Determination of Effect on Essential Fish Habitat from Florida FWC Strategic Boat Access: City of Mexico Beach Marina 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 Mexico Beach Canal Park boat ramp in the City of Mexico Beach. The proposed improvements include replacing the boardwalk dock with a concrete surface and increasing the width, removing and replacing eighteen existing finger piers, and repairing portions the existing retaining wall. Figure 1 illustrates the project area and Figure 2 illustrates the project and surrounding area.

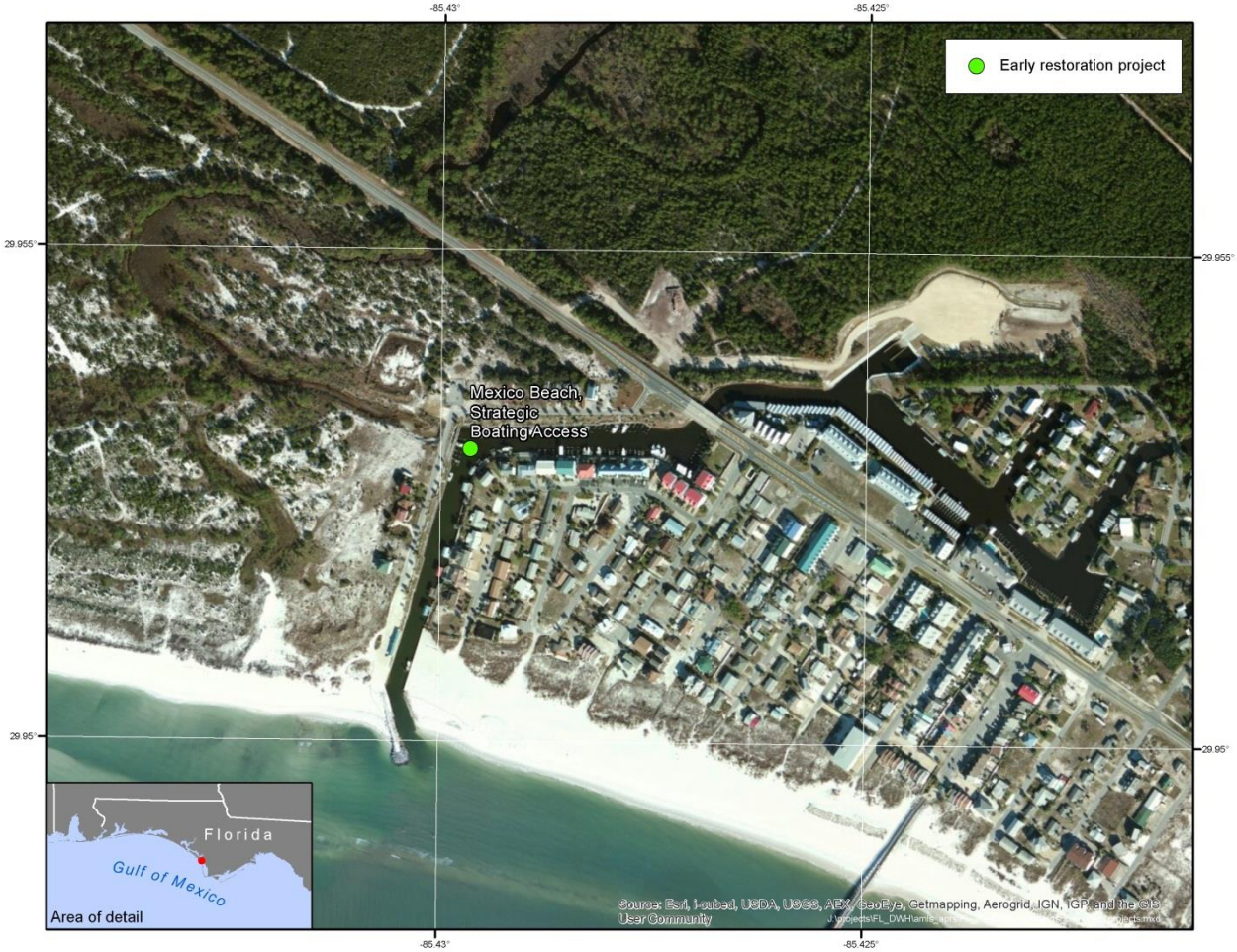

Figure 1. Location of the FWC Strategic Boat Access, Mexico Beach Marina project.

Figure 2. Location of the FWC Strategic Boat Access, Mexico Beach Marina project and surrounding 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.html*. 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. Designated Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) in the proposed project area.

EFH_Category	Species

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 - Juv
	Finetooth Shark - Neonate
	Great Hammerhead Shark - All
	Lemon Shark - Juvenile
	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
Coastal Migratory Pelagics of the Gulf of Mexico AND South Atlantic	Cobia
	King Mackerel
	Spanish Mackerel
Gulf of Mexico Shrimp	Brown Shrimp
	Pink Shrimp
	Rock Shrimp
	Royal Red Shrimp
	Seabob Shrimp
	White Shrimp
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

Assessment of effects to EFH

Restoration actions at the Mexico Beach Marina are expected to have no to minor impacts to EFH. In consultation with the project engineer, it was determined that only approximately 50 feet of the planned project in the southwest portion of the marina intersects with designated EFH, see Figure 3. The portion of the overall project work that would take place in this overlapping area with identified EFH includes replacing approximately 50 feet of existing retaining wall in the marina. The remaining project work include repairing old boat slip piers, constructing new boat slip piers, repairing the existing boardwalk, and repairing the existing seawall would take place in the portion of the marina that does not intersect with identified EFH. Figure 4 provides additional views of the existing project area.

