Subject: DWH-Early Restoration- Essential Fish Habitat Consultation Initiation-Florida FWC Strategic Boat Access: City of Port St. Joe Frank Pate Boat Ramp Improvements
From: Jamie Schubert-NOAA Federal <jamie.schubert@noaa.gov>
Date: 4/16/2014 9:39 AM
To: Mark Thompson <Mark.Thompson@noaa.gov>
CC: Rusty Swafford <Rusty.Swafford@noaa.gov>, Virginia Fay <virginia.fay@noaa.gov>, Leslie Craig <leslie.craig@noaa.gov>, Jamey Redding <Jamey.Redding@noaa.gov>, "Jeff Shenot (Jeff.Shenot@noaa.gov)" <Jeff.Shenot@noaa.gov>

Mr. Thompson,
Attached is the Essential Fish Habitat Assessment for the Florida FWC Strategic Boat Access: City of Port St. Joe Frank Pate Boat Ramp Improvements project. This project is being proposed in the Deepwater Horizon Draft Phase III Early Restoration plan and Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement. Please consider this our initiation of our Essential Fish Habitat consultation. If you anticipate this consultation requiring more than 30 days (May 16, 2014) please let me know.

If you have any questions or require additional information, please contact me at 409-621-1248 or at jamie.schubert@noaa.gov.
Thanks,

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Jamie Schubert
NOAA Fisheries-Restoration Center
4700 Avenue U
Galveston, Texas 77551

Phone-409-621-1248

Attachments:

EFH FWC Strategic Boat Acces Port St Joe Frank Pate 2014-04-14.docx 2.7 MB

Determination of Effect on Essential Fish Habitat from Florida FWC Strategic Boat Access: City of Port St. Joe Frank Pate Boat Ramp Improvements project

EFH overview from Magnuson Stevens Act

The 1996 Magnuson-Stevens Act requires cooperation among the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), anglers, and federal and state agencies to protect, conserve, and enhance Essential Fish Habitat (EFH). EFH is defined as those waters and substrates necessary to fish for spawning, breeding, feeding, or growth to maturity. The designation and conservation of EFH seek to minimize adverse effects on habitat caused by fishing and non-fishing activities.

Project description

The proposed Florida FWC Strategic Boat Access project would improve the existing Frank Pate boat ramp in the City of Port St. Joe. The proposed improvements include repairing and expanding the boarding dock, improving and expanding the parking area, building a staging area, and building a fish cleaning station.

Specifically, there is currently a gravel parking lot south of the existing boat ramp. There is also an informal grass parking area on the north side of the ramp. Implementation of this project would include making the north parking lot more formal and adding additional parking along the south side of 5th Street. The proposed fish cleaning station would be located in Frank Pate Park near the existing restroom facilities so that the cleaning station could be tied into existing water and sewer lines. Finally, the current boarding dock would be renovated and extended to allow for more temporary mooring area while boaters are launching/loading at the ramp. In addition, the fenders and rub rails on the north and south sides of the boat basin along the sheet pile retaining wall would be repaired...

There is an existing, two-lane boat ramp at the site with the two lanes separated by a boarding dock. A gravel parking lot lies to the southeast of the boat ramp. There is also an informal grass parking area on the north side of the ramp. The proposed project would include making the north parking lot more formal and adding additional parking to the gravel lot of the boat ramp. A fish cleaning station would be located near the existing park restroom facilities so the existing water and sewer lines could be used. Figure 1 illustrates the project area. Figure 2 provides additional details of the area and preliminary conceptual plans that address the dock expansion.

The current boarding dock separating the two lanes of the boat ramp would be renovated and extended to allow for more temporary mooring areas while boaters are launching and loading at the ramp. Fenders and rub rails located on the north and south sides of the boat basin along the existing sheet pile retaining wall would also be repaired.

