

Subject: DWH-Early Restoration- Essential Fish Habitat Consultation Initiation-Florida Wakulla County Mashas Sands Park Improvements project

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Date: 3/13/2014 2:35 PM

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Mr. Thompson,

Attached is the Essential Fish Habitat Assessment for the Florida Wakulla County Mashas Sands Park 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 (April 14, 2014) please let me know.

If you have any questions or require additional information, please contact me at [409-621-1248](tel:409-621-1248) or at jamie.schubert@noaa.gov.

Thanks,

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— Attachments: —

DWH-ER-EFH-Wakulla-Mashes-Sands-Improvement-2014-02-14 (2).docx

1.2 MB

Determination of Effect on Essential Fish Habitat from Florida Wakulla County Mashes Sands Park 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 Wakulla County Mashes Sands Park Improvements project would improve recreation areas at the Wakulla County Mashes Sands Park. The proposed improvements include constructing observation platforms, boardwalks and walking paths, improving the boat ramp area and picnic areas, renovating the parking area and the restroom facility, and constructing a canoe/kayak launch site. Most work would be completed in the uplands; however, the proposed boat ramp improvements could include some in-water work. Figure 1 illustrates the general project location with respect to the coast while Figure 2 provides additional detail with respect to the project location and area of expected activity.

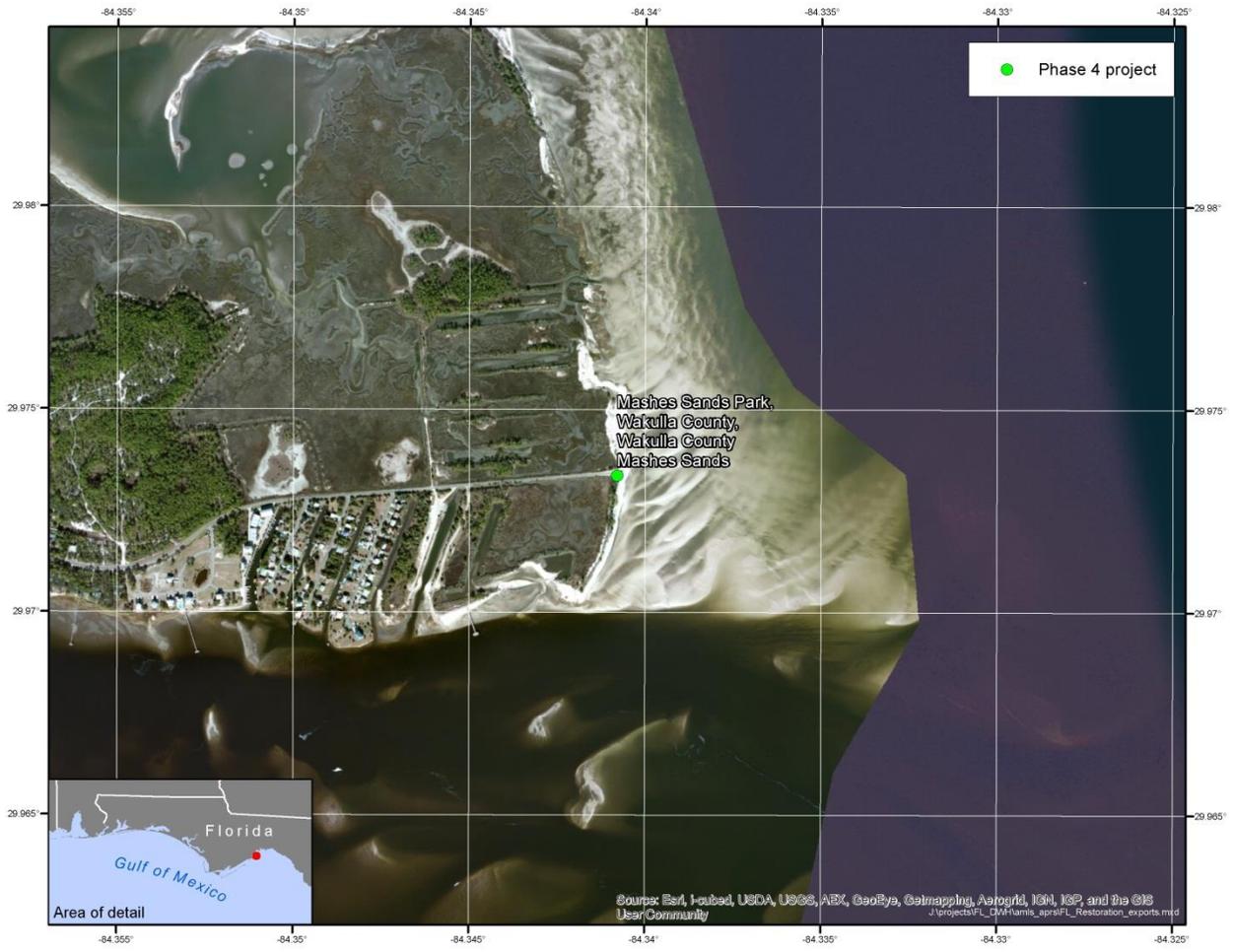


Figure 1. General location of envisioned Mashes Sands Park Improvements Project.



Figure 2. Detailed location and area of envisioned activity for the proposed Mashles Sands Park Improvements Project.

Federally managed fisheries and EFH (develop table from

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. Federally Managed Fisheries with 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 - Adult
	Great Hammerhead Shark - All
	Lemon Shark - Adult
	Nurse Shark - Juvenile
	Scalloped Hammerhead Shark - Juvenile
	Scalloped Hammerhead Shark - Neonate
	Tiger Shark - Juvenile
Coastal Migratory Pelagics of the Gulf of Mexico AND South Atlantic	
	Spanish Mackerel
	Cobia
	King Mackerel
Gulf of Mexico Shrimp	
	Pink Shrimp
	Rock Shrimp
	Seabob Shrimp
	White Shrimp
