



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

National Marine Fisheries Service

P.O. Box 21668

Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668

November 5, 2003

Carol Goularte, District Ranger
Sitka Ranger District
Tongass National Forest
204 Siginaka Way
Sitka, AK 99835

RE: Finger Mountain Timber Sale EFH

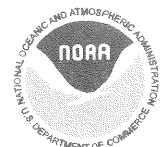
Dear Ms. Goularte:

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has reviewed the Timber Mountain Timber Sale Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) Assessment and draft Record of Decision (ROD). The Finger Mountain Project Area is located in the Tongass National Forest on the southern shore of Tenakee Inlet on Chichagof Island. The project area includes the major watersheds of Inbetween Creek, Saltery Bay, Crab Bay, South Crab Bay, Fog Creek, Broad Creek, and Broad Finger Creek. The proposed actions include harvest of 21.4 million board feet of timber, construction of 9.8 miles of new Forest Service System roads and 10.9 miles of temporary roads, and construction of two log transfer facilities (LTFs): a drive down ramp at the mouth of Inbetween Creek which will be removed upon completion of the timber sale, and a bulkhead for barge use in Crab Bay.

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 Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), EFH includes all segments of streams where salmon reside during any period of the year as well as the marine waters and substrates of Tenakee Inlet adjacent to the project. These areas provide habitat for a number of anadromous and marine species including pink and coho salmon, arrowtooth flounder, dusky rockfish, shorttraker and rough-eye rockfish, skates, sculpins, and pollock.

During EFH consultation, NMFS made the following conservation recommendations:

1) For the Inbetween Bay site, the reef area should be used as the LTF, with the structures removed after completion of the logging. Any small independent log sales should use bundling racks west of the reef as was done previously with log rafts stored in waters deeper than 40 feet when measured from mean lower low water.



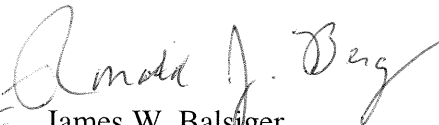
2) For the Crab Bay site, locate the LTF at the site of the previous LTF used during the time period of about 1977-79.

Both of NMFS' recommendations with respect to siting of LTFs have been included in the FEIS. With respect to facilities for small independent log sales, Mr. Greg Killinger, Sitka Ranger District, has informed NMFS that the drive down ramp at Inbetween Creek will be pulled after the primary sale. Small independent sales occurring subsequently will be required to go through a new permitting process prior to placing logs into marine waters.

The FEIS and ROD adequately address NMFS' conservation recommendations. NMFS concurs with the conclusion that the proposed action will affect, but is unlikely to adversely affect, EFH.

Please contact Katharine Miller at (907) 586-7643 if you have any questions regarding this letter.

Sincerely,


For James W. Balsiger
Administrator, Alaska Region

cc: Ron Dunlap, USFS