



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

National Marine Fisheries Service

P.O. Box 21668

Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668

November 17, 2004

Linda Pulliam
Ketchikan Misty Fjords Ranger District
Tongass National Forest
3031 Tongass Avenue
Ketchikan, AK 99901

Dear Ms. Pulliam

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has received the Project Update for the Rockfish, SW Neets, and Francis Cove Environmental Assessments. The proposed timber sales would require marine access facilities (MAFs) at Fire Cove, SW Neets and Margaret Bay.

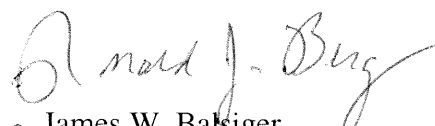
The Magnuson Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act's Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) provisions require Federal agencies to evaluate the effects of proposed actions on EFH and associated species of fish. This information is necessary for NMFS to fulfill its statutory responsibility to provide 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 mandatory contents of EFH assessments are described in 50 CFR 600.920 (e)(3).

NMFS has reviewed the annual Tongass National Forest Monitoring and Evaluation Reports, and it appears that there is no current dive monitoring information available for the proposed MAFs. NMFS recommends that the EFH assessment for these projects include the results from recent dive monitoring surveys for each of these sites.

Margaret Bay, in particular, is of concern because of the sensitive resources in the vicinity of the existing MAF. NMFS was actively involved in evaluating the initial permit application for the Margaret Bay MAF in 1986. At the time of the initial permit, we expressed concern regarding extensive eelgrass beds in the vicinity of the MAF. The project was redesigned to minimize impacts to eelgrass. NMFS would be interested in receiving information on monitoring dives at this MAF to evaluate how effective the minimization efforts were at protecting eelgrass

Please contact Katharine Miller at 907-586-7643 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,


For **James W. Balsiger**
Administrator, Alaska Region

