



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

National Marine Fisheries Service
P.O. Box 21668
Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668

September 13, 2006

Marc Van Dongen
Port Director, Port MacKenzie
350 East Dahlia Avenue
Palmer, AK 99645

Dear Mr. Van Dongen:

We recently met with you and other interested State and Federal agencies regarding the proposed Knik Arm ferry project. During that meeting we discussed the facilities planned for Port MacKenzie and several environmental considerations, notably the Cook Inlet beluga whale. National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has been actively involved in the conservation and management of this depleted stock of marine mammals, and is currently evaluating the extinction risk for this stock for possible listing under the Endangered Species Act of 1973. Research by NMFS and others has identified Knik Arm to be a very important habitat site for these whales; particularly the upper reaches of the Arm in which the whales feed along the shallow mudflats off of Eagle River, and near Eklutna. Beluga whales move within the Arm during each tidal cycle, and often leave Knik Arm to access other areas of the upper inlet. Because of the importance of Knik Arm, the intensity of present and future development here, and the need to conserve this important habitat (especially the relatively pristine areas north of Cairn Point), we feel that mitigative measures which are protective of beluga whales are an instrumental feature to project planning here.

During our conversations, we discussed our concerns for the inclusion of a public boat launch at the Port MacKenzie facility. The presence of small boat traffic in Knik Arm, and especially north of Cairn Point, would be contrary to our goals of conserving this habitat and providing the beluga whales from unrestricted access to feeding areas without potential harassment by vessel traffic. Therefore we requested that you consider deleting the launch from the facility plan. We would like to formalize that request by this letter. Through a recent telephone conversation between yourself and Mr. Brad Smith of our staff, you stated the Port would be willing to delete this scope of work from your project providing the Corps allows you to continue with the remaining scope.

We appreciate your attention to this matter and your efforts to construct and operate the Port in recognition of the conservation needs of the Cook Inlet beluga. We request that you contact the Corps of Engineers to modify the present permit to reflect this change under their authorization (POA-1979-0412-Y, Knik Arm 51, dated 22 October 2004).



We appreciate your attention in this matter. Please refer any questions to Brad Smith in our Anchorage office at (907) 271-3023.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Robert D. Mecum".

Robert D. Mecum
Acting Administrator, Alaska Region

cc: Kaja Brix, PRD Juneau
Records, Juneau File # 1514-10a(01)