



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

National Marine Fisheries Service

P.O. Box 21668

Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668

October 20, 2004

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Wildlife Without Borders
Division of International Conservation
4401 North Fairfax Drive, Room 730
Arlington, Virginia 22203-1622

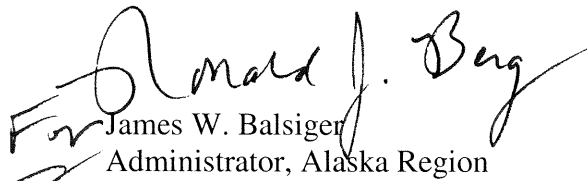
To Whom It May Concern:

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Alaska Region reviewed the proposal entitled "Conservation and Population Diversity of Surfgrasses along the Pacific Coast of North America" submitted to you by the U.S. Geological Survey's Molecular Ecology Laboratory located in Anchorage, Alaska (USGS-MEL). We support this project and recommend that you consider funding it.

Alaskan waters support highly productive living marine resources that yield significant recreational, cultural, and economic benefits to the nation. However, in comparison to the coasts of the contiguous 48 states, Alaska lacks basic data on the ecosystems and processes that support these living marine resources. Seagrasses, including eelgrass and surfgrass, are widely recognized as important habitat elements that support healthy fisheries and coasts. They also are commonly subject to disturbance and removal by coastal development activities. NMFS conducts and supports research on the distribution and ecology of eelgrass in southeast Alaska to increase our understanding of its habitat value for living marine resources. The proposed study, which focuses on the genetic characteristics of surfgrasses, would be a welcome addition to our body of knowledge and complement the work being done on eelgrass. In addition to the benefits of understanding the genetics of surfgrasses, this study would also add to our basic knowledge of surfgrass distributions in southeast Alaska. We are pleased that USGS-MEL has readily agreed to work with us in the selection of surfgrass sampling sites for this study. We see this as an opportunity to leverage the project to our mutual benefit and therefore urge you to support this effort.

Should you have any questions, please contact Linda Shaw at 907-586-7636 or linda.shaw@noaa.gov.

Sincerely,


For James W. Balsiger
Administrator, Alaska Region

cc: Scott Johnson and Pat Harris - NMFS Auke Bay Lab

