



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

*National Marine Fisheries Service*

*P.O. Box 21668*

*Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668*

June 29, 2006

Ms. Susan G. Hathaway  
United States Coast Guard  
Assistant Commandant for Engineering and Logistics  
Environmental Management (CG-443)  
2100 2<sup>nd</sup> Street S.W., Room 6109  
Washington, DC 20593

Re: Decommissioning Proposal for U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) Cutters STORIS  
(WMEC-38) and ACUSHNET (WMEC-167)

Dear Ms. Hathaway:

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has reviewed your June 20, 2006, letter regarding alternatives proposed for the referenced project pursuant to an environmental assessment for decommissioning the cutters STORIS and ACUSHNET. The alternatives described are no action, which would keep the vessels in service; the proposed action, which would dispose of the vessels through the General Services Administration; and a third alternative, which would transfer ownership of the vessels through Congressional mandate.

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

#### 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 adversely affect designated Essential Fish Habitat (EFH). The only components of the alternatives proposed that could affect EFH would involve placement of the vessels into the marine or estuarine environments for disposal or as part of an artificial reef program. Disposal conditions would need to be evaluated when specific sites are being considered to determine what effects may occur to EFH. As an example, NMFS might voice concern if the disposed vessels were to be placed into a valuable habitat such as an eelgrass bed. You have addressed any contaminants concerns by indicated that existing regulations require that hazardous materials that may be present on the vessel would be removed prior to any conveyance.



Threatened and Endangered Species/Marine Mammals

The MMPA and the ESA prohibit the injury, harm or harassment of marine mammals, sea turtles and certain species of fish. Your letter requests a list of any Federal endangered or threatened species that may be impacted by the proposed action. NMFS does not foresee that this project would adversely affect threatened or endangered species unless the vessels were disposed of in the immediate area of a threatened or endangered species critical habitat, such as a pinniped haulout or rookery. NMFS is unable to provide such a list at this time, because the proposed action could occur nationwide. NMFS recommends that you should consult with us further if the project may result in disposal of vessels in the marine environment. If you have questions regarding MMPA and ESA recommendations in Alaska, please contact NMFS Protected Resources Division staff at (907) 586-7235. If you have any questions regarding our EFH comments for this project, please contact Linda Shaw at 907-586-7510.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Robert D. Mecum in black ink, with the initials "RDM" and "for D/M" written to the right of the signature.

Robert D. Mecum  
Acting Administrator, Alaska Region

cc: \* Kaja Brix, NMFS PRD, Juneau  
\* Linda Shaw, NMFS, HCD, Juneau

\*email