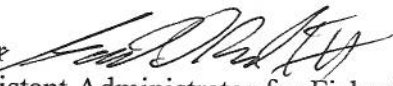




MEMORANDUM FOR: Rodney F. Weiher, Ph.D.
NOAA NEPA Coordinator

FROM: John Oliver 
Acting Assistant Administrator for Fisheries

SUBJECT: Knik Arm Crossing Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS)
Comments - INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

Subject/Issues of Proposed Action: The Federal Highways Administration (Highways) and Knik Army Bridge and Toll Authority (Authority) released the subject FEIS on February 18, 2008. The proposed action is to construct a financially feasible means of crossing Knik Arm, Alaska, to improve access between the Municipality of Anchorage and the Matanuska-Susitna Borough.

Major Points in the Comments: As in NOAA's comment on the Draft EIS, the major comment is continued support for the No Action alternative. The No Action is supported due to adverse effect of the crossing on NOAA trust resources, primarily Cook Inlet beluga whale, anadromous fish and essential fish habitat. Prior NOAA comments on the range of alternatives have been addressed in the FEIS, however, no alternative crossing designs with a potential to reduce impact to NOAA trust resources were found to be practicable by Highways/Authority.

Potential Controversy:

- The No Action alternative does not meet the Highways/Authority purpose and need.
- NMFS is a cooperating agency on the EIS due to the request for Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) Section 101(a)(5) authorization for the preferred alternative.
- Construction involves pile driving and associated in-water sound, as well as permanent fill of tidal wetlands and waters and associated alterations of hydrology and habitat.
- Cook Inlet population of beluga whale is proposed for Endangered Species Act listing.

Other Pertinent Information:

- Deadline for FEIS comment is February 19, 2008.
- Separate ongoing actions related to the Cook Inlet beluga whale include an Environmental Assessment of Port of Anchorage's MMPA Section 101(a)(5) request and a Draft Supplemental EIS for Cook Inlet beluga whale subsistence harvest, released for comment January 11, 2008.

Contact Information:

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