

Subject: DWH-Early Restoration- Essential Fish Habitat Consultation Initiation-Florida Scallop Enhancement project

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Date: 3/5/2014 1:31 PM

To: "Mark Thompson (NOAA Federal)" <mark.thompson@noaa.gov>

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Mr. Thompson,

Attached is the Essential Fish Habitat Assessment for the Florida Scallop Enhancement 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 4, 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 Florida Scallop Enhancement project 2014-2-13.docx

853 KB

Determination of Effect on Essential Fish Habitat from Florida Scallop Enhancement 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 Scallop Enhancement project involves enhancing local scallop populations in targeted areas through a combination of the collection and redistribution of naturally-occurring juvenile scallops, potentially supplemented with stocking of juvenile scallops obtained from a commercial scallop hatchery if not enough are collected from the environment. This approach incorporates restoration methods previously developed by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to enhance bay scallop (*Argopecten irradians*) populations in the bays of Florida's Panhandle.

Specifically, the project would enhance local scallop populations in targeted areas (see Figure 1 for potential project locations) through a combination of the annual collection and redistribution of naturally-occurring juvenile scallops, referred to as spat, supplemented with stocking from a commercial scallop hatchery if needed. Figure 2 provides an example of a typical spat collection device being deployed. Harvested spat would subsequently be released into the targeted bays from small workboats (e.g., similar in size to the one pictured in Figure 2) by pouring out a mixture of the spat and seawater into the receiving bay.

In Florida, recreational scallop harvesting is currently legal in the waters of the eastern panhandle through the Big Bend region (from Gulf County through Hernando County). Harvest has been closed in the western Florida Panhandle (Bay County west of the Mexico Beach Canal through Escambia County) since 2002. Commercial scallop harvesting has been prohibited statewide since 1994. Ideally, implementing this project would increase scallop populations in the targeted locations to self-sustaining levels that would support recreational harvests within 3-5 years in Bay County (St. Andrew Bay system) and within 10 years in Escambia and Santa Rosa Counties (Pensacola Bay / Santa Rosa Sound). Scallop populations in Gulf, Franklin, Okaloosa and Walton counties may also be targeted for enhancement to reduce the risk of population collapses in current recreationally harvested areas.

Performance monitoring would evaluate the enhancement of local scallop populations in targeted areas. Specific parameters include the assessment of number of spat per unit area in newly stocked regions of Wakulla, Franklin, Walton, Okaloosa, Santa Rosa, and Escambia counties. These activities would occur for the life of the project, which would be ten years. These assessments would be conducted by Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) under established protocols.

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 potential project implementation areas defined in Figure 1.

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
	Bull Shark - Juvenile
	Finetooth Shark - Adult and Juvenile
	Finetooth Shark - Neonate
	Great Hammerhead Shark - All
	Lemon Shark - Adult
	Lemon Shark - Juvenile

EFH Category	Species
	Lemon Shark - Neonate
	Nurse Shark - Adult
	Nurse Shark - Juvenile
	Sailfish - Juvenile
	Sandbar - Shark Adult
	Sandbar - Shark Neonate
	Scalloped Hammerhead Shark - Adult
	Scalloped Hammerhead Shark - Juvenile
	Scalloped Hammerhead Shark - Neonate
	Silky Shark - All
	Spinner Shark - Adult
	Spinner Shark - Juvenile
	Spinner Shark - Neonate
	Tiger Shark - Juvenile
	Tiger Shark - Neonate
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
	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

EFH Category	Species
	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

The placement of the scallop spat collectors would have no adverse effects to any federally managed species or designated EFH. Spat collectors would be selectively placed in locations with healthy scallop communities designated previously by the Trustees. Best management practices for placement will be followed to minimize impacts. The duration and extent of the disturbance caused by deployment and collection would not significantly interfere with fish or shellfish migration, nesting, or refuge areas since the affected area would be extremely small and adjacent areas of similar habitat will be available and undisturbed, so most organisms could move away from disturbed areas. No adverse impacts to the ecological health of scallop communities are anticipated in locations where spat collectors are deployed.

Redistribution of spat would have only brief and minor effects to any federally managed species or designated EFH. The redistribution would not significantly interfere with migration, nesting, or refuge areas since the disturbance is minimal and adjacent areas of similar habitat will be available and undisturbed, and most organisms could move away from disturbed areas when it occurs. No habitat would be affected in this process. As filter feeders, a successful reintroduction of scallops to potential project areas would likely provide some water quality benefits. The result of the relocation could be a net benefit to the present scallop community, to those species that feed on scallops, and to species that would benefit from improved water quality.

