Performance Work Statement
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)
National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries)
Alaska Region (AKR)
Cook Inlet Beluga Whale Photo Identification Study Support Services

I. Background

The National Marine Fisheries Service's (NOAA Fisheries) Protected Resources Division (PRD) is responsible for implementing marine mammal conservation and recovery programs under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) and the Endangered Species Act (ESA), including programs for Cook Inlet beluga whales (*Delphinapterus leucas*). NOAA Fisheries listed Cook Inlet beluga whale distinct population segment (DPS) as endangered under the ESA in 2008 and designated portions of Cook Inlet as beluga critical habitat in 2011. Despite these efforts, the Cook Inlet beluga whale population is still declining. Although monitoring for abundance estimates and distribution has been previously conducted by aerial surveys, satellite tagging, photo-identification studies, and passive acoustics, more information on life history parameters and habitat use is needed to understand this small beluga whale population better. Previous research studies have confirmed that most beluga whales possess distinct natural marks that persist across years, and these marks can be effectively recorded and identified with digital photography.

NOAA Fisheries has emphasized the importance of recovering this endangered DPS by publishing a Recovery Plan[1] for Cook Inlet beluga whales and identifying Cook Inlet beluga whales as one of the ten species under NOAA Fisheries jurisdiction that are at most risk of extinction by including them as one of the Species in the Spotlight[2]. Information obtained from photo-identification studies can provide critical insight into individual and population characteristics of the Cook Inlet beluga whales and improve NOAA Fisheries' conservation and recovery efforts for this population. NOAA Fisheries monitors and manages human activities, which have the potential to take belugas. Given the precarious status of this population, NOAA Fisheries prefers non-invasive methods for obtaining this information when possible, and photo-identification has improved our understanding of many of these population characteristics to inform management actions or research focus.

This requirement's purpose is to obtain professional, scientific services to use non-invasive photo-identification techniques to help fill data gaps regarding individual and population characteristics of the endangered Cook Inlet beluga whale to provide information to NOAA Fisheries that will aid the agency in the management of Cook Inlet beluga whales. NOAA Fisheries may use the information generated from this requirement to update population models, conduct project effects analyses during ESA section 7 consultations, and inform various recovery actions or scientific analyses.

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[1] For more information about the Recovery Plan go to: https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/resource/document/recovery-plan-cook-inlet-beluga-whale-delphinapterus-leucas

[2] For more information about the Species in the Spotlight go to: https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/topic/endangered-species-conservation/species-in-the-spotlight

NOAA Fisheries PRD also implements a Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program, and is responsible for coordinating responses to stranded or injured marine mammals. The Contractor shall develop and implement a communication protocol to report any observations of, or information received about, stranded or injured marine mammals in Cook Inlet to the NOAA Fisheries Alaska Region Stranding Coordinator(s) as soon as possible. Responses to stranded marine mammals must be authorized by the Project Manager and/or Contracting Officer Representative (COR).

Scope

The Contractor shall provide professional, scientific, and technical services to conduct a non-invasive photo-identification study of the endangered Cook Inlet beluga whale (CIBW) DPS. The primary objective of this requirement is to collect and analyze high-quality digital photographic data to fill critical information gaps regarding individual and population characteristics, including demography, reproductive rates, habitat use, and movement patterns.

Key components of this scope include:

- Field Data Collection: Performing a minimum of 14 boat- and shore-based photo-identification surveys within Cook Inlet, Alaska, during the designated field season.
- Data Integration & Analysis: Incorporating new imagery and select government-provided stranding/historical photos into the existing CIBW Photo-ID Project catalog (2005–2025) using established, compatible methodology.
- Scientific Reporting: Analyzing longitudinal data to produce peer-review quality reports that summarize survival, mortality, and anthropogenic trauma to inform NOAA Fisheries' management, recovery actions, and ESA Section 7 consultations.
- Stranding Communication: Implementing a protocol for the immediate reporting of observed stranded or injured marine mammals to the NOAA Fisheries Alaska Region Stranding Coordinator.

II. Period of Performance

The base period is two years, from September 30, 2026, to September 29, 2028. The first year is for the field season/data collection and the second year is for documentation, data analysis and report production.

III. Place of Performance

Work will be conducted outside of government facilities (i.e. off-site). Work will primarily be conducted in the field via boat and shore-based surveys in Cook Inlet, Alaska, and at the Contractor's office location.

