CONSTRUCTION GUIDELINES: EXPLOSIVES

Environmental mitigation should be a part of every blasting plan and include appropriate measures identified in the risk assessment for the species and habitats found in the project area. For common activities requiring explosives, such as oil and gas structure decommissioning, some standard recommendations have been developed in coordination with NMFS. A "suite" of measures that applies to all the protected species found in a project area is desirable for flexibility in project planning, as well as for species-specific management needs. Because fish are not readily observable, visual surveys alone cannot avoid impacts; therefore, additional mitigation should be considered when protected species of fish are present in a project area. The suite of measures below should be considered when preparing protected species mitigation measures for blasting plans. Implementation of these measures does not necessarily ensure that all impacts will be avoided. Project-specific recommendations may be discussed during consultation with NMFS.

1. Establish zones of influence based upon protected species found in the project area, using an appropriate model.

2. The lowest net explosive weight[1] (NEW) per detonation should be used to complete the work for a particular construction, severance, or demolition activity. Using smaller NEWs is associated with smaller impact zones where protected species (listed species and marine mammals) could be harmed. Shaped and fracturing charge designs are being developed and refined by the demolition industry that increase the efficiency of the work, resulting in smaller NEWs than for "bulk" charges. Water gel explosives have a lower detonation velocity, generating less shock energy than some other high-detonation velocity explosives (e.g., dynamite) and have lesser impacts on aquatic animals.

3. The use of delays should be maximized between individual blasts to separate the total NEW into a blast episode, creating a series of discrete, consecutive blasts. A blast episode consists of a single blast or a series of blasts that are detonated with a delay to lower the overpressure at a received distance in the environment. Discrete detonations using delays effectively reduce the zones of influence. For delay intervals less than 25 milliseconds (ms), NMFS recommends that zones of influence for protected species be estimated by calculating the distances for the summed explosive weight detonated per 25 ms period.

4. The use of bubble curtains, physical barriers, and other mitigation techniques to dampen the shock wave from detonations should be considered. The effectiveness of mitigation techniques may vary depending on the environment (e.g., currents and water depth), number and NEW of the explosives used, and other project details. Bubble curtains dampen or attenuate the sound transmitted through the bubble curtain. A bubble curtain for explosives may consist of shock-resistant materials at various depths and distances

1 Net Explosive Weight - The actual weight in pounds of explosive mixtures or compounds, including the trinitrotoluene equivalent of energetic material, that is used in determination of explosive limits and explosive quantity data arcs.

from an explosion. The bubble curtain should be effective at reducing pressure to levels below those resulting in harm to the species found in the project area.

5. The perimeter of impact zones should be established and demarcated (e.g., with landmarks or brightly colored buoys) for visual reference when conditions permit. Land- or ship-based observations may use binoculars and the naked eye to monitor the zones of influence. Fixed focus, vector binoculars are useful to establish distance from the project site and identify species. When aerial surveys are proposed, an aerial survey plan should be submitted to NMFS for approval with the mitigation plan.

6. Qualified observers should be used that have completed an approved training program to monitor the zones of influence. Each observer should be equipped with a two-way radio dedicated to protected species communication, polarized sunglasses, binoculars, a red flag or other backup communication, and any necessary data recording equipment.

7. Monitoring should be conducted from the highest vantage point(s) and/or other locations that provide the best, clear view of the entire zone of influence. These vantage points may be on the structure being removed or on nearby surface vessels such as crew boats.

8. A sufficient number of observers should be used to effectively monitor the established zones of influence under variable charge sizes and environmental conditions. The number of observers used may be dependent on numerous factors including whether aerial or vessel/shore-based observations are used, the size of the zones of influences, distance from shore, sea state, and observer fatigue.

9. For large zones of influence, or to augment visual observations, passive acoustic monitoring may be utilized to detect vocal species of marine mammals when animals are not readily observable at the surface. However, passive listening should not be used as a replacement for an adequate number of visual observers.

10. If divers are used during the demolition, they should be instructed to scan subsurface areas around the removal site for the presence/absence of protected species during the course of removal operations.

11. The chief observer should have authority to immediately halt activities should a protected species be observed within the impact zone, or is in the watch zone and in imminent danger of injury by heading toward the impact zone.

12. Surveys should be conducted before and after each blast episode. The duration and method of surveys should be determined in consultation with NMFS. Post-detonation observations are to start at the removal site and proceed in the direction of wind and current movement from the blast location.

13. Surface and/or aerial protected species surveys should be conducted in environmental conditions adequate for effective visual observation. Aerial surveys should be conducted during daylight hours and cease when marine conditions are not adequate for visual

observations, or when the pilot/removal supervisor determines that helicopter operations must be suspended. Detonations should be delayed until conditions improve sufficiently for monitoring to be effectively completed.

14. When a protected species is sighted or heard within the impact zone, detonations should be postponed until it is verified to be outside of the impact zone.

15. Blasting should be limited to daylight hours (between one hour after sunrise and one hour before sunset). If pre-detonation and post-detonation surveys are to be conducted, pre-detonation surveys shall not begin prior to sunrise and detonations must not occur if the post-detonation survey cannot be concluded prior to sunset.

