



MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH

Borough Manager's Office

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October 20, 2006

United States Department of Commerce
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
National Marine Fisheries Service
Attn: Robert D. Mecum
PO Box 21668
Juneau, AK 99802-1668

RE: National Marine Fisheries Service Letter, Juneau File #1514-10a(01), dated September 13, 2006.

Dear Mr. Mecum,

The above referenced letter requested that the Matanuska-Susitna Borough consider deleting the public boat launch from our Corps permitted barge dock expansion project at Port MacKenzie in order to protect beluga whales from potential harassment or harm in Upper Cook Inlet.

Our Port Director, Marc Van Dongen, and I have discussed this issue with the Borough's Port Commission. We are aware that introducing more small, high speed, boats in Upper Cook Inlet could cause harm to the beluga whales that could become listed as "endangered" within the next year. We recognize that the beluga whale situation has changed in Upper Cook Inlet since our permit was approved in 2004. With this in mind, the Port Commission and Matanuska-Susitna Borough both support your request to delete the public boat launch portion of our approved scope of work (SOW) for this project. We have confirmed with the Corps of Engineers that we can continue with the remaining scope to expand our barge dock. We ask the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to consider this voluntary reduction in our approved SOW as mitigation or partial mitigation for a permit, which we plan to submit to the Corps later this year, to add a second trestle to our deep-draft dock at Port MacKenzie.

We support the NMFS in your efforts to conserve important beluga whale habitat, protect the whales, and help restore the Cook Inlet beluga whale population. The NMFS can be proud of the efforts of Brad Smith, from your Anchorage office, to protect beluga whales while supporting responsible marine development.

Sincerely,

John Duffy
Borough Manager

JD/sjs