IV. Operational Hours

Operational hours for the work to be performed is at the Contractor's discretion. For meetings and interactions with government personnel, operational hours are 9:00AM to 5:00PM Alaska Time, Monday through Friday, except when needed with regards to stranded marine mammal response.

V. Tasks

Using non-invasive photographic identification methods, collect and analyze photographic data of Cook Inlet beluga whales, and provide NOAA Fisheries with broad information regarding population demography like survival, reproductive characteristics (e.g., birth rates, calving intervals, age at sexual maturity, sex ratio, etc.), habitat use, distribution and movements. The collection of photographs will occur in the vicinity of Cook Inlet, with emphasis on areas where Cook Inlet beluga whales are known or anticipated to be present during the time of image collection. Specific tasks include:

1. Conduct at least 14 photo-id surveys to collect quality identification photos of Cook Inlet beluga whales during the 2026 field season.
2. Incorporate these photographs and their associated data into the existing *CIBW Photo-ID Project* catalog (2005-2025) using techniques that have been developed and used by the *CIBW Photo-ID Project* for the last 21 years.
3. Review select photographs provided by NOAA Fisheries from CIBW strandings or other sources (e.g. extra-limital sightings, historic hunting or tagging photos) or provided by NOAA Fisheries -identified partners during the period of performance, and incorporate any useable photographs and their associated data into the existing *CIBW Photo-ID Project* catalog. The number of photographs to be analyzed will be determined in a meeting between the project PI and the contract COR and Project Manager at the end of each field season.
4. Analyze data from the photo-id surveys and the NOAA Fisheries- and partner-provided photos (and summarize them in one or more reports to be distributed to NOAA Fisheries and the public, analyzing and reporting the data in a manner consistent with reporting from the previously available years of the *CIBW Photo-ID Project* (see *Deliverables* for additional reporting details).
5. Share the results of this study (including the data collected) in accordance with NOAA's Sharing Directive for NOAA Grants, Cooperative Agreements, and Contracts, version 3.0.

VI. Deliverables

1. Post-Award Meeting with NOAA Fisheries AKR

- Contractor shall schedule a meeting (via phone if contractor is not local) with NOAA Fisheries AKR to review the contract, scope of work, and project timeline.
- Due: contact NOAA Fisheries AKR within 5 business days after award to establish an initial meeting date within the following two weeks.

2. Quarterly Progress Reports
    - Progress reports shall include a summary of the work completed that period and summarize work still remaining to be completed. Any identified or potential complications should be included.
    - DUE: at a minimum, following a quarterly schedule, with the first progress report due 90 days after award of contract.

3. Draft Report(s)

    - The draft report(s) shall be of peer-review publication quality and include project information in sufficient detail to allow for use by NOAA Fisheries in management and scientific decisions and actions.
    - The Contractor will coordinate with NOAA Fisheries AKR to stagger the submission of the draft report(s) to allow NOAA Fisheries sufficient time for review and provide comments on the document.
    - The topics covered by the report(s) are outlined below under "Final Report(s)."
    - DUE: To be finalized in post award conference.

4. Final Report(s)
    - NMFS will have 30 days to review and provide comments on draft report(s).
    - The contractor will have 30 days after receiving comments from NOAA Fisheries AKR to submit the final report(s)
    - If multiple separate reports are provided, the contractor will coordinate with NOAA Fisheries AKR to stagger the submission of the draft report(s) to allow NMFS sufficient time for review and provide comments on each document.
    - DUE: To be finalized in post award conference
    - The contractor will produce no less than one report to be distributed to NOAA Fisheries and the public, analyzing and reporting the data collected in a manner consistent with reporting from previous years of the *CIBW Photo-ID Project*. The report(s) will be formatted to be user-friendly for busy managers and the public, with bullet points, photographs, summaries, and maps of relevant results. The contractor and NOAA Fisheries AKR will collaboratively develop lists of items that will be included in the report(s). The number or reports is at the discretion of the contractor and approved by the COR or Project Manager. The report(s) will focus on the following topics:
        1) Spatial and temporal patterns of habitat use by groups and individuals, with emphasis on feeding and reproduction for 2026, and for the composite of all field seasons since 2005;
        2) Survival and mortality of identified individuals in 2026;

3) Reproduction of identified individuals in 2026;
4) Post-research monitoring of biopsies and satellite-tagged whales: sighting histories and photographs of wound healing in 2026;
5) Human interactions: observations of human activities (non-research) during beluga surveys and signs of anthropogenic trauma (e.g., entanglement, puncture, ship strike) in 2026; and
6) Summary of annual photo-id survey effort and group information (e.g., size, location, group composition) in 2026.

