

From: Chandler, Erin <Erin_Chandler@fws.gov>

Sent: Tuesday, January 30, 2018 11:03 AM

To: VanMouwerik, Mark <Mark_VanMouwerik@nps.gov>; Irick, Kelly A <Kelly_Irick@nps.gov>; Frater, Benjamin <benjamin_frater@fws.gov>; St. Aubin, Channing <channing_staubin@fws.gov>

Subject: Fwd: Discussion Regarding GUIS Asphalt Projects and PKBM Informal Section 7 Consultation

Hi Mark and all,

We reached out to the Panama City Field Office regarding NPS's request on the asphalt removal project, and they support the proposed modifications.

Here's their verbatim response to the proposed revegetation strategy modifications:

“After reviewing the photos and re-vegetation summary, our office supports the changes to the consultation. Plants to be installed may focus on "sea oats, beach panic grass, beach elder, coastal bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), and coastal groundcherry (*Physalis angustifolia*)". However, if other plant species are warranted, then additional species should be planted as originally intended. Thus, we do not want GUIS to be limited in their selection process.”

Channing, thanks for responding so quickly to this request. Please extend our gratitude to the other folks in PCFO who reviewed the proposed changes.

Mark, let me know if you have any questions!

Thanks,

Erin

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----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Chandler, Erin** <erin_chandler@fws.gov>

Date: Thu, Jan 18, 2018 at 8:54 AM

Subject: Discussion Regarding GUIS Asphalt Projects and PKBM Informal Section 7 Consultation

To: Benjamin Frater <benjamin_frater@fws.gov>, "Channing St. Aubin" <channing_staubin@fws.gov>

Hi Channing,

NPS has reached out to our office regarding the ongoing GUIAS Asphalt Removal project. They have some questions regarding the informal Section 7 consultation for PKBM on that project, specifically regarding revegetation approaches that were recommended following asphalt removal.

Asphalt removal has been ongoing, and based on what NPS has seen in the field, they are proposing some tweaks to the revegetation approaches from the informal consultation. Mark prepared a summary of the previous consultation and NPS's specific questions/comments. He has also provided some example photos from the removal work.

Ben and I would like to talk those over with you, get your thoughts, and discuss a path forward. Please let me know when you've had a chance to review, and I'll set up a call for our discussion.

Thanks,
Erin

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GULF ISLANDS NATIONAL SEASHORE
BEACH ENHANCEMENT AND ASPHALT REMOVAL PROJECT
US FISH AND WILDLIFE INTRA-SERVICE SECTION 7 INFORMAL CONSULTATION
PERDIDO KEY BEACH MOUSE AND PROJECT REVEGETATION STRATEGY
REFERENCE NUMBER 04EF3000-2014-I-0011
JANUARY 10, 2018

On September 27, 2013, an intra-Service Section 7 informal consultation regarding federally endangered or threatened species for the Beach Enhancement and Asphalt Removal project was requested by Ms. Deborah McClain, Department of Interior Deepwater Horizon Case Manager with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Southeast Regional Office. The proposed project consisted of mechanically removing fragments of asphalt and road-based material that has been scattered over the Perdido Key, Fort Pickens and Santa Rosa Areas of Gulf Islands National Seashore (GUIS). The consultation resulted in a determination of “not likely to adversely affect” (NLAA) the Perdido Key Beach Mouse (PKBM) (*Peromyscus polionotus trissyllepsis*) and PKBM Critical Habitat (CH) based on information presented in the project proposal and on additional comments addressed directly with the National Park Service (USFWS Field Office letter dated November 1, 2013, Reference Number 04EF3000-2014-I-0011).

In September of 2016 a contract was awarded for the project and asphalt removal or cleanup activities were initiated. Currently cleanup activities have occurred at the Fort Pickens and Santa Rosa Areas of the park. The Perdido Key Area is scheduled to be cleaned during the 2018/2019 field season (September 2018 through March 2019). All areas are expected to be cleaned more than once (during more than one field season) due to the dynamic nature of a barrier island and the propensity asphalt debris to “resurface” after wind erosion or severe weather events. Initial estimates indicated that approximately 107 acres needed to be cleaned at Perdido Key within PKBM CH; however, current estimates indicate that less than 50 acres will require cleaning. Survey efforts will begin on January 9, 2018 to determine actual areas and acreages to be cleaned there. Planting efforts and the development of vegetation plans are currently being discussed for the entire project area, including the Perdido Key Area.

