

April 17, 2023

Memorandum

To: Compliance Supervisor, Deepwater Horizon Gulf Restoration Office, Fairhope, AL

From: Field Supervisor, Mississippi Ecological Service Field Office

Subject: Informal Consultation for the Proposed Project OO RP2 MDBC Mapping, Ground Truthing, and Predictive Habitat Modeling; OO RP2 MDBC Habitat Assessment and Evaluation; OO RP2 MDBC Coral Propagation Technique Development; OO RP2 MDBC Active Management and Protection; also proposed Open Ocean MAM Activity "Linkages between deep benthic habitats and water column resources", located in the Gulf of Mexico.

This memorandum acknowledges our receipt of your memorandum on February 27, 2023. This response is in accordance with Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.) (ESA). We have reviewed your proposed project(s) and concur with your February 28, 2023, determinations for endangered and threatened species, their critical habitat, and at-risk species (should they become listed). We based our concurrence on the justification below. Where more than one justification was applicable, multiple boxes are checked and additional comments are added.

Endangered, threatened, and at-risk species are not known from and are not expected to occur within the vicinity of the proposed project. Comments: species under the purview of the FWS are not known to occur within the project area.

Appropriate avoidance and minimization measures have been included within the project description to ensure that any effects to listed species (or at-risk species should they become listed) are insignificant or discountable. Comments: avoidance measures to minimize the potential for boat strike with manatees are included in the plans.

Critical habitat is not present on site and does not occur within the vicinity of the proposed project. Comments: The work will not take place within CH areas.

Unless the project description changes, or new information reveals that the effects of the proposed action may affect listed species in a manner or to an extent not considered, or a new species or critical habitat is designated that may be affected by the proposed action, no further action pursuant to the ESA is necessary.

If you have questions, please contact Paul Necaïse at 228-493-6631 or email paul_necaïse@fws.gov