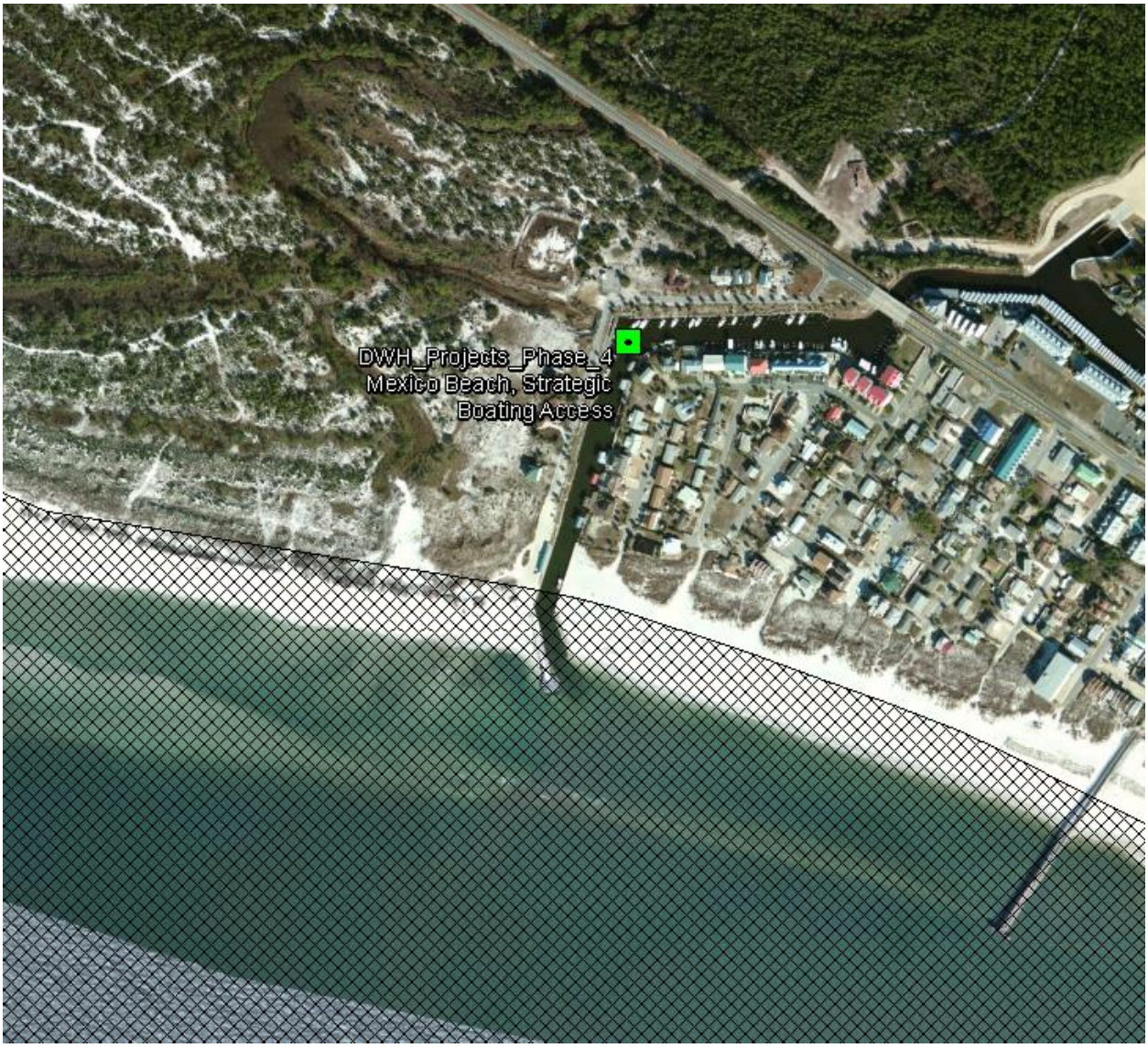

Figure 3. A depiction of the project area showing the extent of EFH (cross-hatched area) and the general location of the Mexico Beach marina project area. This figure illustrates the developed nature of the project area and that there is a minimal area of overlap with the marina and designated EFH.

Figure 4. Views of portions of the existing boardwalk and boat slips at the Mexico Beach marina (note areas shown are outside of the EFH area in Figure 3).

Project work in the area where the EFH overlaps project activities is not expected to convert any EFH based on the focus of replacing an existing retaining wall. Further, given that the majority of project work is located outside of EFH and that work will be completed within the existing marina facility, which is actively used for boat launching and storage and surrounded by other marina facilities, it is unlikely that the area affected by the project work currently provides high-quality habitat.

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 planned project work (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. During construction, adjacent areas with equivalent or better habitat will be available and undisturbed and organisms could move away from disturbed areas.

Conclusion

The project is not likely to adversely affect EFH. The proposed work in the EFH area will take effectively reflects maintenance of the existing structure (retaining wall). As a result, disturbance to species will be limited in their spatial extent, minor in scope, and brief in duration.