ANNOUNCEMENT OF FEDERAL FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Federal Agency Name(s): National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Department of Commerce

Funding Opportunity Title: FY 2015 Alaska Pinniped Research Program

Announcement Type: Initial

Funding Opportunity Number: NOAA-NMFS-AK-2015-2004372

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number: 11.439, Marine Mammal Data Program

Dates: Applications or proposals must be received and validated by Grants.gov by 5:00 p.m., Alaska Standard Time (AST), April 6, 2015. Applications/proposals received after the established deadline will be rejected and returned to the sender without consideration. Applications submitted through Grants.gov are automatically stamped with the date and time of submission, which will be the basis for determining timeliness. The application must be validated by Grants.gov in order to be considered timely.

PLEASE NOTE: It may take Grants.gov up to two (2) business days to validate or reject the application. Please consider this when developing your submission timeline. Applicants are responsible for ensuring that all required elements have been appropriately submitted.

For those not having access to the internet, one signed original and two hard copy applications must be postmarked or received at the NMFS Alaska Regional Office (AKR) by 5:00 p.m., Alaska Standard Time (AST), April 6, 2015 at the following address: NOAA Federal Program Officer for the Alaska Marine Mammal Research Program, National Marine Fisheries Service, 709 W. 9th Street, Juneau, Alaska 99801. Use of U.S. mail or another delivery service must be documented with a receipt. (Note that late-arriving hard copy proposals provided to a delivery service on or before 5:00 p.m. AST on the closing date for applications will be accepted for review if the applicant can document that the proposal was provided to the guaranteed delivery service by the specified closing date and time and if the proposal is received by AKR no later than 5:00 p.m. AST, two business days following the closing date.)

No facsimile or electronic mail proposals will be accepted.

Funding Opportunity Description: The National Marine Fisheries Service (hereinafter, "NMFS") is responsible for the stewardship, conservation, and management of pinniped species in Alaska, including the Steller sea lion, Northern fur seal, ringed seal, bearded seal, spotted seal, ribbon seal, and harbor seal. Two of these pinnipeds are currently listed under the Endangered Species Act: the endangered western Distinct Population Segment (DPS) of Steller sea lions and the threatened Arctic subspecies of ringed seals (a third species, the Beringia DPS of bearded seals, was also listed as threatened but the listing was vacated by the U.S. District Court for the District of Alaska). NMFS has the responsibility to foster the recovery of these ESA-listed species and research is necessary to support our recovery programs for these species. Non-ESA-listed pinniped species or populations in Alaska are listed as strategic stocks under the Marine Mammal Protection Act, and/or are important as a subsistence resource to Alaska Natives and co-managed by NMFS and Alaska Native co-management partners. Research is also an important component to co-management of these animals.

Beginning in fiscal year (hereinafter, "FY") 2015, certain priority pinniped research in Alaska will be administered through a competitively-funded, merit-based grants program. This program concerns only Alaskan pinnipeds for which NMFS bears responsibility; proposals focusing on marine mammals under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will not be considered for funding under this grant program. This document describes how to prepare and submit proposals for funding in FY 2015 and how NMFS will determine which proposals will be funded.

FULL ANNOUNCEMENT TEXT

I. Funding Opportunity Description

A. Program Objective

The objective of the FY15 Alaska Pinniped Research Program is to provide financial assistance for the development and implementation of research programs that:

* Support effective conservation and management of seals, sea lions, and Northern fur seals in Alaska; and

* Implement high priority research objectives or answer research needs as specified in NMFS recovery plans, conservations plans, research plans (including those developed with Alaska Native co-management organizations), or post-delisting monitoring plans for these species (available at http://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/).

B. Program Priorities

Program Priorities

Applicants should ensure that their applications address at least one of the following priorities, which are listed in no particular order of preference (i.e., no one factor carrying a higher priority than any other). Each project must list the priority or priorities being addressed. Proposed work may include field studies, captive studies, and/or laboratory and data analyses. Proposals will be more competitive if they identify how they will provide information that directly supports management information needs, demonstrate how the applicants will cooperate and coordinate with NMFS, and make a clear and compelling case for how the proposed work will fill a pressing NMFS information need. Applications that do not address any of the program priorities will not be considered for funding.

The pinniped research priorities for Fiscal Year 2015 are as follows:

1. Conduct studies of the western DPS Steller sea lion to help elucidate its failure to recover, especially in the western and parts of the central Aleutian Islands, including studies to determine and understand: spatial patterns in survival and reproduction; seasonal and age-specific patterns of prey consumption, habitat use, energy needs and costs, and prey quality, quantity, and spatial distribution; and the influence of direct and indirect effects of fisheries, disease, and contaminants.

2. Monitor the eastern DPS Steller sea lion to detect temporal or spatial changes in trends in pup production, adult/juvenile (non-pup) counts, and survival and birth rates; assess residual or emerging threats to the population; and determine if there are changes in the breeding or feeding ranges of the eastern DPS.