As part of the dock expansion up to 20 pilings could be placed (no pilings need to be removed). These are expected to be 8" diameter wood pilings that would be placed through a combination of water jetting and mechanical auguring. As part of final design effort, a survey of submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) in the area would be completed. Should the site assessment for the project identify SAV in the proposed project area, the conditions in the *Construction Guidelines in Florida for Minor Piling-Supported Structures Constructed in or over Submerged Aquatic Vegetation (SAV), Marsh or Mangrove Habitat* (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers/National Marine Fisheries Service, 2001) would be implemented. Among other elements that would result should these guidelines need to be implemented, there would requirements that pilings be placed a minimum of 10 feet apart and there would be requirements for the height of the pier and spacing of decking materials.

Most work, and all equipment and materials staging, would be completed from the existing disturbed areas near the current boat ramp, although some of the dock construction work would take place from the water.

Figure 3 provides a view looking at the boat ramp at the project site (generally looking Northwest to Southeast).

Figure 1. Location of the Port St. Joe Frank Pate boat ramp project.

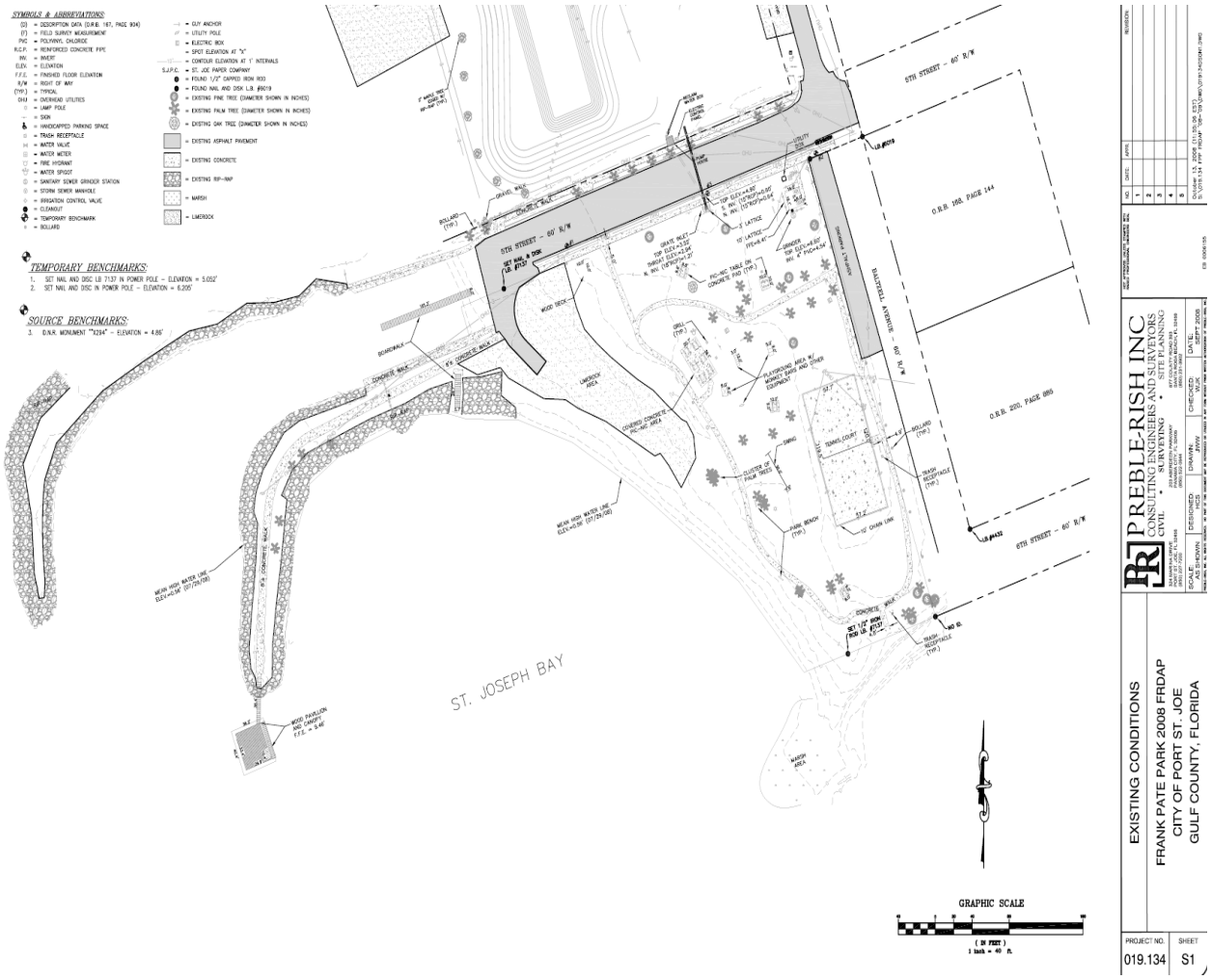

Figure 2. Details of City of Port St. Joe Frank Pate Boat Ramp and Planned Improvement Areas.

Figure 3. Photo showing the existing boat ramp and upland park area.

Federally managed fisheries and EFH

Information on designated EFH in the Gulf of Mexico was obtained in September, 2013 from the NMFS' EFH web site at *http://www.habitat.noaa.gov/protection/efh/newInv/index*. Table 1 provides a summary of the species identified as having designated EFH for one or more life stages within the area of potential affect for the proposed project.

Table 1. Federally managed fisheries with designated Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) in the proposed project area.

EFH Category	Species
Coastal Migratory Pelagics of the Gulf of Mexico AND South Atlantic	
	Cobia
	King Mackerel
	Spanish Mackerel
Gulf of Mexico Red Drum	
	Red Drum
Reef Fish Resources of the Gulf of Mexico	
