Determination of Effect on Essential Fish Habitat from Florida Navarre Beach Park Coastal Access 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 Navarre Beach Park Coastal Access project would construct new infrastructure to increase the public's opportunities to safely access coastal resources including the beach and waters of Santa Rosa Sound. The project includes design and construction of two new beach access boardwalks from existing pavilion/parking lot areas to the Santa Rosa Sound. Additionally, a new kayak/canoe launch would be constructed to increase opportunities/access for recreational boating in the waters of the Sound. The project would also restore a roughly 1 acre area of degraded dune habitat to enhance the recreational experience by helping return the area to a more natural state. This restoration would involve planting gaps in the existing dune within the project area. All plants will be grown from seeds or cuttings from the Alabama or North Florida coast to ensure appropriate genetic stocks are used in the project. See Figure 1 for the project location and Figure 2 for a conceptual design of the proposed project highlighting the new access structures and the area for dune restoration.

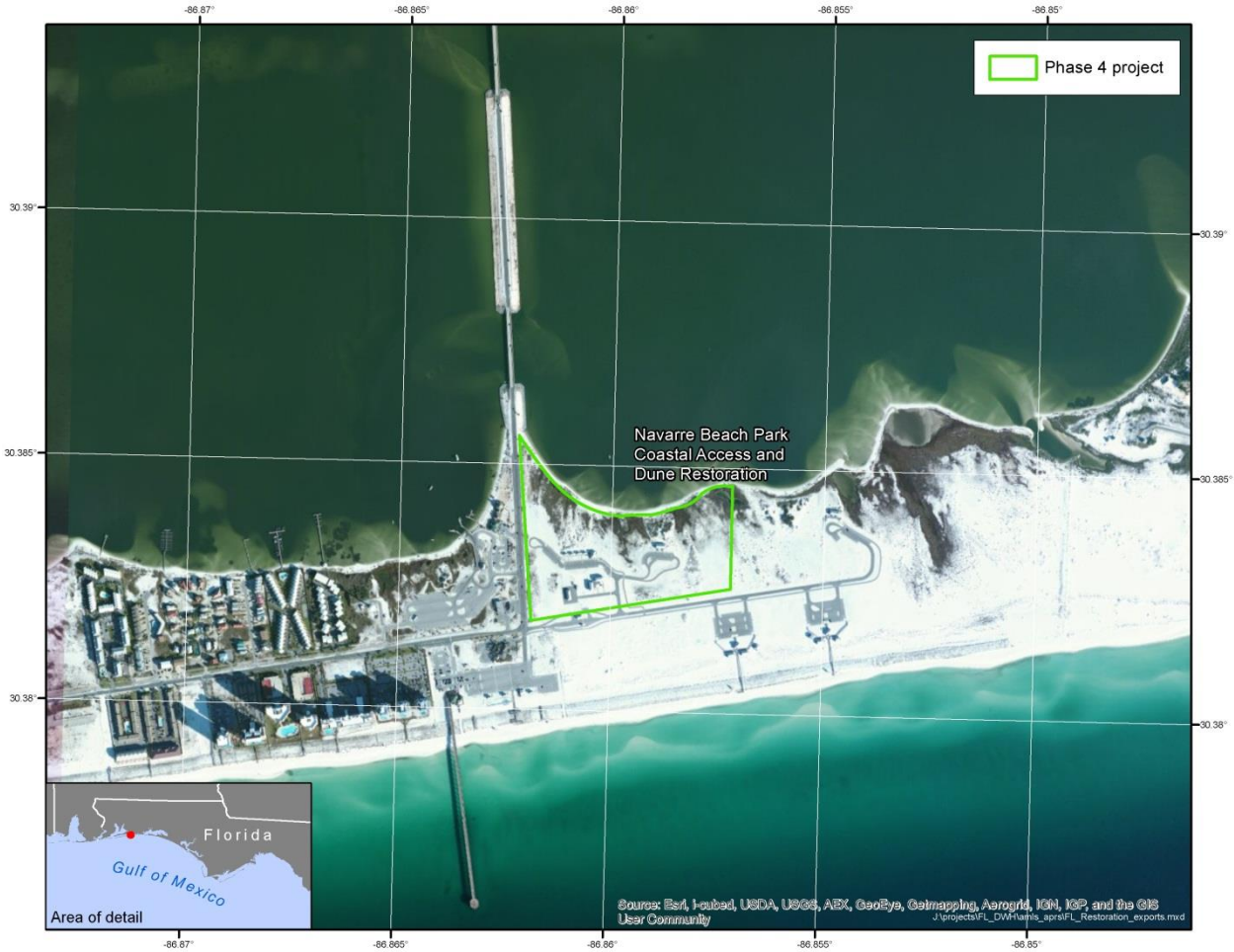

Figure 1. Location of the Navarre Beach Park Coastal Access project.

