

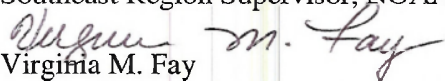


UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
Southeast Regional Office
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St. Petersburg, Florida 33701-5505
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March 5, 2014

MEMORANDUM TO: Leslie Craig
Southeast Region Supervisor, NOAA Restoration Center

FROM: 
Virginia M. Fay
Assistant Regional Administrator, Habitat Conservation Division

SUBJECT: Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) assessment review for the proposed construction and operation of a saltwater sport fish hatchery in Pensacola Bay, Escambia County, Florida.

In response to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWCC) proposes to develop a former industrial site into a saltwater sport fish hatchery and support its operation and maintenance for a period of five years. The facility would release up to five million juvenile red snapper (*Lutjanus campechanus*), red drum (*Sciaenops ocellatus*), and spotted sea trout (*Cynoscion nebulosus*) annually into state waters in the Gulf of Mexico. Estuarine mud, sand, and shell substrates and water column will be impacted by pier construction and saltwater intake for hatchery operations. These habitats are identified and described as EFH under provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act).

As specified in the Magnuson-Stevens Act, EFH consultation is required for federal actions which may adversely affect EFH. As the federal action agency for this matter, NOAA's Restoration Center prepared an EFH assessment for the FWCC and provided that document for our review by electronic mail dated February 26, 2014. The Southeast Region's Habitat Conservation Division (SER HCD) has reviewed the EFH assessment and finds the Restoration Center adequately evaluated potential project impacts to the federally managed species occurring within the influence of the project. The construction of the pier for seawater withdrawal may lead to habitat conversion of EFH on a limited scale. However, the overall development of the hatchery site, including stormwater management and treatment, would likely improve water quality returning to Pensacola Bay relative to current conditions. The SER HCD has no EFH conservation recommendations to provide pursuant to Section 305(b)(2) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act at this time. Further consultation on this matter is not necessary unless future modifications are proposed and such actions may result in adverse impacts to EFH.

cc:
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