



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

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

January 19, 2005

Stephanie Madsen, Chair
North Pacific Fishery Management Council
605 West 4th Avenue, Suite 306
Anchorage, Alaska 99501-2252

Dear Ms. Madsen:

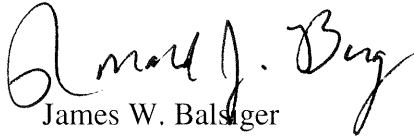
Enclosed please find the Preliminary Final Environmental Impact Statement for Essential Fish Habitat Identification and Conservation in Alaska (EFH EIS). The document evaluates alternatives for three actions: describing and identifying EFH, adopting an approach to identify Habitat Areas of Particular Concern, and minimizing the adverse effects of fishing on EFH.

In preparation for final Council action at the February 2005 meeting, the National Marine Fisheries Service is distributing hard copies of several key sections of the EIS, plus a compact disk with the entire document, including appendices. The hard copy excerpts include the Executive Summary, Section 4.3.7 (which evaluates the consequences of Alternative 5B, including the options recently added by the Council), Section 4.5 (the summary and conclusions from the Environmental Consequences chapter), Appendix B (the revised evaluation of the effects of fishing on EFH), and Appendix L (response to public comments). We are sending this material to all Council members as well as the Advisory Panel and Scientific and Statistical Committee. We are also sending copies to a number of stakeholders who have been actively following this issue. Other interested parties may obtain the documents via the Alaska Region's web site at <http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/>.

At the February Council meeting we will provide an overview of the EFH EIS with an emphasis on changes made since the draft EIS was released last year. We anticipate that the Council will select its preferred alternative for each of the three actions. We will then revise the document accordingly and prepare it for publication.

Any questions regarding the EFH EIS should be directed to Jon Kurland, Assistant Regional Administrator for Habitat Conservation, at 907-586-7638 or jon.kurland@noaa.gov.

Sincerely,

For 
James W. Balsiger
Administrator, Alaska Region

Enclosure

