



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

National Marine Fisheries Service

P.O. Box 21668

Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668

September 7, 2004

Mark Anderson
Project Environmental Coordinator
Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities
6860 Glacier Highway
Juneau, Alaska 99801-7999

RE: Fast Vehicle Ferry #3 Juneau-Petersburg Route
Project Number 73790/MGS-9500(94)

Dear Mr. Anderson:

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has reviewed the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities' June 2, 2004, request for comments and the July 16, 2004, essential fish habitat (EFH) assessment for the Juneau-Petersburg Fast Ferry project terminal mooring improvements. The proposed action includes:

Auke Bay Ferry Terminal Mooring Improvements:

- The addition of two all-tide dolphins to provide overnight moorage. Each dolphin requires five 24" pilings.
- Modify/add new catwalks as required to access the new dolphins and existing dolphins.
- Adjust the ballast in the bridge support float and modify the apron life beam to prevent interference with the vessel sponson.
- Add utilities (fuel, sewer, water and electric) that are requested by AMHS.

Petersburg Ferry Terminal Mooring Improvements:

- Add a dolphin to provide more secure moorage. The new dolphin would require five pilings.
- Add two new catwalks to access the new dolphin and existing dolphins.
- Raise the fender panels on the three existing dolphins.
- Adjust the ballast in the bridge support float and modify the apron lift beam to prevent interference with vessel sponson.
- Add any utilities (fuel, sewer, water, electric) that are requested by AMHS.

We offer the following comments specific to the EFH provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSFCMA), the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) and the Endangered Species Act (ESA).



Essential Fish Habitat

Section 305(b) of the MSFCMA (16 USC 1855 (b)) requires federal agencies to consult with NMFS when any activity proposed to be permitted, funded, or undertaken by a federal agency may have an adverse effect on designated EFH. The MSFCMA requires NMFS to make conservation recommendations regarding any federal or state agency action that would adversely affect EFH. We reviewed the proposed conservation measures in the EFH Assessment and offer these additional EFH Conservation Recommendations:

1. Pile-driving can disrupt migration and cause physical damage to fish. To the extent possible, drive piles during low tide periods in intertidal and shallow subtidal areas to prevent injuries to fish. If peak sound pressure levels from deepwater pile driving exceed the 180 dB re μ Pa threshold for injury to fish (which is unlikely if small diameter piles are used) implement measures to reduce sound pressure such as: surrounding the pile with an air bubble curtain, using a smaller hammer to reduce the sound pressure, or using a hydraulic hammer if impact driving cannot be avoided.
2. NMFS recommends that reasonable precautions be taken to prevent incidental and accidental discharge of petroleum products and other contaminants. A dock-side emergency oil spill response kit or other appropriate equipment should be made available to allow fast response to small oil spills and accidental discharge of hydrocarbon contaminated bilge waters.

NMFS supports your proposed March 1 - June 15 timing restriction; use of a vibratory hammer to the extent feasible; use of steel pilings; and using Best Management Practices during construction. Upon receipt of these EFH Conservation Recommendations, the MSFCMA requires the Federal Highway Administration to respond to NMFS within 30 days informing us of the agency's decision regarding these recommendations.

Threatened and Endangered Species/ Marine Mammal Protection Act

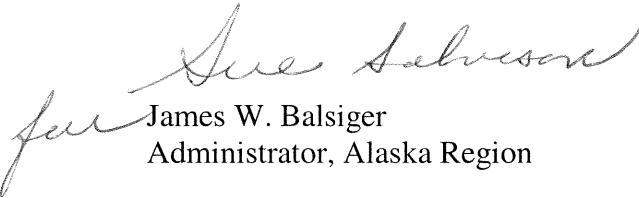
The project is within the range of endangered humpback whales and threatened Steller sea lions, as well as harbor porpoises, harbor seals and killer whales, which are protected under the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

Pile driving introduces high levels of noise into the water column, with the potential to harass or injure marine mammals. Received sound levels in the range of 130-135 decibels have been measured up to one kilometer from a pile driver. Humpback whales, killer whales, Steller sea lions, harbor seals, and harbor porpoises may occur in the project area and could be affected by this work. To reduce the possibility for harassment or injury to marine mammals, NMFS recommends that pile driving not occur if any marine mammals are observed within 200 meters of the platform. The operator should scan the area for the presence of marine mammals. If marine mammals are sighted within 200 meters of the sound source, or are observed to be

disturbed by the activity, pile driving should cease until the animals leave the immediate area.

If you have any questions regarding our comments and conservation recommendations for this project, please contact Cindy Hartmann (586-7585, cindy.hartmann@noaa.gov).

Sincerely,


James W. Balsiger
Administrator, Alaska Region

cc: USFWS, Juneau
EPA, Juneau
ADNR-OHMP, Juneau
ADNR-OPMP, Juneau