Since project implementation, GUIS staff has had the opportunity to observe the cleaning process and mechanized equipment in operation and have a better understanding of actual impacts on vegetation. Based on cleanup efforts at Fort Pickens and currently at Santa Rosa, impacts are not as substantial as originally expected during project planning. Impacted plants are mostly sparsely spaced individuals located in open areas, consist of single runners or are in isolated clumps less than 2-feet by 2-feet in size with little-to-no sand accumulation around them (see separate PowerPoint file showing vegetation in before-after photos).

Based on staff observations and additional information gleaned during project implementation, GUIS is proposing the following minor alterations to the revegetation approach specified in the intra-Service Section 7 informal consultation:

- 1. Section 7 Consultation Notes:** In the information provided to FWS for the section 7 consultation, NPS said “we will re-plant these areas with like numbers of native plants” – within 12 months presumably in the same location.

GUIS Proposed Alteration: GUIS would like to alter this somewhat for three reasons: 1) to improve beach mouse habitat over its current condition, 2) to account for regrowth and voluntary recruitment of native plants, and 3) to optimize conditions for shorebird and seabird nesting, particularly colonial nesting shorebirds such as least terns (*Sternula antillarum*) and black skimmers (*Rynchops niger*). As originally planned, revegetation efforts will involve harvesting plant material, cultivating it as needed, and replanting it in areas that were cleaned and do not warrant re-cleaning. However, plants will *not* always be installed in the exact same locations as where they were before impacted/destroyed. Rather, plants may be replanted much more densely to create landscape features that promote functional habitat (e.g., refugia) connectivity for PKBM (and for beach mice at the Fort Pickens and Santa Rosa cleanup areas). These “vegetation islands” would be in open areas between other densely vegetated areas, including dunes. They could also be immediately adjacent to existing dune features so as to expand the footprint of that feature and minimize gap widths between existing dunes. (Note: this dense planting approach assumes that plants won’t naturally recruit back into the same locations and at the same densities as before they were destroyed; if they do, no replanting will occur in these areas. GUIS staff have observed some plants (e.g. sea oats and beach elder) already recruiting into cleaned areas.)

This approach should not only improve PKBM and other beach mouse habitat, but also optimize nesting conditions for colonial nesting seabirds and shorebirds by maintaining some open sandy areas.

- 2. Section 7 Consultation Notes:** In the information provided to FWS for the section 7 consultation, NPS indicated that a variety of plants would be used in the replanting efforts but specified that any plant impacted may possibly be replanted and noted that beach panic grass and sea oats do very well. NPS has policies that require use of local native plants with the same genetics when replanting.

GUIS Proposed Action: GUIS would like to alter this somewhat to account for annual species that have a large seed bank and regrow naturally; to select a variety of species that produce seeds for PKBM; and to encourage stabilization of PKBM CH. GUIS staff have observed up to 20 different plant species within the project area; species impacted mainly include – in approximate descending order – camphorweed (*Heterotheca subaxillaris*), sea oats (*Uniola paniculata*), beach panic grass (*Panicum amarum*), beach elder (*Iva imbricata*), beach evening primrose (*Oenothera drummondii*) and prostrate spurge (*Chamaesyce maculata*).

Plants to be installed, however, will focus primarily on sea oats, beach panic grass, beach elder, coastal bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), and coastal groundcherry (*Physalis angustifolia*). These species were chosen to provide a diversity of seed-producing species specific to PKBM foraging preferences and/or to encourage stabilization of PKBM CH.

Santa Rosa, Season 17/18. Photo point 2 – NW 9.19.17
16R 3359963 507257



Santa Rosa, Season 17/18. Photo point 2 – NW 12.05.17
16R 3359963 507257



Santa Rosa, Season 17/18. Photo Point 8 – NW 11.06.17
16R 3359155 503126



Santa Rosa, Season 17/18. Photo Point 8 – NW 11.22.17
16R 3359155 503126



Santa Rosa, Season 17/18. Photo Point 10 – N 11.06.17
16R 3359112 503261



Santa Rosa, Season 17/18. Photo Point 10 – N 11.22.17
16R 3359112 503261



Santa Rosa, Season 17/18. Photo Point 11 – E 11.14.17
16R 3359188 502972



Santa Rosa, Season 17/18. Photo Point 11 – E 11.22.17
16R 3359188 502972

