

Consent Agenda Briefing for PWSRCAC Board of Directors – May 2026

ACTION ITEM

Sponsor: John Guthrie and the POVTS Committee

Project number and name or topic: 8540 - Analyzing underwater acoustic noise using hydrophones in the vicinity of Hinchinbrook Entrance

1. **Description of agenda item:** The Board is being asked to authorize a research contribution to the University of Alaska Fairbanks in the amount of \$76,818. This research contribution will allow Dr. Hannah Myers and one research staff member to analyze seven years of hydrophone data in the vicinity of Hinchinbrook Entrance that was previously collected for killer whale research. Dr. Myers’ efforts will focus on quantifying underwater noise from Trans Alaska Pipeline System tankers and escort tugs entering and exiting Prince William Sound and analyzing how the noise from the tankers contributes to the overall level of underwater noise in the region.

This research contribution authorization is contingent upon Board approval of the FY2027 budget, which contains the funding for this project, at the May 2026 Board meeting.

2. **Why is this item important to PWSRCAC:** The project will seek to develop a baseline of underwater anthropogenic noise from tankers and escort tugs in the vicinity of Hinchinbrook Entrance. Current research indicates that if loud and omnipresent enough, anthropogenic noise from vessels can have a variety of both acute and chronic harmful effects on nearby marine mammals. However, it is currently unknown how underwater noise from vessels in Prince William Sound compares to busier regions like Puget Sound and the Strait of Georgia that have been the focus of most prior research. Dr. Myers will leverage an existing 7-year record of acoustic recordings made by hydrophone moorings in Zaikof Bay on Montague Island to monitor killer whale vocalizations to quantify the underwater noise from vessels transiting the region. Automatic Identification System (AIS) data showing vessel traffic in the region can be correlated with the acoustic recordings to determine the contribution that noise from tankers and escort tugs makes to the general underwater acoustic environment.

3. **Previous actions taken by the Board on this item:** None.

4. **Summary of policy, issues, support, or opposition:** The [Research Contributions Guidelines](#) as reviewed by the Finance Committee at their September 16, 2022 meeting are being followed for this project.

5. **Committee Recommendation:** The Port Operations and Vessel Traffic System Committee supports this project.

FY2027 Tanker Underwater Noise Research Contribution Authorization 3-9

6. **Relationship to LRP and Budget:** Project 8540 - "Analyzing underwater acoustic noise using hydrophones in the vicinity of Hinchinbrook Entrance" is in the proposed FY2027 budget in an amount of \$80,818. The remaining funds, \$4,000, not earmarked for this research contribution, are to purchase AIS data from the Marine Exchange of Alaska, if necessary. This project is also included in the Board-approved Long Range Plan and had an overall rank of 17 out of 23.

7. **Action Requested of the Board of Directors:** Authorize the Executive Director to provide a research contribution to the University of Alaska Fairbanks in the amount of \$76,818 to conduct project 8540 - "Analyzing underwater acoustic noise using hydrophones in the vicinity of Hinchinbrook Entrance."

Note: This action is contingent upon approval of full funding of this project in the FY2027 budget.

8. **Alternatives:** None recommended.

9. **Attachments:** None.