Deliverable	Description	Quantity/Media	Completion Due Date
1	Post-Award Meeting	In-person or virtual meeting	October 17, 2026
2	Progress Report	Quarterly written progress reports sent to COR/Technical Lead by email. Periodic check-in meetings, virtual or in-person	Written Report - Quarterly Meetings - at 50% and 75% completion of field season and 50% and 75% completion of draft report.
3	Invoice	Submitted in IPP	Monthly, by the 15th of the following month.
4	Draft Report(s)	Draft written report(s) sent to COR/Technical Lead by email.	TBD at Post-Award Meeting
5	Final Report(s)	Final written report(s) and associated data sent to COR/Technical Lead by email.	30 days after receipt of NOAA Fisheries comments on Draft Report

VII. Performance Requirements Summary

This contract includes a Performance Requirements Summary (PRS). The PRS plays an integral role in the administration of the contract. In addition to any applicable inspection clauses or other related terms and conditions contained in the contract, the PRS shall serve as a primary tool for inspection and acceptance of services as facilitated by the Contracting Officer's Representative (COR). Evaluation of the Contractor's overall performance shall be in accordance with the performance standards set forth in the PRS, and will be conducted by the COR. The PRS

constitutes a material aspect of the contract and will not be changed or otherwise modified without prior written approval of the Contracting Officer.

The PRS establishes key elements of Contractor performance that represent "mission essential" service requirements or "Deliverables", which are identified in the table below in the "Service Output" column. The "Performance Objective" column represents the standard against which Contractor performance will be measured in relation to accomplishment of the corresponding service output. The performance objective or "standard" describes the minimum acceptable level of service by the Contractor for satisfactory performance. The "Acceptable Quality Level (AQL)" column displays the maximum allowable deviation from the performance objective, which, if exceeded, evokes the negative incentive specified in the table below.

Required Services	**Performance Standard**	**Acceptable Quality Level**	**Methods of Surveillance**	**Incentive**
Successful Project Planning	Demonstration NLT two weeks prior to start of field work that all necessary planning steps for obtaining data necessary for project objectives to be met have been completed, per agreed upon study plan and other contract requirements (e.g., all required permits, equipment, and personnel have been obtained; data sharing plan is in place).	95% Compliance required	Quarterly progress report reviews; status update meeting 2-weeks prior to start of field work.	Potential for future work and positive CPARS rating
Successful Field Work	Completion of field work and acquisition of sufficient number of quality photographs of Cook Inlet beluga whales to allow the project objectives to be met, as outlined in the approved study plan, or a mutually agreed upon revision of the study plan developed as a result of unanticipated issues.	80% completion of the approved study plan	Quarterly progress report reviews; periodic inspections (i.e., status update meetings at 50% and 75% completion), and random observations of field activities	Potential for future work and positive CPARS rating
Successful Photo Processing and Data Analysis	Completion of photo processing and data analysis to allow the project objectives to be met, as	Final report(s) satisfies at least 95% of the items	Quarterly progress reports include the status of photo	Potential for future work and positive CPARS rating

Required Services	Performance Standard	Acceptable Quality Level	Methods of Surveillance	Incentive
	outlined in the approved study plan, or a mutually agreed upon revision of the study plan developed as a result of unanticipated issues, and to support successful project reporting (see below)	required for this deliverable	processing and data analysis tasks; periodic inspections (i.e., status update meetings at 50% and 75% completion)	
Successful Project Reporting	High quality final report(s) submitted by deliverable due date which meet the requirements outlined in the contract for information to be included in the reports, and which demonstrate project objectives were met. The report(s) will address the topics identified below: 1. *Spatial and temporal patterns of habitat use by groups and individuals, with emphasis on feeding and reproduction (for each season, and for the composite of all field seasons since 2005);* *2. Survival and mortality of identified individuals;* *3. Reproduction of identified individuals;* *4. Post-research monitoring of biopsies and satellite-tagged whales: sighting histories and photographs of wound healing;*	Final report(s) satisfies at least 95% of the items required for this deliverable	Quarterly progress report reviews; periodic inspections (i.e., status update meetings at 50% and 75% completion)	Potential for future work and positive CPARS rating

Required Services	Performance Standard	Acceptable Quality Level	Methods of Surveillance	Incentive
	5. Human interactions: observations of human activities (non-research) during beluga surveys and signs of anthropogenic trauma (e.g., entanglement, puncture, ship strike); and *6. Summary of annual photo-id survey effort and group information (e.g., size, location, group composition)*			

VIII. Government-Furnished Resources

The contractor is responsible for providing and maintaining all supplies and equipment necessary for completing the contract; no equipment or supplies shall be furnished by the Government.

