



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

National Marine Fisheries Service

P.O. Box 21668

Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668

January 12, 2006

David Navecky
Surface Transportation Board
Case Control Unit
1925 K Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20423-0001

Subject: STB Finance Docket No. 34658

Dear Mr. Navecky:

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has reviewed the proposed Northern Rail Extension Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Process. Your agency has requested NMFS comments on potential environmental impacts. The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) requires Federal agencies to consult with NMFS on all actions, or proposed action, authorized, funded, or undertaken by the agency, that may adversely affect essential fish habitat (EFH). EFH for this project is all streams where salmon are present.

The Northern Railroad Extension corridor contains numerous streams that serve as EFH for Chinook, chum and coho salmon. The stream crossings and wetland fills associated with this project have the potential to cause negative impacts to salmon EFH. Thorough planning as well as project design and implementation can help to avoid and minimize negative impacts.

The EIS should contain a detailed EFH Assessment. Examples of EFH Assessments and other guidance for EFH consultations can be found on the NMFS web site:
<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/habitat/habitatprotection/efh/consultation6.htm>.
The EFH Assessment can be an appendix to the EIS, and can contain references to the main body of the EIS to avoid repeating project details and other information. NMFS is available to assist with development of the EFH Assessment. Please contact Larry Peltz in our Anchorage office (907-271-1332) or lawrence.peltz@noaa.gov with any questions.

Sincerely,

Robert D. Mecum
Acting Administrator, Alaska Region