3. Reevaluate carrying capacity estimates for the Eastern Pacific stock of northern fur seals and address reasons for the decline in fur seal abundance on the Pribilof Islands.

4. Determine the extent of exposure of Alaska pinnipeds, particularly Northern fur seals and harbor seals, to infectious disease and human-derived contaminants, and consequent effects on reproduction and survival.

5. Assess and identify factors contributing to regional harbor seal declines, particularly in the western Aleutian Islands.

6. Document seasonal movements, habitat use, and foraging behavior of ringed and/or bearded seals offshore of Alaska.

NOAA will consider only applications that address the priorities identified in this section. All proposed projects should also be clearly linked to specific NMFS recovery plans, conservations plans, research plans (including those developed with Alaska Native co-management organizations), or post-delisting monitoring plans for these species.

C. Program Authority

16 U.S.C. § 1380

II. Award Information

A. Funding Availability

Total funding available under this notice is anticipated to be approximately $3,500,000 . Actual funding for this program is contingent upon FY2015 Federal appropriations. Award amounts will be determined by the proposals and the availability of funds. Applicants are

hereby given notice that these funds have not yet been appropriated for this program. Given this, there is no guarantee that sufficient funds will be available to make awards for all qualified projects. Publication of this notice does not obligate NOAA to make an award to any specific project or to obligate any available funds.

If an application is selected for funding, NOAA has no obligation to provide any additional funding in connection with that award in subsequent years beyond the award period. If an applicant incurs any costs prior to receiving an award agreement signed by an authorized NOAA official, the applicant would do solely at his/her own risk of these costs not being included under the award. Pre-award costs are not allowed under the award unless approved by the NOAA Grants Officer in accordance with 2 C.F.R. §§ 200.308(d) and 200.458.

B. Project/Award Period

The project budget period is recommended to be 12 months in duration. The requested award start date must begin on the first day of the month and end on the last day of the month. NMFS expects the majority of projects to have one year project periods.

If an applicant would like to continue work on a project funded through this program beyond the approved award period and obligated award funds have not been expended by the end of this period, the applicant must notify the assigned Federal Program Officer 60 days prior to the end of the period to determine eligibility for a no-cost extension. The Federal Program Officer will make the determination 30 days prior to the end of the period if the project is eligible for a no-cost extension. If a proposal is selected for funding, NOAA/NMFS has no obligation to provide additional funding in connection with that award in subsequent years.

C. Type of Funding Instrument

Proposals selected for funding will be funded through a grant or a cooperative agreement. Cooperative agreements are awards that include substantial involvement by NOAA in the management of the project. Examples of substantial involvement may include, but are not limited to, assisting in the development of outreach materials; collaboration between NOAA scientists and a recipient scientist; input into organizational structure, mode

of operations, and programmatic activities; review and revision of draft deliverables; regularly scheduled monitoring; and/or operational involvement during performance. The exact amount of funds, the scope of work, and terms and conditions of a successful award will be determined in pre-award negotiations between the successful applicant and NOAA representatives.

III. Eligibility Information

A. Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants must be in "good standing" with NMFS. An applicant is considered to be in "good standing" if the entity meets the following criteria:

1) No pending enforcement actions under the MMPA or ESA.

2) Progress and financial reports on current Federal assistance awards are up-to- date and/or completed in a timely manner.

3) Satisfactory past performance. This includes completion of proposed projects in a timely manner or as stated in previous proposals. Unsatisfactory performance under prior or current Federal awards, including delinquency in submitting progress and financial reports and inability in meeting proposal objectives and tasks within the project period, may result in either that proposal not being considered for funding or an adjusted final funding recommendation under the 2015 Alaska Pinniped Research Program.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching Requirement

No cost sharing or matching is required under this program.

C. Other Criteria that Affect Eligibility

Applicants proposing research on species under cooperative management, or within Alaska Native communities or traditional hunting areas, must submit a plan of cooperation along with their application describing their efforts to inform, communicate, involve, and report their research to those communities and applicable co-management organizations.

IV. Application and Submission Information

A. Address to Request Application Package

Application packages are available through the Grants.gov website at http://www.grants.gov. Delays may be experienced when registering with Grants.gov near the end of a solicitation period. Therefore, NMFS strongly recommends that you do not wait until the application deadline to begin the registration/application process through the Grants.gov website.

B. Content and Form of Application

NOAA employees (whether full-time, part-time, or intermittent) are not permitted to assist in the preparation of an application, except that staff may provide information on program goals, funding priorities, application procedures, and completion of application forms. Since this is a competitive program, NOAA employees will not provide assistance in conceptualizing, developing, or structuring proposals, or write letters of support for a proposal.

Applications must adhere to the requirements under the Applications and Required Elements subsections by the application deadline. Failure to follow these provisions will result in proposals being rejected and returned to the applicant without review.