	Brown Shrimp
Reef Fish Resources of the Gulf of Mexico	
	Lane Snapper
	Lesser Amberjack
	Mutton Snapper
	Nassau Grouper

EFH Category	Species
	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
	Almaco Jack
	Banded Rudderfish
	Black Grouper
	Blackfin Snapper
	Blueline Tilefish
	Cubera Snapper
	Gag
	Goldface Tilefish
	Gray (Mangrove) Snapper
	Gray Triggerfish
	Greater Amberjack
	Hogfish

Assessment of effects to EFH

Restoration actions at the Wakulla Mashes Sands Park are expected to have no to minor impacts on EFH. Construction of the new canoe/kayak launch will take place at least partially in water. All other restoration actions – constructing observation platforms, boardwalks, walking paths, picnic areas, and renovating the parking area and restroom – will take place above mean high water and would lack a direct connection to identified essential fish habitat management areas.

Construction of the canoe/kayak launch will convert a small area that potentially provides habitat to a less favorable condition by converting a small area of shoreline from natural substrate to a hard-surfaced boat launch. The proposed boat launch will be relatively small, designed for

launching human powered vessels only. The exact dimensions have not yet been finalized and will be provided in the final project design documents. The new boat launch will be located at the northern end of the activity area in Figure 2 where the dirt road meets the tidal stream. This launch will be constructed within the existing Wakulla Mashes Sands Park boundaries, which includes other recreational facilities and an existing boat ramp designed for launching larger vessels. 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.

Figure 3 shows some of the existing infrastructure which would be improved as part of the restoration.



Figure 3. Example of existing infrastructure and Mashes Sands Park (south portion of activity area from Figure 2).

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 constructing the new canoe/kayak launch 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 canoe/kayak launch construction will take place adjacent to the existing boat ramp. A very small area of subtidal habitat may be converted by constructing a hard-surfaced boat launch, however, this will take place near the existing boat launch designed for larger vessels, 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.