	Almaco Jack
	Banded Rudderfish
	Black Grouper
	Blackfin Snapper
	Blueline Tilefish
	Cubera Snapper
	Gag
	Goldface Tilefish
	Gray (Mangrove) Snapper
	Gray Triggerfish
	Greater Amberjack
	Hogfish
	Lane Snapper
	Lesser Amberjack
	Mutton Snapper
	Nassau Grouper
	Queen Snapper
	Red Grouper
	Red Snapper
	Scamp
	Silk Snapper
	Snowy Grouper
	Speckled Hind
	Tilefish
	Vermilion Snapper
	Warsaw Grouper

	Wenchman
	Yellowedge Grouper
	Yellowfin Grouper
	Yellowmouth Grouper
Gulf of Mexico Shrimp	
	Brown Shrimp
	Pink Shrimp
	Rock Shrimp
	Seabob Shrimp
	White Shrimp
Atlantic Highly Migratory Species	
	Atlantic Sharpnose Shark-Adult
	Atlantic Sharpnose Shark-Juvenile
	Atlantic Sharpnose Shark-Neonate
	Blacknose Shark-Adult
	Blacknose Shark-Juvenile
	Blacknose Shark-Neonate
	Blacktip Shark-Adult
	Blacktip Shark-Juvenile
	Blacktip Shark-Neonate
	Bonnethead Shark-Adult
	Bonnethead Shark-Juvenile
	Bonnethead Shark-Neonate
	Bull Shark-Juvenile
	Finetooth Shark-Adult and Juvenile
	Finetooth Shark-Neonate
	Great Hammerhead Shark-All Ages
	Lemon Shark-Adult
	Lemon Shark-Juvenile
	Lemon Shark-Neonate
	Nurse Shark-Adult
	Nurse Shark-Juvenile
	Scalloped Hammerhead Shark-Adult
	Scalloped Hammerhead Shark-Juvenile
	Scalloped Hammerhead Shark-Neonate
	Spinner Shark-Adult

	Spinner Shark-Juvenile
	Spinner Shark-Neonate
	Tiger Shark-Juvenile

Assessment of effects to EFH

Restoration actions at the Port St. Joe, Frank pate boat ramp are expected to have no to minor impacts on EFH. The proposed dock expansion will be constructed in-water, adjacent to the existing dock and boat ramp. All other components of the project – improving and expanding the parking area, building a staging area, and building a fish cleaning station – will be constructed above mean high water and would lack a direct connection to identified essential fish habitat management areas (e.g., the fish cleaning section is linked to the sewer system). Expanding the existing dock will convert a small area that potentially provides habitat to a less favorable condition by installing pilings and shading the area under the dock expansion. However, given that the location is already actively used as a boat launch facility, it is unlikely that the area affected by the dock expansion within the project area currently provides high-quality habitat.

