



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

National Marine Fisheries Service

P.O. Box 21668

Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668

November 21, 2007

Jerry O. Ruehle
Environmental Section
Alaska Department of Transportation
and Public Facilities
P.O. Box 196900
Anchorage, Alaska 99519-6900

RE: Akutan Airport
Draft Environmental Assessment
Project No. 54008

Dear Mr. Ruehle:

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has reviewed the above referenced Environmental Assessment (EA) by the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (ADOT&PF) for the construction of a new airport near Akutan, Alaska. The project includes the construction of a new airport on Akun Island and a ferry (hovercraft) access route to and from Akutan Island. NMFS has coordinated with your staff and contractors over the past several years and offered many alternatives and recommendations to provide better aircraft access to the City of Akutan and minimize effects to living marine resources. NMFS offers the following information under the Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act.

The Draft EA and EFH Assessment incorporate many suggestions developed in early project coordination with NMFS to reduce or minimize effects on EFH. These recommendations include adherence to timing windows, avoidance of sensitive marine vegetated areas, and minimizing in-water work activities. While the Draft EA concludes adverse effects may occur, it provides conservation recommendations to avoid and minimize effects. NMFS concurs with your determinations and proposed conservation measures. Thus, NMFS does not offer any additional EFH Conservation Recommendations.


After reviewing the alternatives and considering effects on living marine resources, NMFS agrees the new airport on Akun Island is best supported by ferry. Your preference is to operate a hovercraft and construct associated infrastructure. The Draft EA provides information on other alternatives and the affected environment. The Draft EA states the hovercraft was chosen to avoid construction of major infrastructure needed to support a fixed-hull ferry (ES 2.0. xiii). All ferry alternatives would, have similar effects and a fixed-hull vessel and associated infrastructure would not have additional adverse effects on living marine resources that could not be overcome by site-specific avoidance, minimization, or mitigation avenues. Many of these issues are



discussed in the EFH Assessment. We would be happy to assist you with the project design if you decide another ferry type and associated infrastructure are more suitable to your needs.

We hope this information is useful in fulfilling your requirements under Section 305(b) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act. Please direct any questions regarding EFH to Mr. Matthew Eagleton at (907) 271-6354.

Sincerely,

for 

James W. Balsiger
Administrator, Alaska Region

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