

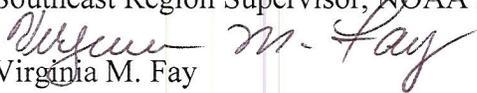


UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
Southeast Regional Office
263 13th Avenue South
St. Petersburg, Florida 33701-5505
<http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov>

April 17, 2014

MEMORANDUM TO: Leslie Craig
Southeast Region Supervisor, NOAA Restoration Center

FROM: 
Virginia M. Fay
Assistant Regional Administrator, Habitat Conservation Division

SUBJECT: Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) assessment review for St. Joseph Bay
Seagrass Recovery project to restore select seagrass beds damaged
by boat traffic in St. Joseph Bay, Gulf County, Florida

In response to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, the St. Joseph Bay Seagrass Recovery Project would restore select shallow seagrass beds in the Florida Panhandle that were damaged by boat traffic. Restoration will occur over approximately two acres of existing seagrass propeller scars located primarily in turtlegrass (*Thalassia testudinum*) habitats in St. Joseph Bay Aquatic Preserve in Gulf County. Should additional sites be needed outside of St. Joseph Bay to meet this acreage goal, disturbed seagrass areas in Alligator Harbor Aquatic Preserve in Franklin County and St. Andrews Aquatic Preserve in Bay County will be evaluated and restored. Estuarine water column and sand substrates will be impacted and are identified and described as EFH under provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act).

As specified in the Magnuson-Stevens Act, EFH consultation is required for federal actions which may adversely affect EFH. As the federal action agency, NOAA's Restoration Center prepared an EFH assessment and provided that document for our review by electronic mail dated March 3, 2014. The Southeast Region's Habitat Conservation Division (SER HCD) has reviewed the EFH assessment and finds the Restoration Center adequately evaluated potential project impacts to the federally managed species occurring within the influence of the project. We concur with the EFH assessment that adverse impacts to EFH related to project construction will be minimal and may result in net benefits. The SER HCD has no EFH conservation recommendations to provide pursuant to Section 305(b)(2) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act at this time. Further consultation is not necessary unless future modifications are proposed and such actions may result in adverse impacts to EFH.

cc:
F/SER-Giordano
F/HC3-Schubert
F/SER4-Dale
F/SER46-Thompson

