



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

National Marine Fisheries Service

P.O. Box 21668

Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668

October 22, 2003

Randall H. Hagenstein
Director of Conservation
The Nature Conservancy
421 West First Avenue, Suite 200
Anchorage, Alaska 99501

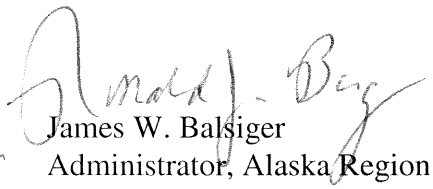
Dear Mr. Hagenstein:

Thank you for visiting my office last week with Rob Bosworth to discuss The Nature Conservancy's initiative to develop an Alaska coastal and intertidal map database. As you know, to help promote sustainable fisheries and manage protected species such as marine mammals, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) maintains an active habitat conservation program. Our Habitat Conservation Division works with the North Pacific Fishery Management Council to identify important habitats for federally managed fish species and develop management measures to minimize the effects of fishing on those habitats. We also review actions proposed by other federal and state agencies that may impact living marine resources and their habitats, and we recommend measures to avoid, minimize, or offset adverse effects. All of these efforts depend upon having reliable information to characterize marine and coastal habitats.

In Alaska, the extensive coastline poses a challenge for coastal and intertidal mapping. NOAA's National Ocean Service conducts hydrographic surveys for nautical charts, and NOAA has contributed to pilot mapping efforts to assist with oil spill response planning, but unfortunately we do not have the resources to conduct comprehensive mapping of coastal habitats. Nevertheless, NOAA Fisheries staff have repeatedly noted that coastal mapping would enhance our ability to provide sound technical expertise to help encourage development practices that minimize adverse effects on the habitats that support living marine resources and commercial and recreational fisheries.

Good luck with your efforts on this project, and please let us know if we can provide technical assistance.

Sincerely,

For

James W. Balsiger
Administrator, Alaska Region

