



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

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

October 22, 2002

Colonel Steven T. Perrenot
District Engineer, Alaska District
Corps of Engineers
P.O. Box 898
Anchorage, AK 99506-0898

RE: West Creek 1
4-2000-0824

Attn: Mr. John Klutz

Dear Colonel Perrenot:

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has reviewed the proposal by the City of Skagway to stabilize the eroded banks of West Creek near Dyea, Alaska following a natural catastrophic flood that scoured the original creek bed and destroyed fish habitat.

The proposed project would require constructing up to 2,500 linear feet of bank stabilization, bridge abutment protection, and/or a new dike system along the new bank configuration of West Creek. Work would include 1) excavation of up to 70,000 cubic yards (cy) of earthen materials from within the newly defined banks of West Creek; 2) discharge of up to 30,000 cy of rip-rap sized materials; 3) discharge of up to 20,000 cy of mid-sized stone; and 4) discharge of up to 20,000 cy of gravel into an area of about 5 acres. Approximately 4,450 cy of these materials will be discharged into waters of the United States below the ordinary high water mark. Much of the dike construction work has been completed and the applicant is seeking a permit for both the completed work and for future bank stabilization work to prevent future breaching or erosion of the bank upstream of the existing dike construction.

West Creek is an anadromous accessible tributary to Taiya River and provided spawning and rearing habitat for coho salmon (*Onchorhynchus kisutch*) prior to the flood event. West Creek is identified as Stream #115-34-10230-2009 in the Alaska Anadromous Waters Catalog. The original creek banks were vegetated and provided cover and nutrients to this section of West Creek. Despite the damage caused by flooding, this stream is considered Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation Management Act (MSFCMA).



NMFS is required to make conservation recommendations to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) regarding permit issuance if we believe the project would adversely affect EFH.

NMFS believes that the partially completed and proposed future bank stabilization work on West Creek would adversely affect EFH if constructed as designed. Constricting the stream channel between narrow rip-rapped banks will not recreate the spawning and rearing habitat that existed prior to flooding and will prevent the natural formation of habitat that over time would restore these functions. As our EFH Conservation Recommendation, NMFS suggests incorporating bioengineered streambank stabilization and streambank vegetation into the project.

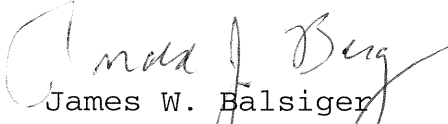
Specific techniques have been developed by the Alaska Departments of Fish and Game and Natural Resources to ensure that fish habitat is restored and streambanks are stabilized. Information on these restoration techniques is available from the ADF&G/ADNR Streambank Revegetation and Protection Manual - A Guide for Alaska, prepared by Gay Muhlberg, Habitat and Restoration Division, ADFG (gay_muhlberg@fishgame.state.ak.us); and Nancy Moore, Plant Materials Center, ADNR (nancy_moore@dnr.state.ak.us) and available online at <http://www.state.ak.us/adfg/habitat/geninfo/webpage/techniques.htm>. These techniques have been developed and tested in Alaskan settings similar to West Creek and are cost-effective solutions for situations requiring both streambank stabilization and enhancement of anadromous fish habitat.

NMFS offers to assist the Corps and/or the applicant in determining site-specific techniques that can be implemented at West Creek and in locating funding sources to assist with the costs of restoration.

Under Section 305(b) of the MSFCMA the Corps is required to respond in writing within 30 days to NMFS' EFH Conservation Recommendations. If the Corps does not make a decision within 30 days, the Corps should notify us in writing and indicate when a full response will be provided. We appreciate the opportunity to comment on this project and look forward to working with the Corps and/or the applicant to develop an appropriate habitat restoration design for this site.

Please contact Sue Walker of my staff if you have further questions or concerns (907-586-7646).

Sincerely,


James W. Balsiger
For Administrator, Alaska Region

cc: ADEC, AADGC, ADNR, ADF&G, USFWS Juneau