Prospective Protected Species Observers (PSOs) applying for the first time for evaluation by National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) as required under the Marine Mammal Protection Act or Endangered Species Act should provide the following:

1) Certificate(s) of successful completion of training within the last 18 months. PSOs must successfully complete relevant training, including all required coursework and evidence of passing grade on related training exams (grade of 80 percent or higher). (Note: Detailed course syllabus may be requested.)
2) Education. PSOs must have successfully completed a bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university with a major in one of the natural sciences, including a minimum of 30 semester hours or equivalent in the biological sciences, and at least one undergraduate course in math or statistics. The educational requirements may be waived if the applicant has acquired the relevant skills through alternate experience. Requests for such a waiver must be submitted as a written justification to NMFS. Requests will be granted or denied (with justification) by NMFS within two weeks of receipt of the waiver request. Alternate experience that may be considered in lieu of education includes, but is not limited to:
    a) Secondary education and/or experience comparable to PSO duties;
    b) Previous work experience conducting academic, commercial, or government-sponsored marine mammal or other protected marine species surveys; or
    c) Previous work experience as a PSO for which a record of consistently good performance must be demonstrated (e.g., via letter of recommendation).
3) Previous PSO Experience. Applicants should provide a resume describing any previous PSO experience. Experience in U.S. waters should be highlighted.

    List of items to include in application:
    - Type of survey for which applicants served as a PSO (i.e., airgun survey, high resolution geophysical [HRG] survey; Note: General descriptions such as “Offshore Wind” are not adequate and will not be considered for unconditional approval);
    - Tier of survey for each deployment (see tiering scheme below; Note: Unconditional approval requires a minimum of 90 days per role and by tier);
    - Number of days on duty per deployment, dates of deployment, and location of deployment
    - Experience (list most recent first) acting as either a Visual PSO or Acoustic PSO/Passive Acoustic Monitoring (PAM) operator including number of days in each role (duty days should not be double-counted as both visual and acoustic, and remote PAM operation should be distinguished from at-sea PAM operation);
    - For status upgrades (e.g., “conditional” to “unconditional” status), PSOs should present the same information above for all experience as a PSO on a geophysical survey in U.S. waters within the last 18 months. If not active as a PSO on a geophysical survey within the last 18 months in U.S. waters, status

would be downgraded, and new training must be completed and updated certificate provided; and

- Optional (please include if known): Notation of regulatory document or agency (e.g., incidental harassment authorization [IHA], letter of authorization [LOA], or biological opinion [BiOp]) for which the project requires PSOs, or the project name and date the IHA/LOA/BiOp was issued.

The table below provides an example of a table that an applicant can provide for consideration as a PSO for geophysical surveys:

Project type (describe the survey type)	Geophysical survey Category	Client	Contractor	Vessel	Location	Position (PSO or PAMO)	PAM operation- at sea or remote	Mitigation	Dates	Duration
3D Wide Azimuth seismic	1	Name of company	Name of company	Name of vessel	Gulf of Mexico	*visual PSO*	NA	observed exclusion zone for marine protected species: shutdowns and ramp ups	March 15, 2020 - April 30, 2020	42 days

Approval status ranking requirements:

	Visual PSO Tier 1 (includes Tier 2)	**Visual PSO Tier 3**	**Acoustic PSO/PAM operator**
Conditional	Education/PSO Training	Education/PSO Training	Education/PSO and PAM training
Unconditional	90 days experience deployed with Visual Lead PSO on Tier 1 survey in U.S. waters	90 days experience deployed with Visual Lead PSO on Tier 3 survey in U.S. waters	90 days experience deployed with Acoustic Lead PSO on any geophysical survey

Note: Following 18 months of inactivity as a PSO for surveys in U.S. waters, applicants will revert to conditional status until they provide an updated refresher training certificate. For new applicants whose experience and certification exceed an 18 months lapse, a refresher training will be required before being issued an approval letter.

PSO experience relevant to the NMFS evaluation process:

- Offshore geophysical surveys (e.g., wind or conventional energy) or other activity required to have PSOs under an IHA/LOA or BiOp) including large and small airgun sound sources and high resolution geophysical sound sources.
- Offshore pile driving/construction PSO work required under an IHA/LOA or BiOp and approved by project.

Please note: Experience not related to geophysical surveys should be noted separately and will not count towards consideration of "unconditional" status. However, the experience listed below may be considered in making a decision for an education waiver:

- ❖ Geotechnical surveys
- ❖ Vessel strike avoidance observer
- ❖ UXO surveys (unless using HRG survey equipment at frequencies <180 kHz)
- ❖ Research surveys
- ❖ Site trawling
- ❖ Activities related to offshore wind, other than HRG surveys (e.g., windfarm foundation pile driving)

Survey tier categories for NOAA Fisheries review:

- Tier 1– Large airgun arrays (>1500 cu in or >12 elements) (i.e., deep penetration or high energy surveys); Tier 1 for this process includes sources categorized as Tier 2: Small airgun arrays (≤1500 cu in and ≤12 elements) or single airguns (i.e., shallow penetration or low energy surveys); and zero offset (or other stationary source) VSP surveys, regardless of array size.
- Tier 3– Surveys using electromechanical sources (e.g., sparker, sub-bottom profiler) (i.e., high resolution geophysical surveys).