



**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

National Marine Fisheries Service

P.O. Box 21668

Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668

August 14, 2003

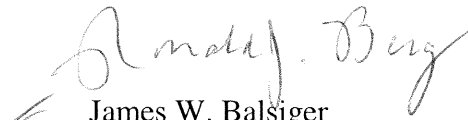
John McPherson
HDR Alaska, Inc.
2525 C Street, Suite 305
Anchorage, AK 99503-2639

Dear Mr. McPherson,

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has reviewed the agency scoping letter and associated documents HDR provided for the South Wasilla Railroad Track Realignment Project Environment Assessment (EA). NMFS was unable to send a staff person to the scoping meeting because of previous staff commitments. The majority of this project will occur in upland areas and not impact any wetlands. The new bridge crossing of Wasilla Creek is the only major concern for NMFS. Wasilla Creek is an important anadromous fish stream. Bridge construction design should be adequate to allow continued fish passage at all stream flows. The existing stream channel should not be modified, and construction activities should be planned to minimize any impacts to the stream. NMFS is unable to provide more specific recommendations until we review construction plans.

The EA for this project should include an Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) Assessment that describes the project, its potential effect on EFH, and a determination by the action agency as to whether and how the project will affect EFH. The EFH Assessment should contain: 1) a project description, 2) an analysis of effect to EFH, 3) proposed conservation measures, and 4) an agency determination. EFH Assessments can be extensive documents on large complex projects or simple 2 - 4 page documents for small projects. Many EFH Assessments are included in the EA document as an appendix. Please contact Larry Peltz (271-1332) if you have any questions or need assistance preparing the EFH Assessment.

Sincerely,


James W. Balsiger
Administrator, Alaska Region

