**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**
**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**
*National Marine Fisheries Service*
*P.O. Box 21668*
*Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668*

November 14, 2003

Ms. Lizette Boyer
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Alaska District
ATTN: CENPA-EN-CW-ER (Boyer)
P.O. Box 6898
Elmendorf AFB, Alaska AK 99506-6898

RE: Wrangell Harbor Quarry Environmental Assessment, Wrangell Alaska
Public Notice ER 04-01

Dear Ms. Boyer:

Thank you for soliciting comment by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) on the referenced project. The purpose of the project is to develop a quarry site at Cemetary Point for construction of Heritage Harbor in Wrangell, Alaska. The project includes expansion of the Wrangell Airport quarry with construction of a barge loading facility at the quarry site. An environmental assessment (EA) will be prepared, and will include the Pat's Creek quarry and log transfer facility (LTF), also associated with this project. NMFS provided comment on the Pat's Creek quarry and LTF in August, 2003.

**Essential Fish Habitat:**

The EA should include an assessment of the impacts of the proposed action to essential fish habitat (EFH), pursuant to the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, in a chapter or section titled "EFH". 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 managed species; 3) the ACOE's conclusions regarding effects on EFH; and, 4) a discussion of proposed mitigation, if applicable. Once we receive an EFH assessment for this project, NMFS must provide EFH conservation recommendations if the project would adversely affect EFH. Wherever possible, NMFS should have at least 60 days notice prior to a final decision on an action to develop conservation recommendations, or at least 90 days if the action would result in a substantial adverse impact to EFH.

**EFH Assessment Information:**

We have identified EFH for the quarry and barge loading facility as follows: walleye pollock eggs, juveniles and adults; skates adults and late juveniles, sculpin adults and late juveniles; sablefish adults and late juveniles; Pacific ocean perch adults and late juveniles, shortraker and rougheye rockfish adults and late juveniles; dusky rockfish adults and late juveniles; Pacific cod adults and late juveniles; arrowtooth flounder adults and late juveniles and all five species of

Pacific salmon (chinook, coho, chum, sockeye and pink.) Further information on EFH species and their habitat requirements may be obtained from our EFH ArcIMS interactive website located at www.fakr.noaa.gov/maps, and navigating to "Essential Fish Habitat with Queriable Database."

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game anadromous fish stream catalog does not identify any cataloged anadromous fish streams in the immediate vicinity of the project site, (USGS Quad Petersburg, B-2). Anadromous fish streams are found south of the project site, including Pat's Creek. NOAA's oil spill sensitivity maps (RPI, 1992) indicate that the general area is important for Tanner crab, Dungeness crab, shrimp, and king crab.

The no in-water work window established for the 1999 environmental review for Pat's Creek LTF should be retained for work associated with construction of the barge loading facility, including construction of the rock dike, dolphin pile driving and removal, and sheet-pile placement. This work window will protect outmigrating juvenile salmonids from streams south of the project site (such as Pat's Creek) from sound disturbance, turbidity and toxic materials that may be stirred up by construction.

The sediment and erosion control and oil spill prevention and response plans discussed at the meeting for the Pat's Creek quarry and LTF, if properly designed and implemented specifically for this project, should be adequate to protect adjacent marine and anadromous waters from adverse effects to EFH. The plans should be outlined in your EFH assessment, including provisions to obtain native seed mixes, as discussed at the scoping meeting.

**Endangered Species:**

Threatened Steller sea lions (*Eumetopis jubatus)* and endangered humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) could occur in the project area near the barge loading facility. In the EA, the Corps should consider the potential of the project to adversely affect these species pursuant to Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act. Adverse effects to listed species include contamination from oil spills and acoustical disturbance to humpback whales from pile driving. Richardson et al. (1995) estimated that pile driving may generate noise in the range of 130-135 decibels for up to several kilometers. Humpback whales may react to noises above 115-129 decibels within 200 meters of a sound source (Zoidis, pers. comm.). Steller sea lions are unlikely to be adversely affected by pile driving because they have higher thresholds for noise disturbance than whales (Richardson et al., 1995). NMFS recommends the following procedure to avoid acoustical harassment of humpback whales.

> "Pile driving is authorized only if no humpback whales are present within 200 meters of the sound source. An observer, able to identify humpback whales, must scan the area for the presence of humpback whales. If whales are sighted within 200 meters of the sound source, or are observed to be disturbed by the activity, pile driving must cease until the whales leave the immediate area. A report of monitoring results should be supplied to NMFS following completion of pile driving operations."

Several other projects in southeast Alaska have successfully implemented similar humpback whale observer monitoring programs. Copies of reports for two of these projects have already been provided by NMFS during scoping for the Pat's Creek quarry and LTF. If you need additional copies, please inform us. Encountering a humpback whale while pile driving for this project is possible, but unlikely, because the area is not recognized as a major humpback whale concentration area. Provided that you implement the measures described above, the project is unlikely to adversely affect listed species under our jurisdiction.

Please contact Linda Shaw at (907) 586-7510 if you have any questions regarding these comments.

Sincerely,

For James W. Balsiger
Administrator, Alaska Region

cc: ADEC, AADGC, ADNR, USFWS, Juneau
ADNR, Petersburg

## LITERATURE CITED

Richardson, W.J., C.R. Greene, C.I. Malme, and D.H. Thomson. 1995. Marine Mammals and Noise. San Diego, CA Academic Press. 576pp.

Reserarch Planning, Inc. (RPI). 1992. Sensitivity of Coastal Environments and Wildlife to Spilled Oil, Southeast Alaska, Biological Resources (Volume 2). Prepared for Hazardous Materials Response and Assessment Division, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Seattle, WA by RPI, P.O. Box 328, Columbia, SC, 39202.