Services Contractor will work primarily:	☐ On-Site	X Off-Site
Services Contractor requires access to NOAA facilities:	☐ Required	X Not Required
Services Contractor requires a PIV or CAC:	☐ Required	X Not Required
Services Contractor requires a NOAA email address:	☐ Required	X Not Required
Services Contractor requires use of DOC-Owned IT equipment (laptop or desktop computer)	☐ Required	X Not Required
Services Contractor requires non-Government IT equipment to connect to a DOC network:	☐ Required	X Not Required
Services Contractor requires access to non-public DOC/NOAA data:	☐ Required	X Not Required
Services Contractor will be provided on-site office space with incidental Government Property *(desk, chair, phone, and other similar equipment that remains onsite, per FAR 45.000 (5)*	☐ Provided	X Not Provided
For Services Contractors doing laboratory work, the government will provide typical lab supplies and equipment for use:	☐ Provided	X Not Provided

IX. Travel, and Training

a. Training: Contractors are required to complete any NOAA mandated training, as applicable.

b. Travel: Fieldwork to conduct photo surveys is a required part of the purchase order. Travel to the Anchorage area may be accomplished by ground or air transport. Once in the Anchorage area, the contractor will travel by car and boat to survey locations throughout Cook Inlet.

X. Special Requirements and Applicable Standards

a. Research Authorization

Activities with a potential to harass marine mammals require a permit from NOAA Fisheries, including scientific research. Contractor shall have a research permit authorizing any harassment associated with the proposed work prior to start of the field season.

b. Data Sharing

The contractor shall propose and clearly articulate a data sharing plan which adequately meets the needs articulated in this performance work statement and which is consistent with NOAA's Data Sharing Directive for NOAA Grants, Cooperative Agreements, and Contracts, version 3.0[3].

c. Data Compatibility

Subtle changes in an individual whale's marks occur over time, and these gradual changes shall be documented in order to recognize and track an individual from one field season to the next. As such, proposed photo-identification imagery collection and analysis methods must be compatible with methods currently employed by the Cook Inlet Beluga Whale Photo-Identification Project so data can be added to the existing long-term photo-identification catalog.[4]

d. Confidentiality and Data Privacy

This contract may require that services contractors have access to Privacy Information. Services contractors are responsible for maintaining confidentiality of all subjects and materials and may be required to sign and adhere to a Non-disclosure Agreement (NDA).

e. Intellectual Property Rights

All deliverables are the property of the U.S. Government. All documents, analyses, files (digital or other), reports, notes and photos are to be used only by Contractor personnel assigned to this purchase order. Documents, files and other data are to be stored exclusively on Government owned

[3] For details on the NOAA Data Sharing Directive go to: https://nosc.noaa.gov/EDMC/PD.DSP.php
[4] Prior photo-ID project reports are available online at https://www.cookinletbelugas.com/

equipment and at no point should be saved or archived on personal drives or devices. Copies are not to be disseminated to anyone outside of the NMFS or to any other contractor personnel without explicit release from the Government.

XI. Required Knowledge and Experience:

The Principal Investigator shall have a minimum:

- A graduate degree (e.g., M.S., Ph.D) in marine mammalogy, wildlife biology or similar field and demonstrated extensive experience in leading and managing long-term photographic identification studies of beluga whales.
- Demonstrated ability to maintain the resources, technical expertise, and experience, to undertake completion of the task order ability to meet or exceed the requirements set forth in this Performance Work Statement.
- Demonstrated consistent ability to produce high-quality products in a timely manner and the skills, expertise, and experience to meet the needs of NOAA Fisheries.
- Personnel experienced in conducting Cook Inlet beluga photo identification work and proficient in the processes and techniques necessary to successfully produce the deliverables detailed in this Performance Work Statement.

XII. Project Lead:

To be provided at the time of award.

XIII. Contracting Officer Representative:

To be provided at the time of award.