



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

*National Marine Fisheries Service*

*P.O. Box 21668*

*Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668*

March 18, 2008

Carol A. Goularte  
District Ranger  
U.S. Dept. of Agriculture Forest Service  
Alaska Region, Tongass National Forest  
204 Siginaka Way  
Sitka, Alaska 99835

RE: Sitka Ranger District New Office Environmental Assessment (EA) Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) Assessment

Attn: Maura Santora

Dear Ms. Goularte:

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has reviewed the EFH assessment and EA for the above referenced project, which would construct a new two-story United States Forest Service (USFS) office no larger than 10,000 sq. ft., with associated access and parking areas at the Cascade Creek Administrative Site in Sitka, Alaska. USFS staff identified an unnamed freshwater stream on this site as possible habitat for any of several species of sculpins that may occupy both fresh and brackish waters (for example, Pacific staghorn sculpin, prickly sculpin and coastrange sculpin). Sculpins are identified as an EFH species complex under the provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSFCMA), which requires federal agencies to consult with NMFS on all actions that may adversely affect EFH. Consequently, NMFS staff visited the site with Sitka Ranger District staff on Wednesday, February 25 and discussed the potential impacts of the project to EFH in the unnamed freshwater stream and the marine waters to which it discharges. USFS staff proposed the following potential impacts and conservation actions for the three alternatives presented in the EA:

Alternative A would have “no adverse effects” on EFH, because existing conditions would remain unchanged.

Alternative B would have “no adverse effects” on EFH, because the small scope and scale of the actions around the drainages would not impact fish habitat. This project would not cause erosion or sedimentation which could reduce the quality or quantity of fish habitat in the freshwater or marine environment downstream of the analysis area.

Alternative C “may adversely effect” sculpin EFH because habitat will be modified temporarily with placement of a culvert which will temporarily increase sediment



loading. It is not known at this point if sculpin are present in the northern-most stream in the project area. Design criteria of instream work will minimize sediment input to the stream. However, there will be no long term effects to the stream with this alternative. The size and scope of the watershed is so small it will not affect enough EFH to see overall sculpin population effects in the Sitka area.

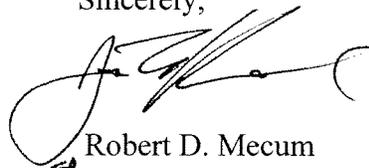
Section 305(b) of the MSFCMA requires federal agencies to consult with NMFS on all actions that may adversely affect EFH. NMFS is required to make EFH Conservation Recommendations, which may include measures to avoid, minimize, mitigate or otherwise offset adverse effects. In accordance with Section 305(b)(4)(A) of the MSFCMA, NMFS makes the following EFH Conservation Recommendation:

The project should apply Forest Plan Standards, Guidelines, and Best Management Practices, and project-specific design and mitigation measures, including on-site monitoring, to avoid and/or correct any downstream sedimentation of the unnamed freshwater stream during in-water work associated with the Sitka Ranger District New Office project. The Forest Service should provide a monitoring report to NMFS that describes how such minimization and avoidance was achieved

Under section 305(b)(4) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, the USFS is required to respond to NMFS EFH Conservation Recommendations in writing within 30 days. If the USFS will not make a decision within 30 days of receiving NMFS EFH Conservation Recommendations, the USFS should provide NMFS with a letter within 30 days to that effect, and indicate when a full response will be provided.

If you have any questions regarding our recommendations for this project, please contact Linda Shaw at 907-586-7643 or [linda.shaw@noaa.gov](mailto:linda.shaw@noaa.gov).

Sincerely,



Robert D. Mecum  
for Acting Administrator, Alaska Region

cc: John Klutz, Corps\*  
EPA Juneau, Chris Meade\*  
USFWS Juneau, Richard Enriquez\*  
ADEC Juneau, Brenda Krauss\*  
OHMP, Erin Allee\*

\* e-mail PDF

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