



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
Southeast Regional Office
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March 17, 2014

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

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

SUBJECT: Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) assessment review for the Ship
Artificial Reef Project, offshore of Galveston, Texas (Ship Reef
Project)

In response to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, the Ship Reef Project will compensate for lost recreational use caused by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill by providing new offshore recreational fishing and diving opportunities. The Ship Reef Project will create a new reef in a permitted 80-acre artificial reef site (HI-A-424) located in federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico, approximately 67 miles offshore of Galveston, Texas, by placement of a sunken ship onto sandy substrate at a water depth of 135 feet. Offshore marine water column and marine sand substrates will be impacted and 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, NOAA's Restoration Center prepared an EFH assessment and provided that document for our review by electronic mail dated February 20, 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. We concur with the EFH assessment that noise, temporary turbidity impacts, and permanent impacts to soft bottom EFH will occur; however, the provision of new hard structure in the Gulf may also create benefits to some species managed under the Magnuson-Stevens Act by providing foraging habitat, cover, and conditions favorable for encrusting benthic colonization. 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 is not necessary unless future modifications are proposed and such actions may result in adverse impacts to EFH.

cc:
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F/HC3-Schubert
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