



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

National Marine Fisheries Service

P.O. Box 21668

Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668

March 1, 2005

Dennis Sylvia
Zone Planning Officer
U. S. Forest Service
P.O. Box 19001
Thorne Bay, AK 99919-0001

Dear Mr. Sylvia;

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has reviewed the Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) Assessment for the Thorne Bay Marine Access Facility (MAF). The Forest Service is proposing to reconstruct the Thorne Bay MAF by extending the facility 25 feet seaward and building a new 2-level bulkhead wall utilizing concrete blocks. The existing bulkhead wall will be buried in the new wall. The Thorne Bay MAF is listed as a Tier I, Category 5, Section 303(d) water quality limited water body by the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, and therefore the MAF will be operated as a barge-only facility. No logs would be placed directly in the water.

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 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 project, EFH includes the marine waters and substrates of Thorne Bay. These waters provide habitat to several marine species including arrowtooth flounder, Pacific cod, walleye pollock, dusky rockfish, shortraker/rougheye rockfish, yelloweye rockfish, sablefish, sculpin and skates. The nearshore waters are also used by adult and juvenile pink, coho, chum and sockeye salmon.

The Forest Service has concluded that the proposed project may adversely affect EFH. NMFS concurs with this conclusion. The EFH Assessment states that it is unclear whether substrate within the extension footprint will need to be removed down to bedrock, or whether fill can be placed directly over the existing substrate. NMFS offers the following EFH Conservation Recommendations in accordance with Section 305(b)(4)(A) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act:

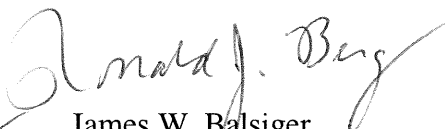
1. All work below the high tide line should be limited to low tidal stages to reduce turbidity.
2. No in-water work should occur from April 1 through June 1 to protect out migrating salmon.
3. If dredging is required, silt curtains or other technology should be used to limit turbidity.

If changes to the project are required that would result in increased impacts to EFH (e.g., blasting or significant dredging), additional consultation with NMFS would be necessary to meet the



requirements of Section 305(b) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. Please contact Katharine Miller at (907) 586-7643 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,


For James W. Balsiger
Administrator, Alaska Region