Conclusion

Potential impacts to EFH in the proposed locations for the scallop restoration project have been assessed and it has been determined that the restoration would not adversely affect EFH. There will be no creation or conversion of one EFH habitat type to another. Disturbance to any EFH and federally managed HMS using the habitat will be brief and insignificant with risks further mitigated by following identified best management practices during implementation.

Figure 1. Location of Potential Locations for Activity as part of the Scallop Enhancement for Increased Recreational Fishing Opportunity in the Florida Panhandle Project.

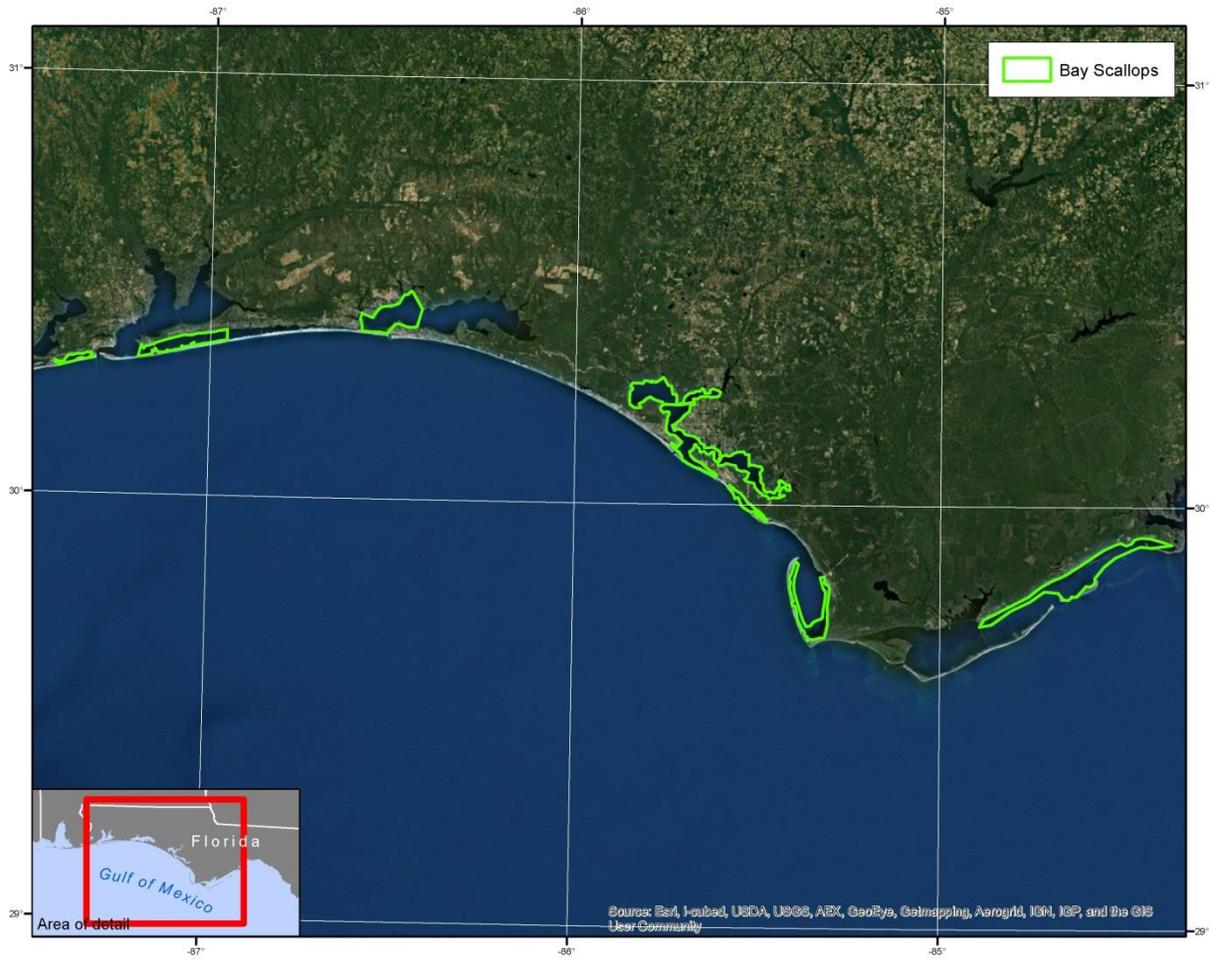


Figure 2. Example of Scallop Spat Collection Device being Deployed

