



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

National Marine Fisheries Service

P.O. Box 21668

Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668

September 18, 2003

David E Schmid
District Ranger
Thorne Bay Ranger District
P.O. Box 19001
Thorne Bay, AK 99919

RE: Sandy Beach Road Improvements EA

Dear Mr. Schmid:

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has reviewed the Sandy Beach Road Improvements Environmental Assessment. The project site is located on Prince of Wales Island in the Thorne Bay Ranger District. The proposed action involves providing a 2-lane paved road from the town of Thorne Bay to Ratz Harbor, and from the town of Eagle Creek to Coffman Cove. A single lane aggregate road will run from Ratz Harbor to Eagle Creek. The proposed action also includes replacement of up to 97 culverts that currently pose a barrier to fish passage.

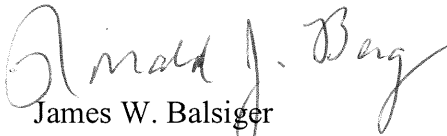
Section 305(b) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act requires Federal agencies to consult with NMFS on all actions that may adversely affect Essential Fish Habitat (EFH). NMFS is required to make conservation recommendations which may include measures to avoid, minimize, mitigate or otherwise offset adverse effects. For the purposes of this EA, EFH includes all segments of streams where salmon reside during any period of the year as well as the marine waters and substrates of Clarence Strait adjacent to the project. These areas provide habitat for a number of anadromous and marine species including, pink, coho, sockeye and chum salmon, arrowtooth flounder, dusky rockfish, shortraker and rough-eye rockfish, skates, sculpins, and pollock.

The EFH Assessment letter provided by the Thorne Bay Ranger District on 15 September 2003 concludes that the project will not adversely impact EFH in the project area. The project is expected to improve access to habitat by anadromous fish through the replacement of culverts. NMFS concurs with this assessment. The best management practices proposed for the project are expected to adequately protect EFH.



Please contact Katharine Miller at (907) 586-7643 if you have any questions or for additional information related to this matter.

Sincerely,


James W. Balsiger
Administrator, Alaska Region

cc: EPA Juneau, Chris Meade
USACOE, Colonel Gallagher
ADEC, ADF&G, ADNR, USFWS, Juneau