



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

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

February 10, 2004

Donna Robertson  
MACTEC  
601 East 57<sup>th</sup> Place  
Anchorage, Alaska 99518

Re: Aleknagik Wood River Bridge  
ADOT&PF Project No: STP-0001-(152)53581

Dear Ms. Robertson:

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has reviewed the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the above referenced project. Due to staffing changes and work load priorities we were unable to respond by the January 23, 2004 deadline. However, we wish to provide the following comments in response to the Preliminary Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) Assessment provided in the document. While we regret that we are providing this information late, we hope this information will be useful to the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (ADOT&PF) in the design and permitting phase for the project.

#### Project Description

The proposed project consists of constructing access roads and a bridge to provide a more practical means of transportation between the north and south shores of the City of Aleknagik, which are separated by the waters of Lake Aleknagik and Wood River. The preferred alternative bridge location is over the Wood River approximately one mile east of the community, downstream where the river narrows to approximately 300 feet in width. This crossing site is preferred because it spans one of the narrowest reaches of the river, and the bedrock and soils at the site provide for the best foundation conditions in that region of the river.

#### Alternatives

Two bridge structure types are under consideration. Both types would be 442 feet long. Bridge Type A has three spans and would require two piers with four supporting piles for each pier in the Wood River. Bridge Type B is a steel clear-span bridge that would not require supporting piles in the river. The EA states:

“Adverse impacts to EFH from Bridge Type A would include direct loss of potential spawning habitat from placement of pilings and resultant scour. Bridge Type B, the clear span bridge, would eliminate direct habitat loss and potential scour, and thus would minimize the impacts on fish habitat. Either bridge type would have the same short-term impacts to substrate and water quality because the construction of temporary work bridges would include piers.”

Based on cost estimates, Bridge Type A is ADOT&PF's preferred alternative. Based on



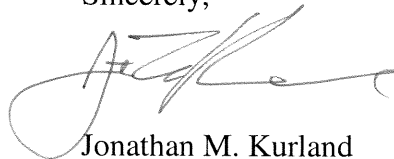
potential impacts to living marine resources including EFH, Bridge Type B is NMFS' preferred alternative.

Essential Fish Habitat

The preliminary EFH assessment and EA state that ADOT&PF has determined that the proposed activity may adversely affect EFH. NMFS agrees with this determination. Several mitigation measures to minimize impacts to EFH are outlined in both documents. However, because final project design is not complete, these measures are very general in nature. We recommend that ADOT&PF continue to coordinate with NMFS as project design information becomes available, so that specific concerns can be addressed prior to the permit stage. For example, timing windows for construction activities should be established in consultation with NMFS and the Alaska Department of Natural Resources's Office of Habitat Management and Permitting to minimize impacts to living marine resources. Also, since the preferred alternative would include pile driving, we have enclosed a summary document titled "Potential Impacts to Fish From Pile Driving." Pile driving and removal activities may have adverse effects to EFH. Steel pile driving activities generate intense underwater sound pressure waves and the removal of old piles has the potential to resuspend sediments that can result in harmful levels of turbidity or release of any contaminated sediment. This summary was prepared by NMFS staff to inform resource agencies and others about the potential impacts of pile driving and possible means of mitigating those impacts.

Should you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Mr. John Olson or Ms. Jeanne Hanson at (907) 271-5006.

Sincerely,



Jonathan M. Kurland  
Assistant Regional Administrator for  
Habitat Conservation

Attachment

cc: USFWS, OHMP, OPMP, EPA, COE, ADOT - Anchorage  
Tim Haugh- FHWA, P.O. Box 21648, Juneau, AK 99802