UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Forest Service
Alaska Region
(Lead Agency)

and

ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME
3298 Douglas Street
Homer, Alaska, 99603-8027
(Cooperating Agency)

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

for the

Tributary Restoration
and
Development Project
Port Dick Creek, Lower Cook Inlet

December, 1995

I. Decision and Reasons for the Decision

The purpose of this decision document is to record the factors I considered and the rationale I used to determine a **Finding of No Significant Impact** (FONSI) concerning a proposal to improve spawning habitat for chum and pink salmon in Port Dick Creek, on the outer coast of the southern Kenai Peninsula on the Gulf of Alaska. This site lies within the Kachemak Bay State Wilderness Park, however, Alaska Statute Sec 41.21.142 allows the Department of Fish and Game to engage in stream rehabilitation, enhancement and development activities within these boundaries. The project has been reviewed by Mr. McCampbell, District Ranger, Kachemak Bay Wilderness State Park, (*see*: EA, Appendix A) and he has indicated no objection to construction of this fish restoration project in this location.

This project is a restoration project to rehabilitate resources injured by the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill of 1989. Restoration includes enhancement, restoration, or replacement of injured resources. This project attempts to improve existing spawning habitat for chum and pink salmon so the population can recover to previous levels.

The proposed Port Dick Pink and Chum Salmon Spawning Restoration Project would restore and develop stable spawning habitat by excavating two tributaries of Port Dick Creek to provide year round stable groundwater sources. A total of 300 m of stream would be modified under the proposed action that includes both the primary and secondary tributaries. Excavation would extend into the substrate approximately 80 cm in the primary tributary and approximately 30 cm in the secondary tributary, respectively. This action is expected to produce an estimated 900,000 salmon fry and approximately 14,900 adult salmon.

To minimize any possible adverse effects, the proposed mitigation includes: (1) scheduling excavation during early June to avoid most recreational activities and when few juvenile or adult fish are present; (2) revegetation of the small spoil disposal site after project completion; and (3) containment of any siltation by a berm and silt curtain. Fishery issues and concerns have been discussed with staff from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Commercial Fisheries Management and Development Division, and any potential impacts are considered to be inconsequential. Additionally, activities would be limited according to restrictions that they imposed. The proposed construction of the Port Dick Restoration Project was reviewed by the Cook Inlet Regional Planning Team (CIRPT), Kenai Peninsula Borough Coastal Management Program and members of the Cook Inlet Seiners Association (CISA). All three organizations endorsed the proposed project (*see* EA, Appendix A). Archeological and Wilderness concerns have been discussed with staff from the Kachemak Bay State Park and determined that any potential impacts would be inconsequential.

In making this decision, considerations have been given to:

1. The public comments received.

2. The Cook Inlet Regional Planning Team Comprehensive Salmon Plan.

3. The 1994 and 1995 *Exxon Valdez* Oil Spill Restoration Draft Work Plans.

4. The 1994 *Exxon Valdez* Oil Spill Restoration Plan.

I am agreeing with the State of Alaska in selecting Alternative A for the following reasons:

Alternative A is consistent with the Wilderness Area standards and guidelines applicable to this area and the *Exxon Valdez* Oil Spill Restoration Program.

Implementing Alternative A (with Mitigation) minimizes the impacts to the wilderness character while providing enhanced spawning habitat for chum and pink salmon. The amount of excavated material is limited and after revegetation, the disturbed areas will blend into the natural environment with little apparent distinction from naturally occurring riparian stream habitat.

Alternative A will have no long-term effects on the maintenance of the wilderness character of the Kachemak Bay State Wilderness Area and furthers the goals of restoring injured fish resources injured as a result of the *Exxon Valdez* Oil Spill. With the mitigation measures including (1) timing and methodology of the excavation; (2) fisheries management; (3) stock manipulation strategies; and (4) project monitoring described in the EA, the stream spawning habitat enhancement activities will be acceptable.

The project is consistent with the *Exxon Valdez* Oil Spill (EVOS) Restoration efforts and has passed through the various project reviews associated with the Restoration program. The project was approved by the *Exxon Valdez* Oil Spill Trustee Council.

II. Alternatives Considered

In making my decision I considered the following alternatives:

Alternative A - Excavate the Tributaries to Restore Spawning Habitat

This alternative would restore a total of 2,100 square meters of spawning habitat in two tributaries of Port Dick Creek producing an estimated 14,900 adult salmon. This would entail excavation of approximately 290 cubic meters of gravel to maintain ideal flow conditions. Excavation equipment may include a D-8 type Caterpillar Tractor, one Caterpillar 225 Excavator (backhoe), one articulating style front-end loader and one non-motorized rock hopper. The excavation activities would be limited to the period of June 1 through June 15. If colonization does not proceed successfully and if the prescribed spawning escapement into the natural spawning habitat in Port Dick Creek is achieved, egg incubation boxes may be employed to accelerate the process.

