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Honolulu, Hawaii 96825-3511

February 14, 2011

Carlton Morris, FWS Project Manager
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Division of Engineering
911 N.E. 11th Avenue
Portland, Oregon 97232

Dear ^{Carlton} Mr. Morris:

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment upon the Engineering Evaluation/Cost Analysis for the cleanup of lead-based paint at Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge. I do not submit these comments as an expert in either engineering or contaminants; however, they do come from my long-term and deeply felt concern for the protection of the unique historic resources found at Midway Atoll. I share the Fish and Wildlife Service's passion for the atoll's significant wildlife resources as well and commend FWS for its efforts to deal with this issue over the past many years. Finding a new source of project funding through the Comprehensive Environmental Restoration, Compensation, and Liability Act is also highly commendable. However, from the first page of the Executive Summary throughout the entire report, it is clear that your objectives only considered the ecological health of the atoll and that protection of historical resources as required by law and numerous legal agreements and plans was considered only after the fact.

The FWS news release regarding this report seeks comments on three areas of the analysis. I do not have the expertise to comment on the proposed clean-up level of 75 ppm for lead in the soil and will support your findings.

Regarding the schedule and cleanup priorities, it is highly unlikely you will obtain any approval from the Hawaii State Historic Preservation Division or the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation to demolish the historic Commercial Pacific Cable Company buildings in Decision Unit 1 in time to address those structures during the summer/fall of 2011. If indeed these buildings must be addressed first, Alternative 7 is most likely the only implementable course of action.

That comment leads to my primary concern: Alternative 7 for Decision Unit 1 was not seriously considered in your analysis. I find it difficult to believe that it would be any less safe for workers to dismantle hazardous portions of the Cable Company buildings and leave the concrete cores and foundations than it would be to bulldoze the structures. If that were the case, why would FWS have proposed, and the State Historic Preservation Division approved, the current plan outlined in the 2009 Memorandum of Agreement? If hand scraping and chemical strippers are acceptable treatments on Building 643, why would they not also be acceptable for the other structures, especially if all that remains are the concrete cores and foundations?

The analysis also cites the possibility of "entrainment of lead in soil under the foundations of the Cable Buildings due to burrowing birds." I suggest this possibility exists under many other buildings scheduled to be treated but not demolished in the report. Surely some method of preventing further access under these foundations can be devised, as must be proposed for Building 643.

The final paragraph under Alternative 7 on page 38 acknowledges that “Mechanized removal of soils from around the Cable Buildings may have an adverse effect on the National Register Cable Station property which may contain buried archeological deposits.” That statement applies to all identified alternatives (except Alternative 1) for the Decision Unit. Archaeological testing should be employed under any of these alternatives and is a further reason it is unlikely Decision Unit 1 can be treated later this year.

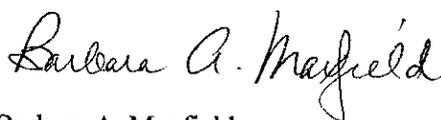
I also note no cost estimate was developed for Decision Unit 1, Alternative 7 (page 62), though you managed to rate it in Table 9. Although more person-hours would undoubtedly be needed to hand scrape and strip the concrete cores and foundations, you may find volunteers willing to take on the task, or find alternative sources of funding to preserve at least part of these historically significant structures. FWS consistently finds volunteers to count albatrosses (including in this part of Sand Island) every year, and Oceanic Society has brought volunteers to Midway for historic preservation projects in the past. It would be worth at least a try to find a group to help.

A few other miscellaneous comments regarding this analysis:

- Page 18: why were no soil samples taken around the aboveground storage tanks? I assume the tanks must have been painted with lead-based paint, but it would be appropriate to explain the rationale for the assumption.
- Page 29 and elsewhere: will the geotextile membrane prevent birds from burrowing beneath the top 12 inches of clean soil? Will it deteriorate over time?
- Page 36: if 1 foot of contaminated soil is to be removed around the Cable Buildings and 3 feet of clean soil is to be placed on top of the excavation, how will the structures be protected from runoff during major rainstorms? Will they become the new low points in the compound?
- Page 61: after participating in intense negotiations with our partner agencies over the number of personnel allowed on Midway at any one time, “obtain[ing] a waiver on the FWS [should be Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument] existing management plan for Midway to allow for additional personnel” may be more difficult than presented in this analysis.

Again, I appreciate the opportunity to submit these comments. I realize the limitations FWS faces in managing its cultural and historic resources with no appropriated funding, but I am deeply saddened when I see how the Commercial Pacific Cable Company buildings have deteriorated in the 16 years since the agency assumed responsibility for Midway Atoll. The buildings managed to survive for more than 100 years; the least we should do is make every effort to preserve what little remains.

Sincerely,



Barbara A. Maxfield

cc: Tom Edgerton, FWS Superintendent, Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument