



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

*National Marine Fisheries Service*

*P.O. Box 21668*

*Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668*

*April 27, 2005*

Edrie Vinson  
Environmental Project Manager  
Federal Highway Administration  
709 West 9<sup>th</sup> Street, Room 851  
P.O. Box 21648  
Juneau, Alaska 99802

Dear Ms. Vinson:

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) received your letter concerning potential effects of the proposed Knik Arm Crossing Project on threatened or endangered species under the jurisdiction of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The Department of Transportation (DOT) has concluded no listed species occur within the project area, and that this project would have no effect on listed species. NMFS agrees with these conclusions.

We recognize that you are aware of the presence of Cook Inlet beluga whales in the project area. This stock of beluga whales is listed as depleted under the Marine Mammal Protection Act. We understand that continuing research and planned National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis will evaluate the potential impact of the Knik Arm crossing on this stock of depleted marine mammals.

Although we consider your consultation requirements under section 7(a) of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) to be satisfied at this time, we are proposing to initiate a formal review of the status of the Cook Inlet stock of beluga whales under the ESA. In the event this stock is listed, a new section 7 consultation would be necessary. We believe the work that the Federal Highway Administration and the Knik Arm Bridge and Toll Authority are presently conducting relative to beluga whales, and the analysis presented in the associated NEPA documents, will provide an adequate foundation for any future consultation.

Please direct any question to Brad Smith in our Anchorage office at (907) 271-3023.

Sincerely,

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

Federal Highway  
Administration  
APR 27 2005  
Juneau, Alaska