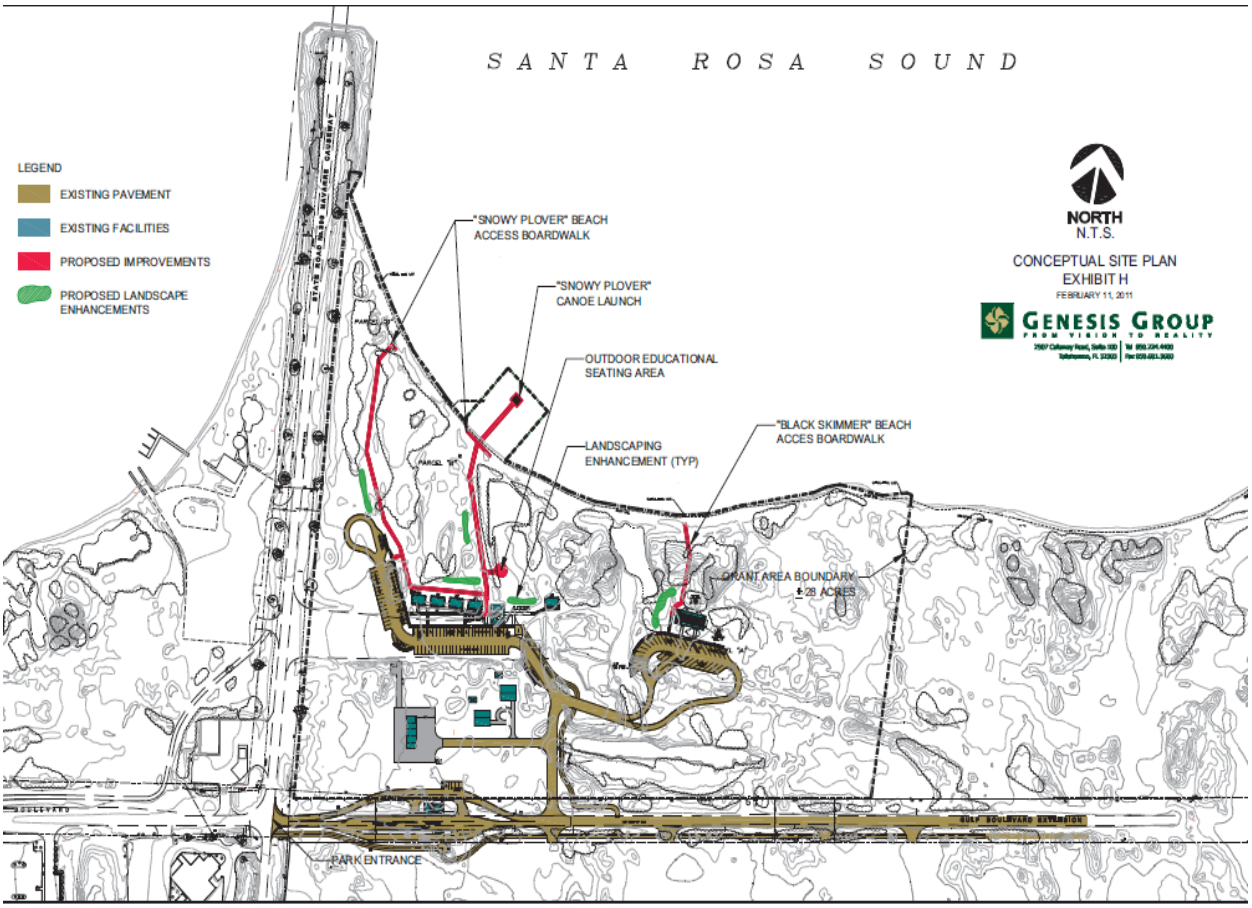

Figure 2. Conceptual plan for the proposed Navarre Beach Park Coastal Access Project.

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*. 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 species with designated Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) in the proposed project area.

EFH Category	Species
Atlantic Highly Migratory Species	
	Atlantic Sharpnose Shark-Neonate
	Bull Shark-Adult
	Bull Shark-Juvenile
	Sandbar Shark-Adult

	Scalloped Hammerhead Shark-Neonate
	Silky Shark-All
	Spinner Shark-Adult
	Spinner Shark-Juvenile
	Tiger Shark-Juvenile
Coastal Migratory Pelagics of the Gulf of Mexico AND South Atlantic	
	Spanish Mackerel
	Cobia
	King Mackerel
Gulf of Mexico Red Drum	
	Red Drum
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
	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 Navarre Beach Park are expected to have no to minor impacts to EFH. The work to develop the proposed canoe/kayak launch will take place in-water. All other components of the project – constructing two new beach access boardwalks and dune restoration – will be completed above mean high water and would lack a direct connection to identified EFH management areas.

Construction of the canoe/kayak launch will convert a small area that potentially provides habitat to a less favorable condition by converting some substrate area with the placement of any pilings needed to secure the 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 constructed within the existing Navarre Beach Park boundaries (see Figure 2 for the conceptual design of the project). 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. Further, constructing the new canoe/kayak launch may reduce habitat disturbance in the long-term by providing a designated location where boaters can enter the water. At this time, with no boat launch available, the sediment and shoreline habitat at Navarre Beach Park are likely frequently disturbed by foot traffic and boats entering and exiting the water.

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 will be relatively small. A very small area of subtidal habitat may be converted by constructing the new canoe/kayak launch; however, this will take place where recreational activities are already common and where the habitat is already likely to be disturbed as a result of those activities. The

canoe/kayak launch construction may reduce shoreline habitat disturbance by providing a designated location for launching boats. Disturbance to species will be minor and brief.