Subject: DWH-Early Restoration- Essential Fish Habitat Consultation Initiation-FWC Strategic Boat Access: Walton County, Lafayette Creek Boat Dock Improvements Project-Florida
From: Jamie Schubert-NOAA Federal <jamie.schubert@noaa.gov>
Date: 2/26/2014 3:49 PM
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Mr. Thompson,
Attached is the Essential Fish Habitat Assessment for the **FWC Strategic Boat Access: Walton County, Lafayette Creek Boat Dock 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 (March 28, 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
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Attachments:

DWH-ER-EFH-FWC.Boat.Ramps.Walton.Lafayette.Creek.2014-02-13.docx	2.8 MB

Determination of Effect on Essential Fish Habitat from Florida FWC Strategic Boat Access: Walton County, Lafayette Creek Boat Dock 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 Lafayette Creek boat dock in Walton County. The boat dock would be extended by 400 feet at the boat ramp to accommodate larger vessels and additional vessels. Figure 1 illustrates the location of the project area. Figure 2 illustrates the project location and the surrounding area.

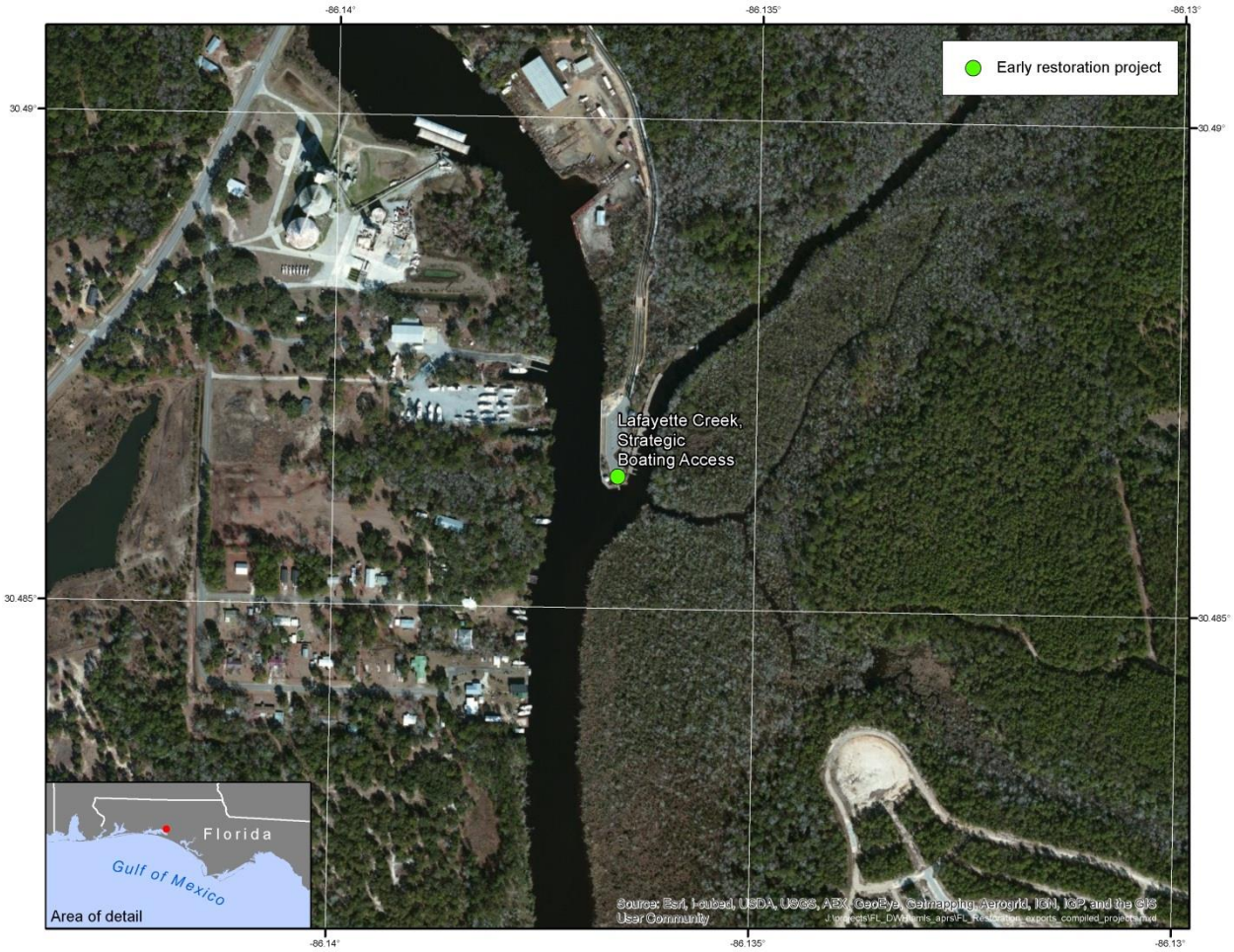

Figure 1. Walton County Lafayette Creek boat ramp project area.

