



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Mississippi Field Office
6578 Dogwood View Parkway, Suite A
Jackson, Mississippi 39213



January 26, 2024

IN REPLY REFER TO:
2024-0006880

Benjamin Frater
Department of the Interior
United States Fish and Wildlife Service - Gulf Restoration Office
341 N. Greeno Road
Fairhope, AL 36532

Dear Mr. Frater:

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Mississippi Ecological Services Office (Mississippi ES Office) has reviewed your email dated January 26, 2024, and Biological Evaluation Form, requesting section 7 consultation for the Reducing Marine Debris Impacts on Birds and Sea Turtles project. The project locations include primarily public land consisting of offshore, nearshore, and upland locations in Hancock, Harrison and Jackson Counties, Mississippi. Our comments are submitted in accordance with the Endangered Species Act (87 Stat. 884, as amended; 16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.), Migratory Bird Treaty Act, Marine Mammal Protection Act, and the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act.

The proposed marine debris removal activities outlined in the project description may be implemented in several ways and could include:

- Recurring clean-up events focused on removal of small to medium-sized surface litter/debris on beaches and developed municipal marine areas. Debris removed during these events will be collected by hand.
- Recurring clean-up events focused on removal of debris of any size (surface level or slightly embedded) on Round Island. Debris removed during these events will be primarily collected by hand but may occasionally require the use of mechanical equipment (skid-steer loader or equivalent) if larger pieces of debris are encountered.
- Installation of debris collection devices on existing municipal storm drains, especially on or near the coastline, and recurring removal of accumulated debris.

- Removing marine debris at identified hotspots- Implementing Trustees would provide support (e.g., capacity, equipment, fuel, etc.) for organized, large-scale debris removal events, regularly conducted targeted site-specific events, and/or the use of professional divers or marine salvage crews for in-water debris removal around deep structures. Debris removal may be a one-time event or a multi-event effort depending on the degree/frequency of debris accumulation, impact on birds or sea turtles, cost, and logistics. Debris removal may be conducted in coordination with or to enhance existing marine debris networks (e.g., Gulf coast clean-ups) and/or as additional stand-alone events.
- Monofilament recycling bins may be installed at public piers and boat launches on existing pilings or on paved surfaces. Additionally, similar receptacles may be provided to private or commercial fishing vessels for debris collection and drop-off at central marina locations.
- Public education and outreach efforts will also not involve ground disturbing activities. These activities will primarily take place at organized events or will include the distribution of educational materials.
- Monitoring activities pertaining to all described project implementation activities will include visual assessments and tabulations only.

The Mississippi ES Office concurs with the effects determinations you have made for species and critical habitat areas outlined in the Biological Evaluation Form (BEF) for this project. Additionally, we concur with the conditions and protective measures outlined in the BEF to minimize impacts to species and habitats found within the project area. Further, our office supports the proposed project, and its intent to enhance current and future marine debris removal efforts to improve sea turtle, shorebird, and other fish and wildlife habitat along the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

Consultation should be reinitiated with our office if the scope of the proposed work changes, or new information reveals that the effects of the proposed action may affect listed species in a manner or to an extent not considered, or a new species or critical habitat is designated that may be affected by the proposed action. This concludes consultation on this project. If you have any questions, please contact Paul Necaise in our office, telephone: (228) 493-6631.

Sincerely,

James Austin
Field Supervisor
Mississippi Field Office