



NMFS Proposes Marine Mammal Permit for Juneau's Downtown Seawalk Extension and Cruise Dock Pile Driving; Comments Due November 12

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NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service proposes an incidental harassment authorization letting the City and Borough of Juneau disturb humpback whales, killer whales, harbor porpoises, Steller sea lions and harbor seals while installing 238 new permanent steel piles and pulling old dock piles to extend the downtown seawalk to the AJ cruise dock on Gastineau Channel, with work planned from April 2027; written comments are due November 12, 2026.

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), part of NOAA, is taking public comments through November 12, 2026 on a proposed incidental harassment authorization (IHA) for the City and Borough of Juneau's Seawalk Extension Project in Juneau, Alaska. The notice was published in the Federal Register on October 13, 2026 (FR Doc. 2026-20789, 91 FR 64890).

An IHA does not approve the construction itself. It is a permit under the Marine Mammal Protection Act that allows a project to disturb ("take" by harassment) small numbers of marine mammals, as long as NMFS finds the effect will be negligible and sets rules to limit it.

The project

- Extend the existing seawalk from the Franklin Dock to the AJ Dock on the eastern shore of Gastineau Channel, giving cruise passengers a continuous walkway to downtown.
- Remove an existing dock, mooring dolphins and unused timber piles, including about 40 at the National Guard dock and moorage float.

- Install 230 new 24-inch steel seawalk piles, 3 catwalk piles and 5 42-inch piles for a new cruise ship mooring dolphin, plus about 160 temporary template piles that go in and come out.
- Methods include vibratory and impact pile driving and down-the-hole drilling into rock.
- Work is scheduled to begin in April 2027 and run on roughly 238 days over 12 months, up to 12 hours a day. NMFS notes funding, permits, equipment and weather could cause delays.

Marine mammals named in the request

The city asked for harassment take of five species: humpback whale, killer whale, harbor porpoise, Steller sea lion and harbor seal. Two of them, Steller sea lions and harbor seals, would also be covered for limited hearing-injury level take (Level A). Neither the city nor NMFS expects any serious injury or death. The Western stock of Steller sea lion is listed as endangered.

Proposed protections

- Clearance and shutdown zones around pile driving, watched by protected species observers. Work must stop if a covered animal enters a shutdown zone.
- Soft start for impact pile driving at the beginning of each day, so animals can move away before full-power strikes.
- Monitoring and reporting to NMFS.

NMFS is also asking for comment on a possible one-time, one-year renewal of the IHA if the work runs long and conditions are met.

How to comment

- Email comments to NMFS's Office of Protected Resources at the address listed in the Federal Register notice, by November 12, 2026. Attachments must be under 25 megabytes.
- The application and supporting documents are posted at [fisheries.noaa.gov](https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov) under incidental take authorizations.
- Contact: Kristy Jacobus, NMFS Office of Protected Resources, (301) 427-8401.
- Comments, including names and addresses, are generally posted publicly.

Source

- Federal Register, October 13, 2026, FR Doc. 2026-20789 (91 FR 64890), NMFS, "Takes of Marine Mammals Incidental to Specified Activities; Taking Marine Mammals Incidental to the City and Borough of Juneau's Seawalk Extension Project, Juneau, Alaska," RTID 0648-XF854.

Notes

- Image: Downtown Juneau, Alaska, and its cruise ship docks on Gastineau Channel, September 2018 (file photo). Photo: Gordon Leggett via Wikimedia Commons (CC BY 4.0).
- Author: Ryan Standley / Record of Sale, LLC / Notice Nearby.
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