1. Applications

A complete standard NOAA grant application package must be submitted in accordance with the guidelines in this document. These forms are available through the Grants.gov website at http//www.grants.gov. Each application must include:

- Application for Federal Assistance: SF-424
- Budget Information - Non-Construction Programs: SF-424A
- Assurances - Non-Construction Programs: SF-424B
- Certification Regarding Lobbying: CD-511
- Disclosure of Lobbying Activities: SF-LLL (if applicable)
- Project Summary (described below)
- Project Narrative Description (described below)
- Detailed Narrative Budget Justification (described below)
- Other supporting Documentation and Relevant Attachments the applicant deems important to the overall understanding and evaluation of the proposed project. Applicants must identify the specific priority or priorities to which they are responding. Applicants should not assume prior knowledge on the part of NMFS as to the relative merits of the project described in the application.

2. Required Elements

Proposals should be limited to 30 pages. The format may vary, but must include:

A. Title Page

This page shall provide the project title, project duration, applicant name(s), name(s) of the Principal Investigator (or Project Manager) and any Co-Investigators (or Co-Managers), complete contact information (address, telephone, fax, email, and phone number) of the applicant(s), and a statement regarding the Federal, non- Federal, and total costs of the project.

B. Project Summary

Provide a brief summary of the project goals and objectives, the proposed activities and connection to specific funding priority being identified, the geographic area where the project would occur, and expected outcomes and benefits of the proposed activities. This summary may be posted on our website if the project is funded.

C. Project Description

Each project must be completely and accurately described. The main body of the proposal should be a clear statement of the work to be undertaken and should include: specific objectives and performance measures for the period of the proposed work and the expected significance; relation to longer-term goals of the PI's project; and relation to other work planned, anticipated, or underway through Federal assistance. Research objectives should be clear and understandable; as specific and quantitative as possible; clear as to the "what and when," and attainable within the time, funding, and resources available. Administrative objectives should be described in a similar fashion. Applications should be accomplishment oriented and identify specific performance measures. Project performance measures could be due dates for draft and final technical and scientific publications, dates for field seasons/data collection, and Administrative performance measures could be dates, agendas, or minutes of meetings, website updating, or outreach and education materials. The main body of the narrative should clearly state how the work will be undertaken to meet the priorities and include:

(1) Project Design and Management: Describe how the project will be organized and managed and who will be responsible for carrying out Research or administrative activities. The lead organization/individual and person listed as the technical contact should be identified as the Project Manager (PM) or Principal Investigator (PI). Use of sub-contractors or volunteer staff time to complete project activities and oversight of those individuals should be discussed. The PM/PI is responsible for all technical oversight and implementation of the approved work plan as delineated in the proposal. One PM or PI must be designated

on each project, but the PM/PI may or may not be the applicant. However, if the applicant is not the PM/PI, there must be an explanation of the relationship between the applicant and PM/PI (e.g., applicant will be responsible for managing the grant funds and the PM will be responsible for completing the project milestones on time and within budget, etc.). Project participants or organizations that will have a significant role in conducting the project should be listed as Co-investigators or Co-Managers. Organizations or individuals that support the project, for example, researchers contributing data or materials, should be referred to as Cooperators. Copies of the PM's or PI's and all Co-investigator's/Co-Manager's current resumes or curricula vitae and position descriptions must be included as appendices.

The project narrative is the technical or scientific plan of activities that are to be accomplished during each budget period of the project. This description should include detailed descriptions of the specific plan and/or methods that will be employed. Project milestones and the timeliness (i.e., the number of months) necessary to meet them should be discussed. The narrative should respond to the following questions:

* What is the project design? What specific work, activities, procedures, statistical design, or analytical methods are being undertaken?

* Who will be responsible for carrying out the various activities?

* What are the major products and how will project results be disseminated? A Data Management Plan should be included (can be submitted as an appendix.) Data Management Planes include the method to make available to the public all data generated from observations, analyses, or model development (primary data) and any secondary (or existing) data used under a cooperative agreement awarded from this solicitation. The data must be available in a format and with documentation such that they may be used by others in the scientific community. Proposals must address plans for sharing data and research products with the community in a timely manner and should lead to development and or support of models for management purposes.

* What are the performance measurements? Performance measurement is the process of assessing progress toward achieving predetermined goals, including efficiency, quality, outcomes and effectiveness. Performance management involves setting agreed-upon performance goals, allocating and prioritizing resources, informing managers about the effectiveness of meeting goals and reporting success.

* What are the project milestones? List the milestones, describing the specific activities and associated time lines to conduct the scope of work. Describe the time lines in increments (e.g., month 1, month 2), rather than by specific dates. Identify the individual(s) responsible for the various specific activities.

(2) Project duration: Starting on the first day of the month and ending on the last day of the month.

