

Press release for Knik Arm Bridge and Toll Authority

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KNIK ARM IS BUSY

Teams of biologists and scientists are now in the field gathering information on the marine environment of Knik Arm. This work is being done for the Knik Arm Bridge and Toll Authority (KABATA), charged by the 2003 Alaska legislature to pursue development of a Knik Arm crossing linking the ports of Anchorage and Port MacKenzie. Building on 50 years of prior studies, and a 1984 Draft Environmental Impact Statement, this fieldwork is focused on fisheries and beluga observation.

Designed to coincide with pile driving for the new Port MacKenzie dock, researchers are recording actual underwater construction sounds to design mitigation for future construction of the crossing. Beluga observers at Cairn Point and Port MacKenzie have been on duty 18 hours a day. "We're using both our eyes and our ears to determine if beluga whales are in the area," says the field coordinator. Next, the crew will set probes underwater so they can listen for beluga whale calls and note location.

Another field team is conducting surveys to determine the area's fish species and habitat. These surveys involve catching fish in nets from the beach and from boats near areas of belugas, and recording the findings. Researchers are taking sediment samples on shore and from the bottom of Knik Arm to determine the invertebrate populations (worms), which are important food for juvenile salmon, marine fish and birds. Current monitors, attached to buoys, can be seen from shore. The report from the field is: "It's been cold and wet out here, but we're getting a lot of good information." The group will be back later in August and September to see how conditions have changed.

Funding has been received for preliminary design and environmental permitting. KABATA has engaged the firms of Peratrovich, Nottingham and Drage (PND) for preliminary engineering, HDR for NEPA and environmental permitting, and URS for regulatory support. Current fieldwork is being conducted by LGL Alaska Research Associates and Pentec Environmental Inc.

To learn more, visit the Knik Arm Bridge and Toll Authority website:

<http://www.knikarmbridge.com>. KABATA will host Open Houses this fall to brief the Anchorage and Mat-Su communities. The KABATA Board meets for its regular quarterly meeting this Thursday, 5 August at 1pm in Room 1860 of the Atwood Tower. This meeting is open to the public.