



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

National Marine Fisheries Service

P.O. Box 21668

Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668

October 29, 2003

Mark Boatwright
United States Department of Interior
Bureau of Indian Affairs
Alaska Region
P.O. Box 25520
Juneau, Alaska 99802

Dear Mr. Boatwright,

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has reviewed the information the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) provided for a proposed transportation improvement project in the community of Nenana, Alaska. The proposed project is funded by the Indian Reservation Roads program. Your letter stated that BIA is mandated to make sure this project meets the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and requests comments on resource issues important to NMFS. We offer the following comments specific to the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act)

Project Description

The proposed project will improve just over one mile of existing community roads and create roughly 1/2 mile of new road. Additionally, erosion control structures are needed to prevent washouts of the proposed new road. The project includes installation of "stream barbs." A stream barb is a stone jetty extending from shore out into the river at an upstream angle to halt river erosion.

Threatened and Endangered Species

Section 7(a)(2) of the ESA directs interagency cooperation "to insure that any action authorized, funded, or carried out by such agency is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any endangered species or threatened species" or result in the destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat. NMFS Alaska Region is responsible for the administration of the ESA as it applies to certain cetaceans, pinnipeds, and marine fish. These include several species of whales, Pacific salmon and Steller sea lions.

Due to the inland location of your project, endangered marine mammals will not occur in the vicinity of the proposed project, and critical habitat for the above listed species would not be affected.



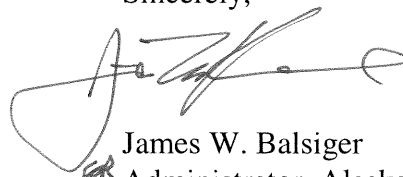
Essential Fish Habitat (EFH)

The proposed stream barbs may impact salmon EFH in the Tanana River. This potential impact should be addressed in the NEPA documentation for this project. Under Section 305(b)(2) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, Federal agencies are required to consult with the Secretary of Commerce for any action that may adversely affect EFH. The trigger for an EFH consultation is a Federal action agency's determination that the action may adversely affect EFH. Federal agencies must prepare an EFH Assessment for any action that may adversely affect EFH. EFH Assessment may be a separate document or clearly referenced in a support document, such as an environmental assessment (EA) or an environmental impact statement (EIS) for the project. An EFH Assessment is outlined in 50 CFR Part 600.920 (e) and includes the mandatory contents: (i) a description of the proposed action, (ii) an analysis of the effects on EFH, (iii) the agency's conclusions regarding the effects of the action on EFH, and (iv) proposed mitigation, if applicable.

Once the assessment is received by NMFS, we will review it and offer conservation recommendations, if any. We have established an EFH area on our Internet site <http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/habitat/efh.htm>, which includes the EFH Environmental Assessment, EFH Habitat Assessment Reports, EFH data sets, EFH maps and an EFH search for species by latitude/longitude tool. We continue to expand this site and hope the EFH information will assist your review. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game Anadromous Waters Catalog and Atlas lists the Tanana River as an anadromous stream. The Tanana River provides EFH for chinook, coho and chum salmon.

NMFS looks forward to working with the BIA to minimize the impact of this project on salmon EFH. Please contact Larry Peltz (271-1332) if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James W. Balsiger', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

James W. Balsiger
Administrator, Alaska Region