



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

National Marine Fisheries Service

P.O. Box 21668

Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668

January 29, 2004

Theresa Svancara
Project Environmental Coordinator
Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities
6860 Glacier Highway
Juneau, Alaska 99801-7999

Re: Skagway – Dyea Road MP 4.2 to 8.1
Safety Improvements,
State Project No. 68576,
Federal Project Number HHH-0997(7)

Dear Ms. Svancara:

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has reviewed your proposal to construct safety improvements between mileposts 4.2 and 8.1 of the Dyea Road near Skagway. Safety improvements are needed because this section of road has a high rate of serious accidents. The proposed safety improvements include roadway and ditch widening, addition of guardrails, and site distance improvements at seven locations. Work would include blasting and filling a total of about 0.5 acres in intertidal areas of Taiya Inlet including Nahku Bay and the Taiya River.

The following three sensitive areas would be impacted from fills or incidental rock fall as a result of blasting:

1. Milepost 5.8 near the head of Nahku Bay on the east shore, where the road would be widened toward the intertidal area to avoid cutting into a steep, unstable hillside. Approximately 700 yd³ of riprap and 3500 yd³ of shot rock would cover 0.2 acres of rocky, sandy beach.
2. Mileposts 7.3-7.7 near the mouth of the Taiya River would receive incidental rock from blasting the hillside to widen the road. Approximately 500 yd³ of rock would likely cover .01 acre of rocky shore.
3. Milepost 8.1 an overhanging rock face would be blasted to widen the road, incidental rock would fall into the Taiya River. In addition to the small amount of incidental rock fall, an estimated 900 yd³ of riprap and 5500 yd³ of shotrock would cover approximately 0.2 acres of shoreline habitat. The existing shoreline at this location is primarily riprap.

The Taiya River (Alaska Department of Fish and Game Anadromous Stream Catalog number 115-34-10230) has been identified as Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) pursuant to the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, because it contains habitat important for spawning, breeding, feeding and growth to maturity for king, coho, chum and pink salmon. Juvenile salmon migrate downstream through the project area during early April through mid-June. Adult migration and spawning begins in August and continues through



October. Anadromous eulachon also spawn near the project area during spring. Spawning is not expected to occur in the areas directly impacted by the project.

The nearshore areas of the Taiya Inlet and Nahku Bay provide habitats for a variety of estuarine and marine species, and are particularly important for salmon smolt and fry. The most sensitive time of year for these species is the spring and early summer period.

Essential Fish Habitat

The EFH regulations require Federal agencies or their designated agents, (the Alaska Department of Transportation (ADPOT) in this instance), to evaluate the effects of proposed actions on EFH and associated species of fish. This information is necessary for NMFS to fulfill its statutory responsibility to provide EFH Conservation Recommendations to minimize the adverse effects of the proposed action. A Federal agency must prepare an EFH assessment for any Federal action that may adversely affect EFH. The EFH regulations, 50 CFR 600.920 (e)(3), describe mandatory contents that must be provided in all EFH assessments. ADOT has indicated that an EFH assessment will be completed for this projects, this information should be incorporated into the EIS.

Based upon NMFS' initial review of the proposed project it is likely that conservation recommendations will include but not be limited to the following actions. After reviewing the EFH assessment, NMFS may modify or provide additional conservation recommendations.

- To protect sensitive life stages of salmon, in-water work and blasting should be conducted during late fall or winter when water levels are low and migrating salmon are not expected to be in the area.
- To protect fish resources, construction activities involving blasting or in-water fills should be conducted from November 1 through March 31 to minimize potential impacts to anadromous fish. In-water work will be prohibited during the period of April 1 through June 15.
- To minimize impacts from fill and incidental rock fall to nearshore estuarine habitats, blasting and filling should be conducted as much as practical during periods of low tide.

Susan Walker is the NMFS contact person for this project. She may be reached at (907) 586-7510.

Sincerely,



(For)

James W. Balsiger
Administrator, Alaska Region