



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

National Marine Fisheries Service

P.O. Box 21668

Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668

April 18, 2005

Mr. Jerry O. Ruhle
Alaska Department of Transportation
and Public Facilities
P. O. Box 196900
Anchorage, Alaska 99519-6900

Re: False Pass Airport, Alaska

Attn: Allen Kemplen

Dear Mr. Ruhle:

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has reviewed the request from the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (ADOT&PF) for comments on the False Pass Airport Master Plan. The existing False Pass Airport provides only limited access to the community because of severe restrictions arising from weather, terrain, runway length, and crosswinds. The primary purpose of the project is to upgrade the existing airport facilities to B-II design category standards to improve the airport and accommodate the forecasted aircraft use.

In addition to the No-Build Alternative (Alternative A), three Build Alternatives are currently being considered, as described below. All build alternatives would enlarge the existing 60 x 2,150 foot runway to 75 x 3,300 feet, require extensive fill into Isanotski Strait and enlarge the Runway Safety Area from 120 x 2, 630 feet to 150 x 3,900 feet. In addition, all of the build alternatives would necessitate installing spur dikes for erosion control around the upstream bridge abutments of the Roundtop Creek bridge, re-surfacing of the Roundtop Creek bridge deck and access road and widening the taxiway by 10 feet.

Alternative B would retain the existing alignment, but would extend and widen the runway and runway safety area to the dimensions listed above. Extending the runway would require fill materials in marine waters up to 40 feet deep. In addition, the surrounding mountains would still penetrate the transitional and approach surfaces to the runway. Costs would run about \$7 million.

Alternative C would realign the south end of the runway five degrees to the southeast, and extend and widen the runway and runway safety area to the dimensions listed above. This alternative would relieve the south runway approach of all airspace penetrations, but would increase air penetrations at the north end of the runway. Disadvantages to this alternative include extending the runway into the 40-foot deep waters of Isanotski Strait, and the high cost (approximately \$11 million) associated with construction.

Alternative D would involve shifting runway 13-31 300 feet towards Isanotski Strait, and extending and widening the runway and runway safety area to the dimensions listed above. The



shift in runway alignment would vastly reduce airspace penetrations at both ends. Disadvantages of this alternative include increased runway protection zone conflicts, more land acquisition than the other alternatives, environmental issues associated with filling in Isanotski Strait in order to extend the runway, and higher cost (approximately \$12 million) than other alternatives.

Based on information provided, NMFS offers the following information under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act).

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 species of whales, Pacific salmon, and the Steller sea lion.

Endangered marine mammals that may occur in marine waters near False Pass include Steller sea lions and humpback and fin whales. No listed Steller sea lion rookeries or major haulout sites are located near False Pass. However, Steller sea lions may forage and transit waters of False Pass during peak salmon returns. Additional information regarding the ESA is available on our website at <http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/protectedresources/default.htm>.

Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act

Section 305(b)(2) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act requires interagency consultation for any federal action that may adversely affect EFH. Federally managed species for which EFH has been described in the proposed project area include: red king crab, Alaska plaice, sculpin, Greenland turbot, Pacific cod, walleye pollock, Atka mackerel, sablefish, flathead sole, rock sole, Pacific Ocean perch, forage fish (eulachon, capelin, and sand lance), and salmon (coho and chum). Additional information regarding EFH is available on our website at <http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/habitat/efh.htm>.

ADOT&PF has determined that that the proposed project may adversely affect EFH. NMFS concurs with that determination. We offer the following comments for consideration in the preparation of the EFH Assessment.

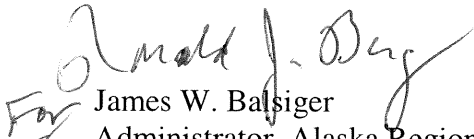
All of the proposed alternatives, with the exception of Alternative A (the no build alternative), require the placement of fill out into the nearshore and marine waters of Isantoski Strait to the depth of 40 feet. This fill would directly impact living marine resources, including EFH, by removing habitat and smothering benthic organisms. Alternatives B, C, and D would essentially create a causeway, altering currents and hydrogeomorphic processes and resulting in siltation and the blockage of nearshore migration. The EFH Assessment should fully address these impacts and provide an analysis of their effect on living marine resources and why alternatives such as extending the runway to the north are not viable. In addition, any of the three build

alternatives would require an extensive amount of fill. Preliminarily, two possible existing material sites have been identified. Information on how the material will be mined and transported should be included in your environmental analysis.

Once an alternative has been identified, options to avoid, minimize and mitigate for impacts should be analyzed as part of project planning. We recommend techniques such as the use of silt curtains and timing restrictions to minimize impacts to water quality during the placement of the fill. Options to compensate for impacts might include incorporating a shallow shore zone into the fill perimeter of the runway, creating a shallow nearshore environment. We will provide more specific recommendations once we review the EFH Assessment.

We look forward to working with you throughout the project. If you have questions regarding EFH please contact Mr. Matt Eagleton. Questions regarding ESA should be addressed to Brad Smith. They can be both reached at 271-5006.

Sincerely,


For James W. Balsiger
Administrator, Alaska Region

cc: USFWS, EPA, OPMP, OHMP, ADEC – Anchorage
Records - Juneau