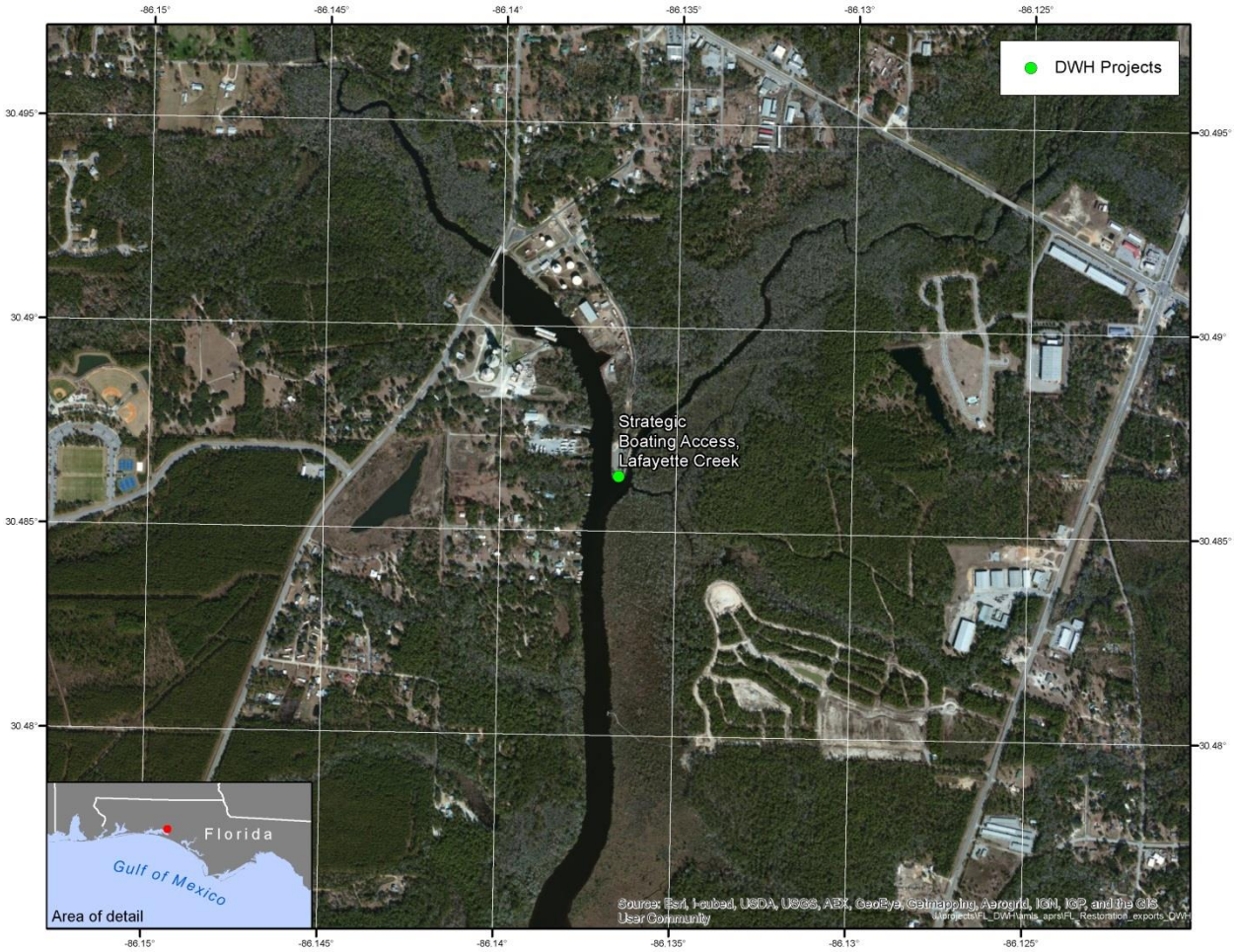

Figure 2. Walton County Lafayette Creek boat ramp project location and surrounding area.

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
Coastal Migratory Pelagics of the Gulf of Mexico AND South Atlantic	
	Cobia
	King Mackerel

	Spanish Mackerel
Gulf of Mexico Red Drum	
	Red Drum
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 Walton County, Lafayette Creek boat ramp are expected to have no to minor impacts on EFH. The proposed work includes expanding the existing dock near the boat ramp to accommodate more and larger vessels. 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 with a large dock structure it is unlikely that the area affected by the dock expansion with the project area currently provides high quality habitat.

The proposed dock expansion will be approximately 400 linear feet (the exact dimensions have not yet been finalized and will be provided in final project design documents), which is relatively small. The expansion will lengthen the existing boarding dock 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 in a similar fashion.

Figures 3 and 4 provide a sense of the project surroundings.

Figure 3. A photo of the existing boat ramp and dock.

Figure 4. A photo of other structures present at the Lafayette Creek boat ramp facility.

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 expanding 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. 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 dock construction will take place adjacent to the existing boat ramp. A very small area of benthic habitat may 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.