



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
PROGRAM PLANNING AND INTEGRATION
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

FEB 19 2008

Betty Fauber
Administrative Director
KABATA
550 West 7th. Avenue, Suite 1850
Anchorage, Alaska 99501

Dear Ms. Fauber:

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has reviewed the 2007 Knik Arm Crossing Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) / Final Section 4(f) Evaluation. As a cooperating agency under 40 CFR Part 1501, we have focused much of our input and analysis on the effects of bridge construction and operation on Cook Inlet beluga whales, a species which is currently depleted under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) and proposed for listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), and on anadromous fish. We continue to have very serious concerns about the environmental consequences of the project, especially for beluga whales. We provide these comments on the FEIS for consideration as part of the Federal Highway Administration's decision-making process.

NOAA's concerns and issues were presented in detail in our November 17, 2006 response letter to the Draft Knik Arm Crossing Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). In response to those comments, the FEIS presents additional analysis of bridge crossing design alternatives, such as alternate transportation modes and floating and suspension bridge designs. The FEIS similarly carries through the 14,000-foot bridge length for comparative purposes, although noting that this alternative does not meet the stated purpose and need. The FEIS concludes that only the 8,200-foot bridge length meets the purpose and need of the proposed action. The environmental consequences of that alternative cause us to continue to support the No Action Alternative as the best option for promoting the recovery of Cook Inlet belugas and sustaining upper Cook Inlet salmon runs.

Summarizing, the FEIS responds to our previous comments through provision of additional analyses and clear statements regarding adverse effects. However, these additional analyses have not removed NOAA's concerns, and our position on this project in regard to beluga whales, Essential Fish Habitat, and our marine and freshwater trust resources has not changed.

Sincerely,

Rodney F. Weiher, Ph.D.
NOAA NEPA Coordinator

