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Revised EFH Determination of Effect for Gulf Islands Natl. Seashore project

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Hello Mark,

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has reviewed the revised "Determination of Effect on Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) for the DWH Bike and Pedestrian Use Enhancements at Davis Bayou in the Gulf Islands National Seashore Project" provided in email request dated August 22, 2019. In response to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, NOAA Restoration Center proposes to fund roadway safety improvements on the Davis Bayou Area of the Gulf Islands National Seashore in Ocean Springs, Mississippi. The proposed work entails the construction of pedestrian/bicycle lanes on Park Road where roadway improvements would impact brackish marsh and water bottoms categorized as EFH under provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act). The National Park Service prepared a Determination of Effect on EFH for the "Bike and Pedestrian Use Enhancements" project on May 29, 2015. NOAA's NMFS Southeast Region Habitat Conservation Division (SER HCD) concurred with the determination in a letter dated June 2, 2015.

The revised Determination of Effect on EFH proposes modifying the approach to EFH mitigation, not modifying the project. While Park Roadway improvements would destroy 0.22 acres of brackish marsh, the minimal marsh creation (1.0:1.5) mitigation requirement would be 0.33 acres in the Davis Bayou Area to compensate for such impacts. The modified approach to EFH mitigation proposes enhancement of a 4.95-acre area of emergent marsh and soft bottom habitat east of Park Road through installation of a new 20-ft long by 32-ft wide bottomless concrete culvert under Park Road. Enhancement of these habitats will mitigate EFH impacts. The new culvert will provide access to red drum and white and brown shrimp by naturally flushing with the ebb and flow of the tides and positively effecting water quality parameters such as salinity, dissolved oxygen, temperature, and turbidity.

The SER HCD has reviewed the revised Determination of Effect on EFH and finds the document adequately evaluates potential project impacts to EFH supportive of a number of federally managed fishery species. The EFH assessment included sufficient information pertaining to the mitigation component of the project to ensure impacts to EFH would be adequately offset. As such, SER HCD concurs with the statements in the EFH assessment and has no EFH conservation recommendations to provide pursuant to Section 305(b)(2) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act at this time. This concludes EFH consultation on this matter unless future modifications are proposed and such actions may result in adverse impacts to EFH.

Thanks,
January

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