



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

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

October 21, 2002

Steven H. Heppner
Regional Fire Program Manager
United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Indian Affairs, Alaska Region
P.O. Box 25520
Juneau, Alaska 99802

RE: Environmental Assessment (EA) for Native Allotment Fire
Management Plan

Dear Mr. Heppner,

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has reviewed your request for essential fish habitat (EFH) consultation regarding the Native Allotment Fire Management Plan (FMP). The FMP would apply to Native trust land throughout Alaska, including regions in the southeast, southcentral, interior, southwest, western coastal, arctic slope, Bering Sea islands, and the Alaska Peninsula-Aleutian Islands. Many of these areas include habitats designated as EFH for Federally managed species of fish such as salmon, groundfish, crab, and scallop species. EFH for these species could potentially be affected by the various management actions described in the FMP, which include wildland fire suppression, burned area rehabilitation, vegetation and fuels management, and prescribed fires. Collectively, these activities could include burning, introduction of non-native plant species, and the use of mechanical and chemical treatments in riparian zones and wetlands adjacent to anadromous fish streams, estuarine or coastal habitats.

The impacts of these actions to EFH will need to be addressed in an EFH Assessment (which may be included in the EA) as required by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSFCMA) implementing regulations (50 CFR 600.920, 67 FR 2380). The EA should include an assessment of the impacts of the proposed action on EFH in a chapter or section titled "Essential Fish Habitat". The EFH Assessment should include 1) a description of the action; 2) an analysis of the potential adverse effects of the action on EFH and the managed species;



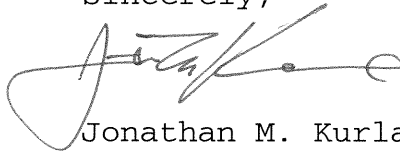
3) The Bureau of Indian Affairs' conclusions regarding the effects of the action on EFH and 4) proposed mitigation, if applicable.

Upon receipt of the EFH Assessment, NMFS will provide you with EFH conservation recommendations, as appropriate, if we believe the project would adversely affect EFH. Upon receipt of NMFS EFH Conservation Recommendations, the MSFCMA requires you to respond in writing to NMFS within 30 days.

To assist you in developing an EFH Assessment, please visit our EFH GIS interactive website located at <http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/maps/>.

Thank you for your continued coordination on this project. If you have any questions please contact Linda Shaw at (907) 586-7510.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jonathan M. Kurland', with a large, stylized initial 'J' and a horizontal line extending to the right.

Jonathan M. Kurland
Assistant Regional
Administrator
for Habitat Conservation

cc: EPA Anchorage (Mark Jen)
ADEC, AADGC, ADNR, USFWS Juneau
ADF&G, Juneau