in the GRNMS, a companion management plan for the research area will serve as a supplement to the 2006 GRNMS Final Management Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement.

By this notice, NOAA announces the initiation of scoping for the proposed research area in Gray’s Reef National Marine Sanctuary. Scoping is the initial process intended to solicit information and comments on the range and significance of issues related to the proposed action. The results of this scoping process will assist NOAA in formulating alternatives for a draft environmental impact statement for the proposed research area.

NOAA encourages the public and interested parties to submit (via mail, e-mail, or fax) comments and to attend the public scoping meetings in March.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1431 et seq. (Federal Domestic Assistance Catalog Number 11.429 Marine Sanctuary Program)


John H. Dunnigan,
Assistant Administrator, Ocean Services and Coastal Zone Management, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

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