

Habitat Conservation Plan Proposed for Palmas Del Mar Development, Humacao, Puerto Rico

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Habitat Conservation Plan Proposed for Palmas Del Mar in Humacao, Puerto Rico *Plan Is Designed to Help Offset Impacts on 3 Species of Nesting Sea Turtles.*

The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is reviewing a proposed Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) for the renewal and modification of the previous HCP at Palmas Del Mar. The Palmas Homeowners Association (PHA) has requested an incidental take permit for effects to nesting green, leatherback and hawksbill sea turtles by the various coastal developments and beach maintenance. To offset the projects impacts to nesting sea turtles, PHA has proposed a series of mitigation measures to minimize impacts from development lighting on the beach, beach cleanup and maintenance and beach use by residents to aid in the conservation of these species and their habitat.

The Service is requesting public comments on PHA's application during a 30-day comment period. Information is sought on the HCP and the preliminary determination that the plan qualifies as a "Low-Effect" Habitat Conservation Plan. Comments on the proposal can be submitted through April 22, 2016.

PHA has proposed to renew its current 10 year HCP for 6 coastal developments and add five additional developments for a total of 11 coastal development projects. These projects are located in the Palmas Del Mar property located in Humacao, Puerto Rico. Because the sand beaches on the property are known for sea turtle nesting (585 nests in a 10 year period) they have requested a permit for incidental take within the beach areas.

The draft Conservation Plan addresses the potential for take of nesting adult sea turtles or their hatchlings associated with light disorientation from the adjacent developments, beach cleanup and public use of the beach. They have proposed avoidance, minimization and mitigation measures to help compensate for the impacts of the projects.

The Endangered Species Act provides a critical safety net for America's native fish, wildlife and plants. This landmark conservation law has prevented the extinction of hundreds of imperiled species across the nation and promoted the recovery of many others. If implemented, PHA's proposed HCP would manage 2 kilometers of nesting

beach habitat. Other mitigation measures in the proposed HCP include installation of vegetation barriers, beach monitoring, training for beach maintenance crews, retrofitting lighting fixtures, public outreach and education, and submittal of yearly nesting surveys.

The Federal Register notice, and draft HCP are available at <http://www.fws.gov/caribbean/ES/Index.html>

Comments concerning the proposed HCP can be sent by U.S. Mail or email through April 22, 2016 to:

Marelisa Rivera, Deputy Field Supervisor, Caribbean Ecological Service Field Office, PO Box 491, Boquerón, Puerto Rico, 00622; or sent by facsimile to 787-851-7440.

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