16. Detonation of scare charges to intentionally harass sea turtles or marine mammals into leaving a project area is prohibited. Scare charges using detonation cord are potentially harmful to fishes (California Department of Fish and Game 2002) if the mass of the explosives is not considered. In some cases, scare charges may be necessary to reduce the risk of mortality to sturgeon and smalltooth sawfish in the immediate area of a blast. Detonation caps not exceeding 0.5 g (Collins et al. 2001) may be approved on a case-by-case basis for use as scare charges for sturgeon and smalltooth sawfish. Scare charges not exceeding 0.5 g are also recommended to avoid the attraction of marine mammals, sea turtles, and piscivorous fishes that are stunned or wounded by the scare charge.

17. All protected species entering the impact zone should be allowed to move out of the area under their own volition. Enticing marine mammals to bow-ride or intentionally harassing animals into leaving the area is prohibited.

18. All “shock-tubes" and detonation wires should be recovered and removed after each blast.

19. The chief observer should submit a post-project report within 30 days of completion of the project to the permitting agency. The report should include project information, including but not limited to, a description of the project and explosives used, survey information, environmental conditions, and observations of protected species. Reports should be available to NMFS upon request.

20. Report dead or injured protected species to your local stranding network contacts. A list of sea turtle stranding responders is available at http://www.sefsc.noaa.gov/seaturtleSTSSN.jsp.
    A list of marine mammal stranding network responders for each state is available at http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/health/networks.htm or may be reported to the marine mammal stranding hotline at 877-433-8299.
    All other dead or injured protected species should be reported to NMFS’ Southeast Regional Office by telephone at (727) 824-5312, or by FAX at (727) 824-5309.

Additional Considerations
The following mitigation measures may be recommended under some circumstances to avoid impacts to important habitats and behaviors of protected species.

1. Avoid blasting techniques in regions that may affect any primary constituent elements of critical habitat designated for a listed species.

2. When blasting in inshore habitats, blasting should be conducted at low tide, above the water line to reduce the transmission of energy into the water column.

3. Sequence work to minimize impacts to biologically important areas such as migration corridors, important foraging areas, spawning habitats, near nesting beaches, calving areas, or in juvenile or developmental habitats protected species. These considerations may involve temporal or seasonal considerations when blasting in biologically important habitats.

4. No debris from the blasting operations should be left on the seafloor unless the structure is to be decommissioned as an artificial reef. The amount of debris scattered by blasting should be minimized to the greatest extent practicable (e.g., the use of blast mats). Methods should be used to minimize benthic and habitat disturbances such as removing structures below the mudline, use of blasting mats, and removing debris off the seafloor with appropriate methods, and in consultation with NMFS.

Summary of Information Required

A complete description of the activity and an assessment of impacts to protected species from explosives should be submitted with a request for consultation or incidental take authorization to NMFS. NMFS may also consider other actions associated with the use of explosives that may affect protected species such as vessel traffic, dredging, construction noise, effects on habitat quality, and other potential effects of the action. Any additional activities that may result in impacts to protected species or those identified in consultation with NMFS should also be identified. An analysis of all activity components that may affect protected species should be conducted, and those resulting in potentially adverse affects identified. For explosives use, a detailed blasting plan should be submitted with, or integrated within the impact analysis for a particular activity. The information needed for NMFS to assess activities using explosives includes:

- A description of the types of targets or structures on which explosives will be used;
- The type of explosives used;
- Details of the use of delays, stemming, charge placement, and depth of detonation;
- The total number of detonations or detonation sequences for the project, and number per day;
- The maximum explosive weight detonated per 25 ms period for each detonation sequence;
- The number of delays used and delay time for each detonation sequence;
- The time of year (months) the blasting is planned; and

- The total number of days blasting is expected to occur;
- A description of habitat in which explosives will be used including depth, salinity, water temperature, substrate type, and biota;
- A description of protected species and habitat in the project area;
- A summary of potential effects to species and habitat from the activity;
- An estimation of the zones of influence to protected species indicating the method by which they were calculated. Models and mitigation methods may be approved on a case-by-case basis, or as new information becomes available regarding blast modeling or exposure criteria for protected species;
- An analysis of effects to protected species;
- An analysis of effects on protected species habitats and primary constituent elements (PCEs) of any critical habitat, if designated in the project area;
- A proposed mitigation/monitoring plan for the project; and
- Observer qualifications

A well-prepared blasting plan can partially fulfill the recommendations for biological assessments (BAs) and environmental assessments (EAs). Guidelines on the preparation of a BAs and EAs, and information regarding Section 7 consultation can be found on the Southeast Regional Office web site at http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/pdf/BA_guide_comboeh081105.pdf.

Information regarding applying for an incidental take authorization under the Marine Mammal Protection Act may be found at http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/permits/incidental.htm.

REFERENCES

California Department of Fish and Game. 2002. Use of Detonation Cord in Lake Davis to Control Population of Northern Pike: Initial Study and Proposed Mitigated Negative Declaration. Technical Report, January 2002.

Collins, M.R., F. Yelverton, and G.F. Revey. 2001. Response of shortnose sturgeon to scare charges. South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, unpublished report.