



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

National Marine Fisheries Service

P.O. Box 21668

Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668

February 20, 2004

Kris Balliet
Alaska Region Director
The Ocean Conservancy
425 G Street, Suite 400
Anchorage, Alaska 99501

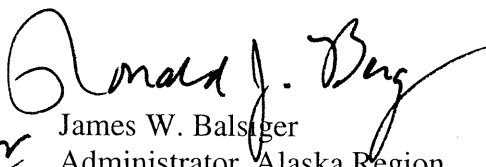

Dear Ms. Balliet:

Thank you for your recent letter to Kaja Brix requesting feedback on your proposal to the North Pacific Fishery Management Council to establish a Habitat Area of Particular Concern (HAPC) for Zhemchung and Pribilof Canyons in the Bering Sea. The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is assisting the Council in the review of all 23 HAPC proposals that were submitted to the Council for consideration. Our staff will participate in the March 8-9, 2004 meeting of the Council's Plan Teams to evaluate the technical merits of the proposals, and we are conducting separate evaluations of socioeconomic issues and enforcement considerations. Based on these initial reviews, the Council will determine which HAPC alternatives to analyze in the forthcoming Environmental Assessment.

Your proposal for Zhemchung and Pribilof Canyons envisions closing these areas to all forms of fishing, as well as oil and gas development. Please remember that under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, NMFS and the Council can only regulate fishing. Any management of other activities, such as oil and gas development, would need to be initiated by other agencies with appropriate jurisdiction.

We look forward to working with you and other interested parties to pursue the identification and management of HAPCs in the waters off Alaska. For further coordination on this issue, please contact Jon Kurland, Assistant Regional Administrator for Habitat Conservation, at 907-586-7638.

Sincerely,


For  James W. Balsiger
Administrator, Alaska Region

cc: North Pacific Fishery Management Council

