



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

*National Marine Fisheries Service  
P.O. Box 21668  
Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668*

September 17, 2003

MEMORANDUM FOR: Robert Fasick, Program Officer for  
Congressionally Identified Construction Projects  
NOAA Office of Finance and Administration

FROM: *For* James. W. Balsiger *Donald J. Berg*  
Administrator, Alaska Region

SUBJECT: Ship Creek Culvert Removal Project

Per your request, attached please find a briefing paper regarding the Ship Creek Access Project. We appreciate your interest and remain willing to assist in your review of this matter. Should you require additional information, please contact Ms. Jeanne Hanson or Lt. Mark J. Boland at 907-271-5006.

Attachment



OVERVIEW OF THE SHIP CREEK CULVERT REMOVAL PROJECT  
ANCHORAGE, ALASKA  
September 17, 2003

BACKGROUND:

The FY 2000 Commerce, Justice, State, Judiciary, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act earmarked \$3.5 million in NOAA construction funds for a Ship Creek Alaska Fisheries Research and Support Center. Subsequent activities by the Municipality of Anchorage (MOA) relating to the Ship Creek basin suggested that the use of the limited basin lands for an office building may not be the most beneficial use of the NOAA Ship Creek funds. The MOA reapplied in late 2001 to use the \$3.5 million grant for a habitat restoration project in the area of Ship Creek Crossing. The Environmental Assessment (EA) for the project favored a bridge alternative to replace a deteriorating culverts system. NOAA's Office of Finance and Administration approved the EA in October 2002.

The NOAA grant supported a project to remove the three culverts and an embankment with an existing road and replace them with a bridge. The embankment consists of three arched culverts under gravel fill that is covered on the sides with large rock riprap. The embankment supports a road and contains two utility lines: a 36" sewer line and a 10" fuel line. The embankment is eroding, the steel culverts have corroded, and the structure is on the verge of collapsing. Catastrophic failure of the culverts and fill across Ship Creek is inevitable. Phase 1 of the project was completed in the winter of 2002-03. This work consisted of burying a multi-pipe inverted sewer siphon under Ship Creek. The Anchorage Water and Wastewater Utility purged the sewer line, but it was not removed from the embankment. Tesoro Petroleum Company's fuel line remains in the embankment and has not yet been purged.

ISSUES:

Ship Creek is designated an anadromous fish stream by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, supporting runs of coho, chum, chinook, and pink salmon. It is one of the most popular urban fishing streams in Alaska. Ship Creek salmon runs also provide seasonal prey for the Cook Inlet stock of beluga whales. Failure of the culvert system would most likely result in the failure of the utility lines running through the embankment and could contaminate Ship Creek. In early July 2003 the Corps of Engineers proposed to authorize phase 2 of the bridge construction work under a nationwide permit. This proposal was inconsistent with the EA insofar as it allowed for the possibility that the culverts and embankment could remain in place for two additional years beyond completion of the bridge. The NOAA grant specified that the fill embankment would be removed concurrently with construction of the bridge.

STATUS:

Apparently the lack of support and cooperation from Tesoro has resulted in delays from the MOA in removing the fill embankments and culverts. The Corps of Engineers' permit decision is currently on hold.

#### NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE (NOAA FISHERIES) POSITION:

In a letter to the Corps of Engineers dated July 24, 2003, NOAA Fisheries recommended that the Corps require MOA to (1) coordinate with Teroso to remove the fuel line and (2) remove the culverts and fill embankment prior to or during bridge construction and not postpone this activity until after the bridge is completed. Removing the fuel line promptly will decrease the risk of a significant fuel spill and associated impacts to species such as salmon and beluga whales. Removing the culverts and fill embankment during construction of the bridge would expedite restoration of natural tidal flow in this lower section of Ship Creek and limit the impact of construction equipment in the intertidal area to a single construction event. Additionally, removing the culverts and fill would eliminate a potential threat to the new bridge structure should the culverts break free. The Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game have taken similar positions.

#### NOAA FISHERIES PROJECT CONTACTS

Jeanne Hanson, (907) 271-5006 or LT Mark Boland, (907) 271-2373