Further, the proposed dock extension will be relatively small. The exact dimensions have not yet been finalized and will be provided in final project design documents. The dock extension will lengthen one of the existing boarding docks, which are adjacent to the boat ramp. Therefore, the size of the potential habitat conversion is very small relative to the amount of habitat available in the surrounding area and will take place directly adjacent to an area that is already developed.

Construction activities will likely have a temporary negative impact on habitat. Disturbance caused by the use of heavy equipment, sediment disturbance, potential increase of debris in the water, and increased noise associated with extending the dock (e.g., placing new pilings) may affect any species using the habitat near the boat ramp. During construction, all appropriate BMPs will be followed to minimize the potential impacts of construction activities on EFH and species in the area.

One of the critical elements of the effort to limit impacts associated with the project development will be the consideration of, review for, and ultimate implementation of stormwater management controls for the project. Although each project site will pose its own issues when developing the stormwater and sediment control plans for pre, during, and completion of construction plans there is a standard approach to preparing these designs characterized by the following steps, which are distinguished by their relationship to construction, that will be followed for this project:

1. <u>Development of Pre-construction or existing conditions plans w/erosion and sediment control (E&SC) features.</u> These pre-construction plans will illustrate what sediment

control measures will be initially installed and their location in order to minimize impacts to receiving waterways when upland land disturbance activities begin. These plans will be based upon an existing site survey delineating the project boundaries, site topography, topographic features (vegetation, soil types, impervious and pervious areas, water bodies (streams and ponds), wetlands, drainage channels, existing structures, drainage basins, flow patterns and major points where stormwater enters and exits the site. The survey should extend to at least 50 feet beyond the project site and contours should depict intervals of 0.5 to 2.0 feet. The pre-construction plans should also identify phases of construction and areas that will be disturbed along with the overall limits of construction or disturbance. Sensitive areas (e.g., locations of sensitive/protected flora and fauna, wetlands, excessive slopes and unsuitable soils) should also be identified. Taking all the above information from the survey into consideration the designer will designate the locations and describe the structural controls to be installed in order to minimize erosion and control sediment from reaching adjacent receiving waters and wetlands. The most important aspect of the pre-construction drawings is to identify where water flows through the project site and where critical discharge points are located. The nature and location of best management practices (BMP's) that will then be emplaced and incorporated prior to construction are determined from these drawings. BMP's commonly identified/used include: placing combinations of silt screens, hay bales, fiber logs, and temporary vegetation down gradient of areas to be disturbed. Other sediment and stormwater control options include installing sediment ponds or traps or diversion berms and conveyance channels to redirect runoff and sediment from receiving waters.

2. Development of During Construction grading plans. These plans may be incorporated with the pre-development plans when feasible for a simple site but otherwise will be developed for depicting E&SC measures to be employed during grading operations. As the project progresses through its various phases of construction it may be necessary to adjust the location of structural E&SC measures or to include additional ones. These plans will show areas for stockpiling top soils and other materials and how they are to be contained (silt fencing, berms etc.), equipment storage areas and refueling areas (if allowed) with protective measures to be employed such as containment berms or absorbent material for possible spills. These plans may also include final stormwater control structures such as retention/detention ponds. These plans will also include requirements for inspection and maintenance of the BMP's such as inspections and repair/replacement, if necessary, after every storm event. These plans will point out to the contractor critical containment contours to ensure that optimal treatment of runoff from the disturbed areas is realized and minimal impact occurs to receiving waters.