(3) Goals and Objectives: Identify the specific program priority the project intends to address and describe its significance. Identify the problem/opportunity you intend to address and describe its significance. Identify the administrative and/or project objectives, which should be simple and understandable, as specific and quantitative as possible and attainable within the specified time, money and human resources available. State what you expect the project to accomplish.

(4) Benefits or results expected: Identify the outcomes, outputs, results and benefits. Describe how these expected outcomes, outputs, results, or products will be applied and/or made available to any appropriate user groups. Outputs express the effort expended to achieve a particular goal and measures the volume of a program's activity. Outcomes are the results or the benefits that participants of a program receive.

(5) Need for Government financial assistance: Demonstrate the need for Federal financial assistance. List all other sources of funding that are or have been sought for the project.

(6) Participation by persons or groups other than the applicant: Describe how government and non-government entities, will participate in the project, and the nature of their participation.

(7) Project management: Describe how the project will be organized and managed. Include resumes of principal investigators. List all persons directly employed by the applicant who will be involved with the project. If a consultant and/or subcontractor is selected prior to application submission, include the name and qualifications of the consultant and/or subcontractor and the process used for selection. Please also include information about the specific responsibilities of other personnel funded through the proposal, including technical and administrative points of contact as appropriate. Provide curricula vitae or resumes and job descriptions for PI(s) or project managers funded through the proposal.

If any portion of the project will be conducted through consultants, subcontracts and/or sub-awards, you must follow the requirements set out at 2 C.F.R. §§ 200.330 through 200.332, as applicable. If you select a consultant, subcontractor and/or sub-awardee prior to submitting an application, indicate the process that you used for selection and provide a statement of his/her qualifications or background.

(8) Federal, State and local government activities: List any plans or activities (Federal, State, or local government activities) this project would affect and describe the relationship between the proposed project and those plans or activities. Provide a list of all applicable

permits that will be required to perform the proposed work and an indication of the status of any permits needed, or a statement indicating that no permits are necessary.

D. Total Project Costs and Budget Justification

The budget justification narrative should include a detailed breakdown of total project costs by category of cost (i.e., object class) with appropriate narrative justification. Total project costs are the amount of funds required to accomplish what is proposed in the Project Description. Each proposal must include clear and concise budget information, both in the required Federal forms and in the narrative detail of this section. Each application must have a detailed budget narrative and corresponding spreadsheet describing the total project costs. Funding detail should be broken down by sub-project. Proposals should contain a detailed breakdown of personnel hours and costs associated by task/project as well as contractual hours and costs by task/project.

Applications must include OMB standard form 424A, "Budget Information - Non Construction Programs". All instructions should be read before completing the form, and the amounts per category and total amounts indicated on the form should correspond with amounts indicated in the budget narrative and justification.

On a separate sheet or spreadsheet, list itemized costs per category and the corresponding Federal and non-Federal share and direct and indirect cost totals. Describe and justify the requested budget. For the non-Federal share, the itemized costs should be separated into cash and in-kind contributions. If in-kind contributions are included, describe briefly the basis for estimating the value of these contributions. Non-Federal share is not required.

If the applicant currently has an established indirect cost rate with the Federal government, indirect costs, which are sometimes referred to as facilities and administrative (F&A) costs, can be included in the budget. As defined at 2 C.F.R. § 200.65, indirect costs are those costs incurred for common or joint purpose benefitting more than one cost objective, and not readily assignable to the cost objectives specifically benefitted without effort disproportionate to the results achieved. Indirect costs may include costs for basic operational functions, including lights, water, and insurance. If indirect costs are included, the application must include a copy of the current, approved, negotiated indirect cost agreement with the Federal Government. In accordance with 2 C.F.R. § 200.414(f), if an applicant has not previously established an indirect cost rate with a Federal agency, s/he may choose to negotiate a rate with the Department of Commerce or use the de minimis indirect cost rate of 10% of modified total direct costs (MTDC). The negotiation and approval of a rate is subject to the procedures required by NOAA and the Department of Commerce

Standard Terms and Conditions Section B.06. The NOAA contact for indirect or facilities and administrative costs is:

Lamar Revis, Grants Officer

NOAA Grants Management Division

1325 East West Highway

9th Floor

Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

lamar.revis@noaa.gov

NOAA/NMFS will not consider fees, fundraising activities, or travel for activities not directly related to project implementation, travel or salaries for Federal employees, or profit as allowable costs in the proposed budget. The total costs of a project consist of all allowable costs incurred in accomplishing project activities during the project period. A project begins on the effective date of an award agreement between the applicant and the Grants Officer and ends on the date specified in the award. Applicants will not be reimbursed for time expended or costs incurred in developing a project or in preparing an application, or in any discussions or negotiations with the agency prior to the award.

