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**NOAA SEEKS COMMENT ON PROPOSED INCIDENTAL MARINE MAMMAL HARASSMENT
*Corporation to Conduct Rocket Launches in Alaska***

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service is seeking comments now through Dec. 13 on the Alaska Aerospace Development Corporation's proposal to conduct rocket launches from the Kodiak Island Complex on Kodiak Island, Alaska. The rocket launches may result in the incidental harassment of marine mammals. NOAA Fisheries is also seeking comments on proposed regulations to govern that take, to be effective from December 2004 through November 2009. NOAA is an agency of the U.S. Department of Commerce.

The KLC facility is a commercial rocket launch complex located on state-owned land on the eastern side of Kodiak Island on the Narrow Cape peninsula. To date, there have been six rocket launches from KLC. The facility is licensed to launch up to nine rockets per year. Because the noise generated by the rocket launches has the potential to disrupt the behavior patterns of pinnipeds ashore at the time of a launch, the AADC must request an authorization under the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

While the number of incidental harassment takes will depend on the distribution and abundance of marine mammals in the vicinity of launch operations at the time of the launch, NOAA Fisheries believes that the number of potential harassment takings is estimated to be small, will not have more than a negligible impact on affected marine mammal stocks, and will not have an unmitigable adverse impact on the availability of the species or stocks for subsistence uses. Only a small area is close enough to KLC to be impacted by the rapid departure of rockets overhead, and launches are conducted on an infrequent basis. Mitigation and monitoring measures, such as surveys by trained biological observers, and recordings of sound intensity and frequency metrics of rocket launch noise, will be implemented.

KLC was designed to accommodate a variety of small, solid rocket motors, including such vehicles as the Minuteman II, Taurus, Conestoga and Athena (Lockheed Martin Launch Vehicle), and provides an infrastructure for placing small commercial and military telecommunications, remote sensing, scientific and research payloads into orbit. The largest vehicle that can be launched from KLC is the Athena-2 (Lockheed Martin Vehicle-2). Launch operations at the KLC are authorized under license from the Federal Aviation Administration, Office of Associate Administrator for Commercial Space Transportation.

NOAA Fisheries will accept comments on the application and proposed regulations through December 13, 2004. Comments should be addressed to:

Stephen L. Leathery, Chief of the Permits, Conservation and Education Division
Office of Protected Resources, NOAA Fisheries
1315 East West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Comments may be sent by e-mail to PR1.082701E@noaa.gov. A copy of the application and proposed rule federal register notice may be obtained by contacting the same office. NOAA Fisheries published an advanced notice of proposed regulations and a notice of receipt of AADC's application for regulations and requested comments on the request Nov. 5, 2001. Comments received during the ANPR 30-day public comment period as well as during the proposed rule 45-day public comment period will be considered in this rulemaking.

NOAA Fisheries is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources, and the habitat on which they depend, through scientific research, management and enforcement. Stewardship of these resources benefits the nation by supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, while helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of America's coastal and marine resources.

On the Web:

NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov>

NOAA Fisheries: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>