3. Final Grading or Construction Plans. These plans will show how the site is to look upon completion of construction, final grades, stormwater controls and final stabilization of disturbed lands. These plans will include final landscaping (sod, mulching, plants (native trees and shrubs), ditch or swale lining utilizing sod mats, ditch breaks etc., and slope stabilization. Final grades on all impervious areas such as parking, entry and exit drives will designed so as to reduce runoff velocity and direct runoff into drainage conveyance systems and finally into treatment ponds dry or wet type depending on groundwater depths where the majority of runoff is treated before being released into the receiving waters. The design capacity of the treatment ponds will be based upon SCS curves for the required design storm event. Release of stormwater from the sites will be at pre-construction rates. Outlet controls BMP's may include rip rap installation where necessary to control erosion at exit points. Most boat ramp installations will also include the installation of trench drains at the top the ramps to capture runoff from the drive areas and divert it to treatment areas or pass it through a filter "sock". Projects that have sufficient budgets and suitable site conditions may also consider the placement of pervious concrete in lieu of asphalt or concrete driving surfaces. The final grading plans will describe when and where removal of BMP construction sediment control structures (silt fencing, diversion berms etc.) is to be done i.e. establishment of 70% of permanent vegetation. The final part of the stormwater management system is the development of the monitoring or maintenance plan which will describe the frequency of inspection (after every major storm, x's per year etc.) and maintenance (removing sediment from ponds and swales, cleaning or replacing sand filter beds, replacing sediment "sock" in trench drain) and what actions to take when the system has been reduced in efficiency or has failed.

In addition, while no analysis has been completed to evaluate how the improvements to the Frank Pate boat ramp may affect future use by recreators, the FWC does, on occasion, recommend the installation of seagrass information signs (Caution: Seagrass) in shallow waters around dredged channels or in areas affected by human activities where seagrass habitats are present. FWC's Boating and Waterways unit, part of the Division of Law Enforcement, lacks authority to permit regulatory signs for natural resource protection, but it has the authority to permit informational signs. Generally, seagrass informational signs are installed in waters along a 3' contour adjacent to shallow seagrass beds in order to warn boaters of the potential for running a ground or striking the bottom and damaging seagrass. This is not always recommended for permitted projects, but it is often employed when attempting to prevent damage by boaters along dredged channels and from boating access corridors.

Figure 4 provides examples of the approved informational signs that FWC can recommend along with the critieria such signage must meet (see the Florida administrative code section on waterway markers for reference - 68D-23 - 10-2006).

Figure 4. Example of FWC approved sea grass signage.

USCG & FWC Approved Signage for Marking Seagrass Areas

These drawings represent the approved methods for posting seagrass beds, *in a non-regulatory manner*

"Buoy on a Stick" - This is a hollow buoy; it must always float in the water, traversing the PVC pipe with the tide. Must be secured from PVC to buoy by chain and/or cable.

"Pile with Sign" - This method would entail the use of at least a 3' x 4' sign board.

"Collared Buoy" - This method would be used in areas where the water is shallow, the collar type buoy will assist in maintaining upright position.

All borders must be International Orange. Signage background will be of reflective white material, and @ least 3'x4'

All characters must be black block a minimum of 1" in height.

Collared Buoys and "Bouys on a Stick" must extend at least 36" above the waterline.

Failure to adhere to these specifications will result in revocation of your permit

As part of the project implementation, FWC and DEP will evaluate whether a recommendation for placing such informational seagrass signage should be made to the public authorities operating the boat ramp in order to ensure sea grass habitat is protected.

It is expected that the in-water work associated with this project would last no more than 3 months.

Conclusion

The project is not likely to adversely affect EFH. The proposed dock construction will take place adjacent to the existing boat ramp extending its length. A very small area of subtidal habitat will be converted with the placing of pilings for the expanded dock, however, this will take place

directly adjacent to the boat ramp, where the habitat is already likely to be significantly disturbed as a result of both the boat traffic to and from the boat ramp and use of the existing boat launch structure and shoreline habitat. Disturbance to species will be minor and brief and during construction and adjacent areas with equivalent or better habitat will be available and undisturbed allowing organisms to move away from disturbed areas.

References

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers/National Marine Fisheries Service. 2001. *Construction Guidelines in Florida for Minor Piling-Supported Structures Constructed in or over Submerged Aquatic Vegetation (SAV), Marsh or Mangrove Habitat.* August.