E. Appendices or Supporting Documentation

This section should include the supporting documentation such as: qualifications (i.e., curricula vitae or resumes) of the primary project personnel (PM/PI and any Co- Managers/ Co-Investigators), position descriptions, agreements with key partners, a copy of established indirect cost rate agreement, letters of support received from relevant representatives, partners or communities supporting the project, and letters of cooperation between the Principal Investigator and all named participants in the project, describing and agreeing to the specific activities each participant would perform (e.g., participants/collaborators receiving marine mammal samples/specimens). Applicants requiring scientific research permits must also include evidence of such a permit (i.e., the permit number) or evidence they have submitted a permit application. Additional material, documents and information necessary or useful to the description of the project will help us to understand the project and the priority you seek to address. Letters of support and/or cooperation are strongly recommended.

C. Submission Dates and Times

Applications/proposals must be received and validated by Grants.gov by 5:00 p.m., AST, April 6, 2015. Applications/proposals received after the established deadline will be rejected and returned to the sender without consideration.

D. Intergovernmental Review

Applications submitted by state and local governments are subject to the provisions of Executive Order 12372, "Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs." Any applicant submitting an application for funding is required to complete item 16 on SF-424 regarding clearance by the State Single Point of Contact (SPOC) established as a result of EO 12372. To find out about and comply with a State's process under EO 12372, the names, addresses and phone numbers of participating SPOC's are listed in the Office of Management and Budget's home page at: http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants/spoc.html.

This information will assist applicants in providing either a Yes or No response to Item 16 of the Application Form, SF-424, entitled "Application for Federal Assistance."

E. Funding Restrictions

None

F. Other Submission Requirements

Permits, Pre-approvals, and Clearances: The applicant is required to obtain the necessary permits, approvals and/or clearances that authorize the actions and activities required to carry out the project as proposed. This shall include meeting the requirements of applicable Federal law and all local regulations. To ensure that such permits, approvals, and clearances, where required, are obtained prior to the release of funds to the recipient, specific requirements in the form of Special Award Conditions may be attached to the NOAA award documents.

V. Application Review Information

A. Evaluation Criteria

Technical/Merit reviewers will evaluate applications by assigning scores based on the following standard evaluation criteria, associated questions, and respective weights specified below. Written comments are required to justify provided scores in each section of the review. Applications that best address these criteria and associated questions will be most competitive.

1. Importance and/or relevance and applicability of the proposed project to the program objectives and priorities (30 points). Proposals will be evaluated on clear identification of proposed project objectives and the applicant's ability to link those objectives the objectives and priorities of this program. Reviewers will carefully consider the likelihood of meeting milestones and achieving anticipated results specified in the statement of work.

2. Technical/scientific merit (20 points): This criterion assesses whether the approach is technically sound and/or innovative, if the research methods are appropriate, and whether there are clear project objectives. Proposals should provide a clear identification of objectives, clear definition of the project design, strengths or weakness, and the means to measure and evaluate performance. Successful past performance will be considered during evaluation regarding the applicant's ability to meet their proposed objectives and tasks within the project period.

Are the objectives in the proposal clearly defined and focused? Does the applicant demonstrate that the objectives are realistic and can be reached within the proposed project period? Are the conceptual framework, design, methods, and analyses adequately developed, well-integrated, and appropriate to the aims of the project? Does the applicant acknowledge potential problem areas and consider ways to resolve the issues or implement alternative tactics? Is sufficient detail provided in the proposal about the methods proposed for monitoring and evaluating the success of the project? Are they appropriate?

3. Overall qualifications of the applicant (20 points): This criterion assesses whether the applicant, and team members, possess the necessary education, experience, training, facilities, and administrative resources to accomplish the project. Reviewers will consider previous related experience and qualifications of the project's PM or PI, Co-Manager(s) or Co-Investigator(s) and other personnel, including designated contractors, consultants, and cooperators. Reviewers will also consider past award performance of the applicant(s) and PM/PI. Does the applicant have adequate administrative capability and experience in successfully completing similar projects? Does the applicant provide position descriptions of staff being funded through the proposal? Does the proposal include resumes and/or curricula vitae of the PM/PI or staff funded through the proposal?

4. Project costs (30 points): This criterion evaluates the budget to determine if it is realistic and commensurate with the project needs and time frame. Applicant must clearly differentiate between proposed administrative and projects costs as specified under section

B, Program Priorities. The itemized costs and the overall budget must be justified, clear to the reviewer, cost-effective, and appropriately allocated. Applicant should include the organization's travel policy and rates. The proposed costs and overall budget of the project will be evaluated according to the proposed work. Note project costs including administrative costs must be limited to NMFS species.

Is the budget cost-effective and realistic based on the applicant's stated objectives, time frame, and amount of overall project budget? Is the proposed budget sufficiently detailed, with appropriate budget breakdown and justification of costs by object class?

B. Review and Selection Process

Screening, review, and selection procedures will take place in 3 steps: initial screening, technical/merit panel review, and final selection by the Selecting Official (i.e., the Regional Administrator, NMFS Alaska Region). An initial screening and evaluation of applications will be conducted to ensure that application packages have all required forms and application elements, clearly relate to the 2015 Alaska Pinniped Research Program, and meet all of the eligibility criteria.

NMFS will screen applications to ensure that they were received by the deadline date (see IV.C. Submission Dates and Times); include a SF 424 authenticated by an authorized representative, as well as other required federal forms; were submitted by an eligible applicant; address one of the funding priorities; include a budget, statement of work, and milestones; and identify the principal investigator. If your application does not conform to the requirements listed above, and the deadline for submission has passed, the application will be returned without further consideration.

Applications meeting the requirements of this solicitation will then undergo technical/merit panel review. Each will be reviewed by reviewers that evaluate and discuss the application in a panel setting, followed by an individual scoring using the evaluation criteria provided in section V.A. (Evaluation Criteria) above. Technical/merit reviewers will be individuals with appropriate subject-matter expertise and may be from Federal or state agencies, or other organizations. The merit reviewers' scores will be used to produce a rank order of the proposals. In an effort to ensure that the review and selection process is fair and objective the identity of individual reviewers will remain anonymous, to the extent permitted by law.

After applications have undergone merit review, the Selecting Official will make the final decision regarding which applications will be funded based upon the rankings, funding amount recommendations, and evaluations of the applications.

If the Selecting Official accepts an application for a project not in accordance with the rank given or the recommendation of the reviewer panel, the Selecting Official will consult

with the Federal Program Officer and provide a detailed written explanation of the reasons for the action based on the selection factors below. The authority for approving a grant award for projects rests solely with NOAA.

Not all activities, tasks, objectives or projects submitted under a single proposal may be deemed appropriate for funding; as such, the Selecting Official may recommend alternate activities as appropriate. For an application to be selected for funding the applicant may be required to modify objectives, work plans, budgets, and provide supplemental information required by the agency prior to the award.

We will notify you in writing whether your application is selected or not. Successful applications will be incorporated into the grant/cooperative agreement award documentation (See VI. Award Administration Information, A. Award Notices.

C. Selection Factors

The NMFS Regional Administrator, Alaska Region will be the Selecting Official. The merit review ratings shall provide a rank order to the Selecting Official for final funding recommendations. The Selecting Official will review the rank order, funding recommendations and comments from all reviewers and determine the recipients to be funded and how much funding shall be awarded to each selected recipient. A program officer may first make recommendations to the Selecting Official after applying the selection factors below. The Selecting Official shall award in the rank order unless the proposal is justified to be selected out of rank order based upon one or more of the following factors:

1. Availability of funding

2. Balance/distribution of funds:

(a) geographically,

(b) by type of institutions,

(c) by type of partners,

(d) by research areas, and

(e) by project types.

3. Duplication of other projects funded or considered for funding by NOAA or other Federal agencies.

4. Program priorities and policy factors.

5. Applicant's prior or current award performance (including progress and financial reporting, and ability to meet proposed objectives and tasks within project period in a timely manner).

6. Partnerships and/or Participation of targeted groups.

Key program policy factors (see 4 above) to be considered by the Selecting

Official are:

(1) the time of year the research activities are to be conducted;

(2) The ability of the proposal to meet the applicable requirements;

(3) redundancy of research projects.

Therefore, the highest scoring projects may not necessarily be selected for an award

D. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates

Subject to the availability of funds, the competitive selection process and subsequent notification of applications being considered for funding are expected to be completed four months following the date given in this announcement.

VI. Award Administration Information

A. Award Notices

Successful applicants will receive notification from the NFMS Alaska Region Program Office that the application has been recommended for funding to the NOAA Grants Office. This notification is not an authorization to begin project operations, and is not a guarantee of funding. Official notification of selection, signed by the NOAA Grants Officer, is the authorizing document that allows a project to begin. Notifications will be issued to the Authorizing Official of the project electronically. Unsuccessful applicants will be notified that their proposals were not selected for recommendation. If an application is not selected, NOAA will return the proposal and related documents to the applicant.

Successful applicants may be asked to modify objectives, work plans, or budgets prior to final approval of an award. The exact amount of funds to be awarded, the final scope of activities, the project duration, and specific NOAA cooperative involvement with the activities of each project will be determined in pre-award negotiations among the applicant, the NOAA Grants Office, and NOAA/NMFS program staff. Projects should not be initiated in expectation of federal funding until an official notice of award document is received from the NOAA Grants Officer.

Award documents provided by the Grants Officer may contain special award conditions for activities outlined within the proposal. These special award conditions may also include other compliance requirements for the award as applicable and will be applied on a case-by-case basis. Applicants are strongly encouraged to review award documents carefully before accepting a Federal award so they are fully aware of the relevant Standard Terms and Conditions as well as any Special Award Conditions that have been placed on the award.

