



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
Southwest Region
501 West Ocean Boulevard, Suite 4200
Long Beach, California 90802-4213

JAN 26 2009

Mr. Michael Hansen
Gulf of Catalina Gray Whale Preservation
and Education Foundation
34675 Goldern Lantern
Dana Point, California 92629-2990

Dear Mr. Hansen:

I am writing this letter to acknowledge and encourage your efforts for cetacean conservation in southern California through the Gulf of Catalina Gray Whale Preservation and Education Foundation (Foundation). As you are aware, NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) seeks to maintain populations of cetaceans at their optimum sustainable population levels under authority of the Marine Mammal Protection Act. The waters off California and the eastern tropical Pacific Ocean provide important habitat for migrating and foraging whales and dolphins, and NMFS recognizes the need to maintain and protect this ecosystem. This challenge is the joint responsibility of NMFS' Southwest Fisheries Science Center, whose scientists carry out research to assess the status of cetacean populations, and Southwest Regional Office, whose managers monitor, reduce threats, and provide public information about cetaceans in the region.

Consistent with our stewardship role in protecting and conserving marine trust resources, NMFS applauds efforts that complement the agency's responsibilities and we fully appreciate the Foundation's commitment to create a student education program. The exposure of grade-school students to the local phenomenon of migrating gray whales from the Gulf of Alaska to their nursery grounds in Baja California, Mexico creates a wealth of learning opportunities that not only benefits the local southern California community but also the mission of NMFS. The Foundation's efforts to expand the introduction of young minds to the annual event of migrating gray whales, the frequent occurrence of other cetaceans (e.g., humpback, blue, fin and minke whales and several species of dolphins), and the need to protect their habitat serves to nurture the curiosity and intellect of this next generation of ocean stewards. The participation of local school districts in the Foundation's effort also provides NMFS another avenue for conveying NOAA's educational outreach program.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment. Should you require additional information, the direct line to our Regional Office in Long Beach is (562) 980-4000. Also, please feel free to contact Elizabeth Crapo, our Outreach and Education Coordinator at (562) 980-4085.

Sincerely,

Rodney R. McInnis
Regional Administrator

