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NOAA Seeks Public Comment on Navy's Request for Marine Mammal Permit During New Ship Test

NOAA's Fisheries Service is seeking comment on its proposal to minimize the U.S. Navy's disturbance to marine mammals as a new class of ship is tested for structural integrity and crew survivability in naval training waters off the east coast of Florida sometime between May and September.

The U.S. Navy has requested what's known under the Marine Mammal Protection Act as an incidental take authorization. The proposed authorization outlines measures the Navy should take to protect marine life as it detonates explosives to battle test the ship.

The Navy says it plans to detonate explosives in areas where there are the least number of whales and dolphins determined by trained spotters in aircraft surveying the training waters. In addition, the Navy will monitor the area after each test to locate any injured animals. Injuries and deaths, while not expected, will be reported to NOAA's Fisheries Service.

NOAA's Fisheries Service has preliminarily determined that the tests will not result in more than incidental harassment of marine mammals, and would have no more than a negligible impact on the species or stocks in the area.

The Navy plans to detonate up to four 10,000-pound explosives at a rate of one per week to assess the survivability during battle of new transport dock ship, the USS *Mesa Verde*. The Navy uses the information gathered during shock trials to help reduce the risk of injury to the crew and damage or loss of the ship during battle.

NOAA's Fisheries Service will accept comments on the application and proposed rule through Mon., May 12. To read the proposed rule, go to <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/permits/incidental.htm#applications>

Comments should be addressed to:

Mr. P. Michael Payne, Chief, Permits
Conservation and Education Division
Office of Protected Resources
NOAA's Fisheries Service
1315 East-West Highway
Silver Spring MD 20910-3225

Electronic comments need to be submitted via the federal e-rulemaking portal, <http://www.regulations.gov>.

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