To enable the use of a universal identifier and to enhance the quality of information available to the public as required by the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006, to the extent applicable, any proposal awarded in response to this announcement will be required to use the Central Contractor Registration (CCR) and Dun and Bradstreet Universal Numbering System (DUNS number) and be subject to reporting requirements as identified in OMB guidance published at 2 C.F.R. Parts 25, 170 (2010) http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?tpl=/ecfrbrowse/Title02/2cfr25_main_02.tpl, and http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?tpl=/ecfrbrowse/Title02/2cfr170_main_02.tpl.

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

1. The Department of Commerce Pre-Award Notification Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements contained in the Federal Register notice of December 30, 2014 (79 FR 78390) are applicable to this solicitation and may be accessed online at http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2014-12-30/pdf/2014-30297.pdf. Applicants whose proposed projects may have an environmental impact should furnish information requested to assist proposal reviewers in assessing the potential environmental consequences of supporting the project.

2. Omni-Circular

Please note that on December 26, 2013, OMB published final guidance entitled Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements (OMB Uniform Guidance) (https://www.federalregister.gov/articles/2013/12/26/2013-30465/uniform-administrative-requirements-cost-principles-and-audit-requirements-for-federal-awards), which streamlined the language from eight existing OMB circulars, including Cost Principles (OMB Circulars A-21, A-87, A 122) and administrative requirements (OMB Circulars A-102 and A 110), into one consolidated set of guidance applicable to federal assistance awards. In accordance with the Federal Register notice published on December 19, 2014 (79 FR 75871) and the regulation at 2 C.F.R. § 1327.101, the DOC adopted such Guidance on December 26, 2014, which has been codified at 2 C.F.R. Part 200, making it applicable to all new awards and to additional funding to existing awards made after December 26, 2014. The audit requirements of the Guidance also apply to audits of non-Federal entities beginning on or after December 26, 2014. It is important to note that the OMB Uniform Guidance supersedes DOC's uniform administrative requirements set out at

15 C.F.R. parts 14 and 24. Given the foregoing, applicants should familiarize themselves with the OMB Uniform Guidance. Additional information on the substance of and transition to the OMB Uniform Guidance may be found at https://cfo.gov/cofar/.

National Environmental Policy Act

NEPA and the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) implementing regulations (40 CFR parts 1500 through 1508) require that an environmental analysis be completed for all major Federal actions significantly affecting the environment. NEPA applies to the actions of Federal agencies and may include a Federal agency's decision to fund non-Federal projects under grants and cooperative agreements. NMFS must analyze the potential environmental impacts, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), for each project which seeks NMFS funding. Detailed information on NEPA can be found at the following NOAA NEPA website: www.nepa.noaa.gov, including our NOAA Administrative Order 216-6 for NEPA, www.nepa.noaa.gov/NAO216_6.pdf, and the Council on Environmental Quality implementation regulations (40 CFR parts 1500 through 1508, available online at: http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/browse/collectionCfr.action?collectionCode=CFR). Consequently, as part of all project application packages, applicants are required to provide detailed information on the activities to be conducted, locations, sites, species, and habitat to be affected, possible construction activities, and any environmental concerns that may exist (e.g., the use and disposal of hazardous or toxic chemicals, introduction of non-indigenous species, impacts to endangered and threatened species, aquaculture projects, and impacts to coral reef systems). Program applications should, to the best extent, provide what they know about their projects at the time of submitting their grant applications. In addition to providing specific information that will serve as the basis for any required impact analyses, applicants may also be requested to assist NMFS in drafting of an environmental assessment, if NMFS determines an assessment is required. Applicants will also be required to cooperate with NMFS in identifying feasible measures to reduce or avoid any identified adverse environmental impacts of their proposal. The failure to do so shall be grounds for not selecting an application. In some cases if additional information is required after an application is selected, funds can be withheld by the Grants Officer under a special award condition requiring the recipient to submit additional environmental compliance information sufficient to enable NMFS to make an assessment on any impacts that a project may have on the environment.

C. Reporting

All performance and financial reports shall be submitted through the recipient's NOAA Grants Online account in accordance with the Department of Commerce, Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions. Progress on each award is communicated to NOAA in the form of performance progress reports, the requirements of which are outlined in 2 C.F.R. § 200.301.

Recipients will be required to submit the following financial and performance (technical) reports. These reports must be submitted electronically through the Grants Online system.

Financial Status Reports (SF-425) are required to be submitted to the Grants Officer semi-annually, or as outlined in the award conditions. Financial Status Reports must be entered directly into the Grants Online system.

Semi-Annual performance reports will be required to address progress and performance in six-month intervals, beginning from the award start date. Reports are due no later than 30 days following the end of each reporting period. In addition, a comprehensive final report is due 90 days after the award expiration date along with copies of all products that are developed under the award. Copies of all materials (such as but not limited to brochures, posters, videos, DVDs, publications, reports, management plans, workshop proceedings etc.) produced through the award, along with copies of any reports submitted by subcontractors as part of the award, must be submitted within 90 days of the end of the award. All such products should acknowledge the support provided by the NOAA/NMFS Alaska Region, 2015 Alaska Pinniped Research Program.

