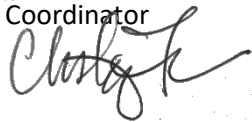




MEMORANDUM FOR: FILE

FROM: Christy Fellas, DWH Environmental Compliance Coordinator  
NOAA Restoration Center, Southeast Region 

DATE: February 24, 2022

SUBJECT: Proposed Project Changes for Coastal Alabama Sea Turtle (CAST)  
Habitat Usage and Population Dynamics Project (ID #130) Approved in  
Alabama TIG Restoration Plan #2 and Environmental Assessment: No  
further compliance reviews needed for ESA, EFH, MMPA

The Implementing Trustee is proposing the following changes to the Coastal Alabama Sea Turtle (CAST) Habitat Usage and Population Dynamics Project (ID #130) approved in the Alabama TIG's Restoration Plan #2 and Environmental Assessment (RP2/EA):

- 1) Add acoustic tags that will be attached to sea turtles with wire and epoxy through holes drilled into the edge of the turtle's shell
- 2) Deploy acoustic receivers in Perdido Bay and the intracoastal waterway to detect the presence of these tagged turtles
- 3) Use receiver arrays deployed by other researchers across the Gulf of Mexico
- 4) Discontinue the use of trawling techniques to collect samples

Based on my review of the project changes and completed compliance reviews, the project changes do not necessitate any further consultation with NMFS under the ESA. The proposed changes are within the existing analysis completed in a biological opinion the issuance of research permit under section 10(a)(1)(A) of the ESA (Permit No. 17304-03). This permit allows the capture, handling and tagging of turtles.

At the time of Alabama TIG RP2/EA, the project was determined not to have any effects on designated EFH, or result in take of marine mammals under the MMPA. The proposed changes do not change these original determinations.

If the project is further modified in a way that could adversely affect protected species and/or habitats under the jurisdiction of NMFS, this determination will be re-evaluated as appropriate.

## Acoustic receiver deployment

Receivers are 308 mm long and 73 mm in diameter (about the size of a Pringles can; see Figure 1). They weigh 50 g in water.

Whenever possible, we will deploy the receiver by attaching it to an already existing structure. For example, we already have permission to attach a receiver to a waterfront home-owner's dock on the northern shore of Bayou St. John. This is an area where we have captured 3 green turtles and observed additional turtles. However, in some areas if we are unable to get permission to attach receivers to existing structures, we may need to anchor the receivers directly to the seafloor. We typically anchor receivers onto sand substrate using a large concrete block and stainless-steel cable. At completion of the project, we will pull the concrete anchor back onto the boat using a winch.

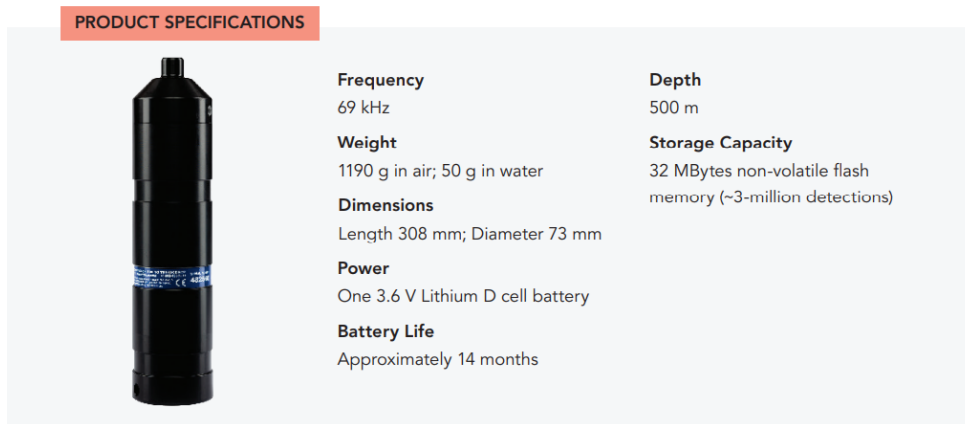


Figure 1. Acoustic receiver image and specifications

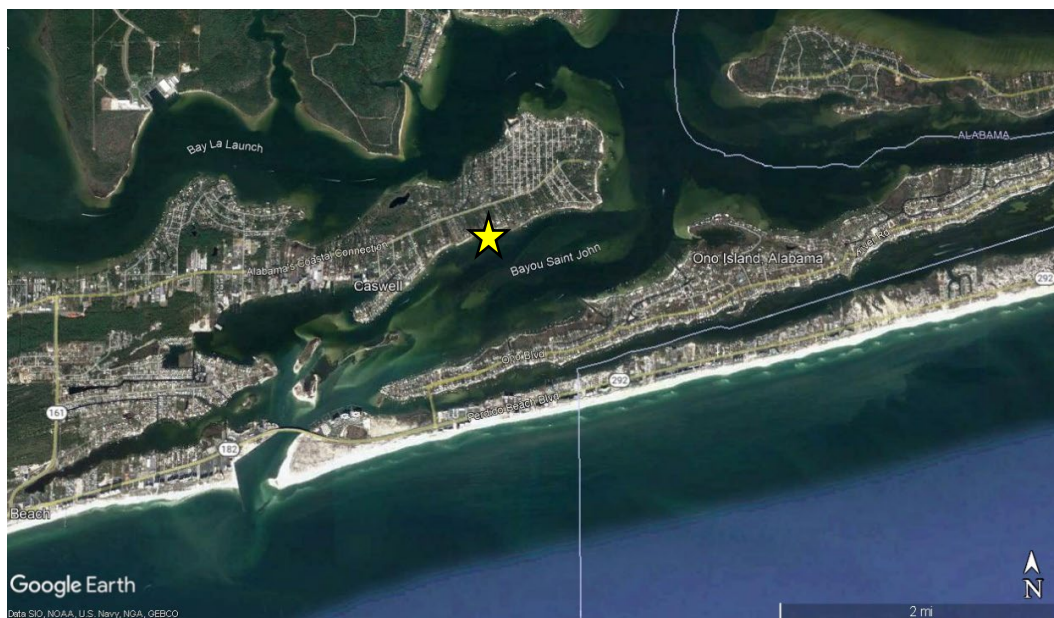


Figure 2. Approximate location of acoustic receiver deployment on a private dock in Bayou St. John.