Alternative B - No Action

No action would be taken to restore or develop chum or pink salmon spawning habitat in Port Dick Creek. The restoration of injured salmon stocks would not be achieved. This alternative provides the baseline to which the other alternative can be compared.

Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Analysis

Also reviewed were two alternatives considered but eliminated from detailed analysis. These two alternatives were eliminated during the analysis process by the Interdisciplinary Team and the rationale for their elimination is described in the EA.

II. Public Involvement

This project was reviewed and approved by the *Exxon Valdez* Trustee Council (TC) in April 1995 pending successful completion of federal NEPA requirements. State of Alaska

members on the TC include the Attorney General, and the Commissioners of Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) and the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). Federal members include representatives of the U.S. Departments of the Interior and Agriculture and the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration. As part of the review process, the EVOS Trustee Council, Public Advisory Group (PAG) reviewed this salmon instream habitat and stock restoration project in 1994 and 1995 prior to preparing recommendations to the Trustee Council. The PAG made no motion to disapprove this project. The project has received strong public support (*see* EA, Appendix A). In addition, support for this project was received at the Trustee Council Wild Stock Supplementation Workshop in January, 1995. Concerns related to the goals, linkage to injury, and benefit/cost that were addressed have been incorporated into the proposal.

The scoping process included communications with the public and state and federal agencies. A letter that described the proposed project, issues and alternatives was distributed in August, 1995 to 20 addressees; only positive responses were received. A copy of the *Exxon Valdez* Oil Spill 1995 Annual Work Plan, which included this project, was distributed to over 2300 addressees for public review and comment. Notification of this EA was also included in three quarterly issues of the "Chugach National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions for Environmental Analysis" that was mailed to more than 600 individuals, agencies and organizations. No comment was received.

IV. Finding of No Significant Impact

It has been determined through the Environmental Assessment that this is not a major Federal action that would require the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement. The determination of finding of no significant impact is based on the following factors:

1. There are no significant cumulative effects that would result from this action;

2. The physical and biological effects would be limited to the area of planned activity;

3. No known threatened or endangered species of wildlife or plants would be affected;

4. The action would not adversely affect cultural resources or objects listed, or eligible for listing, in the National Register of Historic Places;

5. There is no possibility of a significant restriction to subsistence resources or their uses as a result of this action; and

6. The project is consistent with the *Exxon Valdez* Oil Spill Restoration program.

This action will have limited context and intensity (40 CFR 1508.27), individually or cumulatively. This project does not pose a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment. Therefore, I find that the environmental assessment prepared is adequate to meet the needs of NEPA.

The project is consistent with the State of Alaska Wilderness guidelines, the *Exxon Valdez* Oil Spill Restoration Plan, 1994 and the 1995/96 Work Plans.

V. Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

The EA identifies all state and federal permits that must be approved before implementation can begin. A cultural resource survey was conducted on September 1, 1995 at Port Dick Creek with the Alaska Department of Natural Resources (Office of History and Archaeology). All applications have been submitted and are being coordinated through the State of Alaska Division of Governmental Coordination. The Department of Army, Corps of Engineers, regulatory program permit application was filed in the Anchorage office on Sept. 12, 1995. The Port Dick project was assigned project number 4-950786. The Coastal Project Questionnaire and Certification Statement was filed with the State of Alaska, Department of Governmental Coordination (DGC) on July 25, 1995. DGC will coordinate the permit process with the Departments of Fish and Game, Natural Resources and the Department of Environmental Conservation. A special use application to conduct activities within Kachemak Bay State

Park was submitted to DNR (Division of Parks And Outdoor Recreation) on August 18, 1995.

VI. Implementation

In accordance with 36 CFR 215.10(c) implementation of this project may occur 30 days after the date this decision appears in the Anchorage Daily news. According to the EA, the actual excavation is scheduled to occur between June 1 and 15, 1996.

VII. Administrative Review

Pursuant to 36 CFR 215.8(a)(3) this decision is not subject to appeal. A notice of the proposed action and opportunity to comment was published and no expression of interest or comments were received during the comment period (36 CFR 215.6). I did not modify the proposed action after the comment period.

VIII. Contact Person

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IX. Signature

James A Wolfe

PHIL JANIK
for Regional Forester

Date Dec. 21, 1995