MEMORANDUM

State of Alaska

DEPARTMENT OF FISH & GAME

RPWG JS

TO: Stan Senner
Restoration Specialist
OSIAR Division
Department of Fish and Game

DATE: April 8, 1992

FILE NO.:

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SUBJECT: Habitat Survey Priorities

FROM: Mark N. Kuwada MK
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The Habitat Division recommends that R-47 surveys of anadromous fish distribution and stream habitats be conducted in the following areas, in order of descending priority:

- Afognak Island
- Outer Kenai Peninsula
- Prince William Sound

In our view, Afognak Island should receive the highest priority for the following reasons:

- Extensive timber harvesting has already occurred, and will continue to occur, as a result of operations conducted by Koncor Forest Products and Afognak Native Corporation (ANC).

- Koncor Forest Products and ANC have apparently expressed an interest in negotiating land protection and/or acquisition options.

- Afognak Island supports habitats that are linked to the recovery of injured resources.

- There is a high potential for identifying new anadromous fish habitat based upon topography and the presence of extensive, uncataloged freshwater drainages.

- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) plans to conduct a congressionally mandated study of Afognak Island this summer that will focus primarily on coastal and upland resources. The division's study would complement this effort.

The Outer Kenai Peninsula was selected as a secondary priority because:

- Extensive timber harvesting has already occurred, and will continue to occur, as a result of operations conducted on lands owned by Port Graham, English Bay and Seldovia Native Corporations.

- The Outer Kenai Peninsula supports habitats that are linked to the recovery of injured resources.

- There is a moderate-to-high potential for identifying new anadromous fish habitat based upon topography and the presence of uncataloged freshwater drainages.

- Logistically, a helicopter or vessel contract could be consolidated with planned Afognak operations.

Prince William Sound was accorded the last level of priority for surveys because:

- Fish habitat surveys have already been conducted in PWS on Montague Island and the Fidalgo Peninsula, where imminent threats of development exist.

- Although Prince William Sound supports habitats that are linked to the recovery of injured resources, and Eyak Corporation has apparently expressed an interest in negotiating land protection/acquisition options, lands near Cordova and Tatitlek, where timber harvests are occurring or are planned to occur, have a low-to-moderate potential for identifying new anadromous fish habitat in relation to potential timber harvest areas.

- Logistics would dictate developing separate helicopter or vessel contracts.

The division intends to document the distribution and presence of anadromous fish in all types of freshwater habitats on private lands subject to ongoing or potential major development activities--primarily timber harvesting. This means that we will focus on previously unsurveyed freshwater systems or systems that are contiguous to known anadromous waterbodies, including the upper reaches of streams that have already been documented as supporting anadromous fish. The surveys will attempt to document fish presence by means of electroshocking. Stream habitat characteristics to be recorded include, at a minimum, substrate, gradient, stream width, bank incision, riparian vegetation, and instream debris. The surveys will also identify any obvious blockages to fish passage.

The surveys will not consider waterbodies that are already known to support anadromous fish, nor will they provide estimates of escapement or a quantification of spawning and rearing habitat.

As a result of our discussion last week, I am concerned that the restoration office seems to be confused about what the R-47

project is designed to accomplish. It had been assumed that the objectives of the survey and the products that would follow were clearly understood when the proposal was debated last winter. During that process, the project absorbed an across-the-board cut of 10-percent, and an additional cut of 25K when essential equipment was cursorily deleted. The point is that the project is already underfunded and cannot accomplish what is intended with the addition of a new set of objectives. The desire to obtain escapement estimates, quantify relative habitat values and develop comparative habitat relationships will require developing new survey techniques, take a substantially greater time to complete, and substantially reduce the area that can be surveyed.

Perhaps the restoration office should consider how information obtained in the surveys will be utilized. Certainly, there is a need to apply the information toward a relative assessment of fishery resources on private lands where protection or acquisition options are being considered. There is also a need to better manage fishery resources in order to diminish the threat of further impacts to injured species. Finally, acquired information should benefit other restoration projects to the extent that a duplication of effort is avoided.

The division's fish habitat surveys are designed to provide information that will assist in achieving each of these goals. However, the most significant debate seems to be related to the level of detail needed to effect land protection and acquisition decisions. This is also an issue that the lands protection and acquisition subcommittee of the restoration planning team has yet to resolve. Consequently, we believe it is unfair to expect the fish habitat survey study to provide every conceivable type of information that might eventually be needed, without acknowledging that this will have a commensurate effect on the number of streams that can actually be surveyed or the total cost of the project. Moreover, we have serious reservations concerning the validity of attempting to extrapolate habitat values based upon one year's survey data, particularly when statistical analyses are lacking.

For these reasons, some clear and immediate direction is needed as to what the restoration office would like to achieve with the division's stream habitat surveys. We wish to provide a product that will be useful in achieving restoration objectives, but do not want to misconstrue the nature of our project. If the restoration office has other expectations, please let me know so that we can work out some mutually agreeable approach.

cc: Frank Rue
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