



## United States Department of the Interior

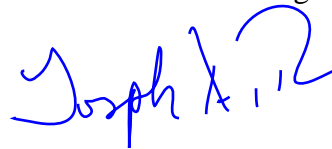
FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
Louisiana Ecological Services  
200 Dulles Drive  
Lafayette, Louisiana 70506



October 15, 2020

### Memorandum

To: Deputy *Deepwater Horizon* Department of the Interior Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration (NRDAR) Case Manager

From: Field Supervisor, Louisiana Ecological Services Office 

Subject: Informal Consultation for the Isle au Pitre Restoration Project

Please reference your August 24, 2020, memorandum requesting our review of the subject project which would be implemented in Louisiana by the Deepwater Horizon NRDAR Louisiana Trustee Implementation Group (LA TIG); and our September 18, 2020, letter, in response to that request. This letter supplements our September 18, 2020, letter. The LA TIG has evaluated this project as a potential restoration project to restore natural resources in Louisiana that were injured as a result of the *Deepwater Horizon (DWH)* oil spill. The Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), Louisiana Ecological Services Office has reviewed the information provided and offers the following comments in accordance with the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973 (87 Stat. 884, as amended; 16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.).

The subject action is an engineering and design project only; thus, no construction activities are proposed. Activities associated with this proposed project may include:

1. Bathymetric and topographic surveys of access channels, dredging areas, and fill areas;
2. Magnetometer surveys;
3. Geotechnical data collection, including borings and/or cone penetrometer tests, possibly in both dredging and fill areas;
4. Other geophysical surveys;
5. Possible probing to confirm pipeline locations/depth of cover;
6. Possible cultural resources surveys; and
7. Oyster surveys, assessments, and appraisals within St. Bernard Parish, Louisiana.

Your office provide a Biological Evaluation (BE), dated August 21, 2020, addressing the potential effects, conservation measures, and justifications of the proposed project and requested our concurrence with your determination of effects on federally listed threatened and endangered species in Louisiana under the Service's jurisdiction.

Piping Plover and Red Knot

The piping plover is a small (7 inches long), pale, sand-colored shorebird that winters in coastal Louisiana and may be present for 8 to 10 months annually. Piping plovers arrive from their northern breeding grounds as early as late July and remain until late March or April. They feed on polychaete marine worms, various crustaceans, insects and their larvae, and bivalve mollusks that they peck from the top of or just beneath the sand. Piping plovers forage on intertidal beaches, mudflats, sand flats, algal flats, and wash-over passes with no or very sparse emergent vegetation. They roost in unvegetated or sparsely vegetated areas, which may have debris, detritus, or micro-topographic relief offering refuge to plovers from high winds and cold weather. They also forage and roost in wrack (e.g., seaweed or other marine vegetation) deposited on beaches. In most areas, wintering piping plovers are dependent on a mosaic of sites distributed throughout the landscape, because the suitability of a particular site for foraging or roosting is dependent on local weather and tidal conditions. Plovers move among sites as environmental conditions change, and studies have indicated that they generally remain within a 2-mile area. Major threats to this species include the loss and degradation of habitat due to development, disturbance by humans and pets, and predation.

The federally threatened red knot (*Calidris canutus rufa*) is a medium-sized shorebird about 9 to 11 inches in length with a disproportionately small head, small eyes, short neck, and short legs. The black bill tapers steadily from a relatively thick base to a relatively fine tip; bill length is not much longer than head length. The legs are typically dark gray to black but are sometimes greenish in juveniles or older birds in non-breeding plumage. Non-breeding plumage is dusky gray above and whitish below. The red knot breeds in the central Canadian arctic but is found in Louisiana during spring and fall migrations and the winter months (generally September through May). During migration and on their wintering grounds, red knots forage along sandy beaches, tidal mudflats, salt marshes, and peat banks. Observations along the Texas coast indicate that red knots forage on beaches, oyster reefs, and exposed bay bottoms, and they roost on high sand flats, reefs, and other sites protected from high tides. In wintering and migration habitats, red knots commonly forage on bivalves, gastropods, and crustaceans. Coquina clams (*Donax variabilis*), a frequent and often important food resource for red knots, are common along many gulf beaches.

Species in the project area may be temporarily disturbed by the noise and vibrations of the proposed work, but these impacts are of short duration and limited in scope. Furthermore, should piping plovers or red knots occur within the project area during construction only a small portion of suitable habitat would be impacted at a time. Therefore, individuals are likely to move to nearby areas of suitable habitat (i.e., within two miles of the site). Based on the information provided, the Service's Louisiana Ecological Services Office concurs with your determination that implementation of the proposed action is not likely to adversely affect the piping plover (and its critical habitat) or the red knot.

#### Loggerhead Sea Turtle and Kemp's Ridely Sea Turtle

Federally listed as a threatened species, loggerhead sea turtles (*Caretta caretta*) nest within the coastal United States from Virginia to Louisiana, with major nesting concentrations occurring on the coastal islands of North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia, and on the Atlantic and Gulf coasts of Florida. Historically in Louisiana, loggerheads have been known to nest on the

Chandeleur Islands and recent data indicate rare nesting attempts along Fourchon Beach in Lafourche Parish. Nesting and hatching dates for the loggerhead in the northern Gulf of Mexico are from May 1 through November 30. Threats to this species include destruction of nesting habitat and drowning in fishing nets.

The endangered Kemp's ridley (*Lepidochelys kempii*) is one of the smallest sea turtles with adults reaching lengths up to 19.5 to 27.5 inches (50 to 70 centimeters) (Ernst and Barbour 1972). Its carapace is heart-shaped or nearly round and is generally wider than it is long. The carapace ranges in color from grayish brown to olive green (Rebel 1974), and the plastron is white in juveniles and yellow in adults. The Kemp's ridley generally has a restricted distribution, and nesting is usually limited to the beaches of the western Gulf of Mexico, primarily in Mexico. However, Kemp's ridley nests have been documented in Texas and Alabama, and nesting attempts were observed on the Chandeleur Islands of Louisiana. The Kemp's ridley nesting season occurs from April through July, and the egg incubation period is approximately 55 days. Kemp's ridleys are coastal inhabitants throughout the Gulf of Mexico and the northwestern Atlantic Ocean, as far north as the Grand Banks and Nova Scotia, Canada. Juveniles and sub-adults occupy shallow, coastal regions and are commonly associated with crab-laden, sandy or muddy water bottoms. They are generally found in near shore areas of the Louisiana coast from May through October. Adults may be abundant near the mouth of the Mississippi River in the spring and summer. Adults and juveniles move offshore to deeper, warmer water during the winter. Between the East Gulf Coast of Texas and the Mississippi River Delta, Kemp's ridleys use near shore waters, ocean sides of jetties, small boat passageways through jetties, and dredged and nondredged channels. They have been observed within both Sabine and Calcasieu Lakes. Major threats to this species include over-exploitation on their nesting beaches, drowning in fishing nets, and pollution.

Loggerhead and Kemp's ridley sea turtles are not known to nest within the proposed project area; in addition, soils are poorly drained, scatlake mucky clay unsuitable for nesting. Based on the above information, the Service's Louisiana Ecological Services Office concurs with your determination that implementation of the proposed action is not likely to adversely affect the loggerhead or Kemp's ridley sea turtles.

The Service's, Louisiana Ecological Services Office appreciates the opportunity to provide comments in the planning stages of this proposed project. If you have questions regarding this letter, please contact Ms. Karen Soileau (337-291-3132) of this office for further assistance.

Copies provided via electronic mail:

LDWF, Wildlife Diversity Program, Baton Rouge, LA