



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

National Marine Fisheries Service

P.O. Box 21668

Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668

March 1, 2005

Carol Goularte
District Ranger
Sitka Ranger District
Tongass National Forest
204 Siginaka Way
Sitka, AK 99835

Dear Ms. Goularte:

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has received and reviewed the Project Introduction and Scoping Statement for four proposed timber stand improvement projects on the Sitka and Juneau Ranger Districts. The proposed action is to pre-commercially thin approximately 545 acres of overstocked young-growth stands to improve diameter and height growth of residual trees, enhance fish and wildlife values, enhance riparian function, and promote greater structural diversity. The four sites proposed for thinning are: Kruzof Island/Mud Bay Area; Starrigavan Creek; Camp Coogan Creek; and Point Anmer/Snettisham Peninsula.

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. 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 is required to provide comments and EFH Conservation Recommendations on actions that affect EFH. Recommendations may include measures to avoid, minimize, mitigate, or otherwise offset adverse effects on EFH. Accordingly, we offer the following EFH Conservation Recommendations:

1. We recommend that an EFH assessment be completed as part of the project record especially for the Starrigavan Creek and Camp Coogan Creek projects that are both planned within an anadromous stream riparian area. We are available to review and provide comments on your EFH assessment.
2. Camp Coogan Creek is a catalogued Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) anadromous fish stream with pink, chum and coho salmon (number 113-41-10350). Starrigavan Creek is a catalogued ADF&G anadromous stream with pink, chum and coho salmon and Dolly Vardan char (number 113-41-10150). In stream work should only occur in June and July (after smolts have left the system and before adults return to spawn).
3. Remove any woody debris that may fall into the stream channel during the thinning operation.



Please contact Cindy Hartmann at 907-586-7585 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

For Donald J. Berg
James W. Balsiger
Administrator, Alaska Region

cc: Pete Griffin, District Ranger, Juneau Ranger District