



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

National Marine Fisheries Service

P.O. Box 21668

Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668

September 23, 2003

Pete Griffin
Juneau District Ranger
U.S. Forest Service
8465 Old Dairy Road
Juneau, AK 99801

RE: Greens Creek Tailings Disposal FEIS

Dear Mr. Griffin:

Thank you for meeting with National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) staff last week regarding the Greens Creek Mine. NMFS has reviewed the excerpts from the Greens Creek Tailings Disposal Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) related to marine waters and Essential Fish Habitat (EFH). NMFS has also reviewed the document "Essential Fish Habitat in Hawk Inlet Subsequent to Mining Operations." Because of the short timeframe for review of these items, NMFS is providing only general comments.

Section 305(b) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act requires Federal agencies to consult with NMFS on all actions that may adversely affect Essential Fish Habitat (EFH). NMFS is required to make conservation recommendations which may include measures to avoid, minimize, mitigate or otherwise offset adverse effects. For the purposes of this FEIS, EFH includes all segments of streams where salmon reside during any period of the year as well as the marine waters and substrates of Hawk Inlet. These areas provide habitat for a number of anadromous and marine species including pink salmon, chum salmon, coho salmon, several species of shrimp, halibut, black cod, and king crab.

From review of the FEIS, NMFS has concluded that direct and cumulative effects of the alternatives will adversely impact EFH. NMFS agrees that the information available from the ongoing marine monitoring program is not sufficient to determine whether and to what extent metals contamination in sediment and invertebrates may affect higher trophic level organisms. Implementation of the measures that have been incorporated into the design and construction plans of the alternatives, as well as implementation of the conservation recommendations provided in NMFS' August 18, 2003 letter, will help to minimize the impacts of the alternatives on EFH. These measures will also assist in better characterizing the potential impacts to EFH and managed species so that appropriate minimization and/or mitigation measures can be developed, if necessary. Per our meeting last week, we understand that NMFS' conservation

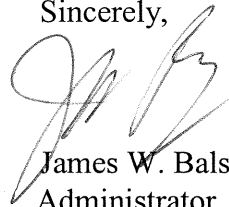


recommendations will be implemented by including an enhanced monitoring program in the mine's General Plan of Operations.

NMFS also has reviewed the document "Essential Fish Habitat in Hawk Inlet Subsequent to Mining Operations." This document contains a detailed investigation of the marine environment and EFH in Hawk Inlet and presents analysis of a large quantity of data. Although the short timeframe for review precludes us from providing specific comments on the document, it appears that the information provided addresses the concerns raised in NMFS' earlier comments regarding incomplete EFH assessment information.

We look forward to future coordination to implement NMFS' conservation recommendations. Please contact Katharine Miller at (907) 586-7643 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



James W. Balsiger
Administrator, Alaska Region

cc: EPA Juneau, Chris Meade
USACOE, Colonel Griffith
ADEC, ADF&G, ADNR, USFWS, Juneau
NOAA; Joyce Wood