

# NOAA Extends Deadline on Underwater Acoustics Document

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Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has extended the public comment period for an acoustic noise study released last month. On December 27 the administration began soliciting comments on a study that examines how acoustic noise affects marine mammals. The comment period was initially supposed to end yesterday, but on Thursday NOAA announced the deadline would be extended until March.

Bree Witteveen is a marine mammal specialist and said the study is basically a review of all the literature and studies done over several years compiled into a single document. She said that document was peer-reviewed by researchers in the marine mammal world who specialize in acoustics.

"And so NOAA is requesting feedback from the public, which they always do when they release a document like this, just to see if there's any other insights or any other areas that they might be more inclined to look into."

Witteveen said the draft includes a list of marine mammals, what type of hearing they have and how they might be affected by different noises, either man-made or naturally occurring. Basically, the document identifies what noise levels are considered harassment to different animals.

Once the public comment period closes, Witteveen said the document will probably be used to draft guidelines or regulations for man-made noises in the marine environment.

"So what will happen is that you will likely need to apply for a permit if you foresee that whatever research or development or construction or anything that might be happening in the marine environment, if that is a potential impact to marine mammals based on these new acoustic guidelines, then you would have to apply for a permit which would then have to be approved by NOAA."

If NOAA does decide to create regulations, Witteveen said they shouldn't have too much of an impact locally.

"I mean a lot of the noise impacts that we're talking about are things like seismic water guns, explosions, things like that, that actually might cause damage to marine mammal hearing."

She said things like vessel noise, outboard motors and different fishing sounds are not likely to be affected by this at all.

"The only time I could see it beginning to affect our community is if the Gulf of Alaska became open to more gas and oil exploration. And that's when you get the larger

noises that are much more impactful &ndash; the air guns and the seismic explosions and things like that.&rdquo;

The public comment period is open until March 13 and we have a link to the NOAA document here .