The format of the semi-annual performance report may vary, but must contain:

1. A brief description of the program/research purpose and/or underlying need for the work. Include enough detail to acquaint the reader with the project specifics without having to reread proposal;

2. Summary of progress and results - State each project objective scheduled for the reporting period. For each project objective, describe each of the tasks planned to complete the objective. Describe activities undertaken to achieve each of the planned tasks. Please provide a separate response for each task. If there were changes to the project objectives or tasks during the reporting period, detail the circumstance and nature of each change. Describe results and/or specific products (e.g., publications, data, technology, web site

updates) prepared during the reporting period. Attach copies of publications or research products completed during the period.

3. Identify any problems or issues - Explain circumstances or problems that prevented completion of any one or more of the project objectives or tasks. Please provide a separate response for each objective or task not completed. Describe what actions will be taken to resolve the above problem(s) for each project objective or task not completed. Please provide a separate response for each objective or task. Explain any significant differences between budgeted and actual expenditures and/or line item transfers.

The format of the final report may vary, but must contain:

1. A brief summary of overall project purpose, key activities and results;

2. A detailed description of the issue/problem that was addressed. Describe specific goals/objectives of the project/program;

3. A detailed description of how work was undertaken to accomplish project objectives i.e., sampling protocol, data collection methods, analytical methods.

4. Describe project results and/or findings, including a discussion of extent to which the goals and objectives were achieved. Specifically detail which objectives were achieved, partially achieved, and which were not achieved. For the objectives partially or not met, describe the circumstances preventing successful completion of the objective;

5. Describe significant modifications made to the original goals/objectives and why the change was necessary;

6. A discussion of results and any relevant conclusions presented in a format that is understandable to a non-technical audience. This should include benefits and/or contributions to management decision-making;

7. A list of entities, firms, or organizations that actually performed the work, and a description of how the work was accomplished;

8. Data from research projects must be submitted in electronic format with appropriate documentation to NMFS as requested;

9. Describe products/publications (journal articles, pamphlets, videos, etc.) prepared during the project period. Provide copy of publication or title pages of grant funded products with sufficient information (author, title, publisher, etc.) to facilitate cataloging or information sharing, as soon as they are available. Describe activities undertaken to disseminate project results/publications/product; and

10. Cite literature references

The Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006 includes a requirement for awardees of applicable Federal grants to report information about first-tier subawards and executive compensation under Federal assistance awards issued in FY 2011 or later. All awardees of applicable grants and cooperative agreements are required to report to the Federal Subaward Reporting System (FSRS) available at www.FSRS.gov on all subawards over $25,000.

VII. Agency Contacts

If you have any questions regarding this solicitation, please contact Jenn Hall- Brown, at the Alaska Regional Office, 709 9th Street, Juneau Alaska 99801; Phone: (907) 586-7273; or Email: jenn.hall-brown@noaa.gov.

VIII. Other Information

In the event that an application contains information or data that you do not want disclosed prior to award for purposes other than the evaluation of the application, you should mark each page containing such information or data with the words "Privileged, Confidential, Commercial, or Financial Information - Limited Use" at the top of the page to assist NOAA in making disclosure determinations. DOC regulations implementing the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) are found at 5 U.S.C 552, which sets forth rules for DOC to make requested materials, information, and records publicly available under FOIA. The contents of funded applications may be subject to requests for release under the FOIA. Based on the information provided by you, the confidentiality of the content of funded applications will be maintained to the maximum extent permitted by law.

Environmental data and information, collected and/or created under NOAA grants/cooperative agreements must be made visible, accessible, and independently understandable to general users, free of charge or at minimal cost, in a timely manner (typically no later than two (2) years after the data are collected or created), except where limited by law, regulation, policy or by security requirements.

1. Unless otherwise noted in this federal funding announcement, a Data/Information Sharing Plan of no more than two pages shall be required as part of the Project Narrative. A typical plan may include the types of environmental data and information to be created during the course of the project; the tentative date by which data will be shared; the standards to be used for data/metadata format and content; policies addressing data stewardship and preservation; procedures for providing access, data, and security; and prior experience in publishing such data. The Data/Information Sharing Plan will be reviewed as part of the NOAA Standard Evaluation Criteria, Item 1 -- Importance and/or Relevance and Applicability of Proposed Project to the Mission Goals.

2. The Data/Information Sharing Plan (and any subsequent revisions or updates) will be made publicly available at time of award and, thereafter, will be posted with the published data.

3. Failing to share environmental data and information in accordance with the submitted Data/Information Sharing Plan may lead to disallowed costs and be considered by NOAA when making future award decisions.