



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Florida Ecological Services Office



In Reply Refer To:

April 23, 2026

2026-0080144 Improving Resilience for Oysters by Linking Brood Reefs and Sink Reefs, Florida Component

Memorandum

To: Compliance Supervisor, Gulf Restoration Office, Fairhope, AL

From: Division Supervisor, Environmental Review, Southeast Region, Florida

Digitally signed by CHRISTOPHER PUTNAM
Date: 2026.04.23 16:34:37 -04'00'

Subject: Informal Consultation for the proposed project *Improving Resilience for Oysters by Linking Brood Reefs and Sink Reefs, Florida Component*, Dixie and Levy counties, FL.

This memorandum acknowledges USFWS's receipt of the Gulf Restoration Office's request for consultation and conference letter on April 22, 2026. This response is in accordance with section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.) (ESA). The USFWS has reviewed the Gulf Restoration Office's proposed project and concur with your April 22, 2026, determinations for endangered, threatened, and proposed species. We based our concurrence on the proposed project submissions and justification below. Where more than one justification was applicable, multiple boxes are checked and additional comments are added.

- ☐ Species-specific surveys were conducted and there are no endangered, threatened, or at-risk species or designated critical habitat on site.
- ☐ Endangered, threatened, and at-risk species are not known to be present and are not expected to occur within the vicinity of the proposed project.
- ☒ Appropriate avoidance and minimization measures have been included within the project description to ensure that any effects to listed species (or proposed species should they become listed) are insignificant or discountable.

Applicant has agreed to the following:

- NMFS's *Measures for Reducing Entrapment Risk to Protected Species* (NMFS 2012)
- NMFS's *Southeast U.S. Marine Mammal and Sea Turtle Viewing Guidelines* (NMFS 2014)
- NMFS's *Protected Species Construction Conditions* (NMFS 2021a)
- NMFS's *Vessel Strike Avoidance Measures* (NMFS 2021b)
- *Standard Manatee Conditions for In-water Work, 2011* (FFWCC 2013)
- Vessel operations will maintain a minimum draught of 4'. If water depth is less than 4' between the keel/propeller and the river bottom, vessels will operate at idle/no-wake speeds. In some cases, shallow-draft paddlecraft or low-impact trolling motors may also be used.
- Vessels will travel from existing access points to monitoring sites, following all posted speed zones, or operating at idle/no-wake speeds where speed zones are not posted.

- Field work will occur during daylight hours, and vessel operation will be limited in frequency, duration, and speed, particularly in shallow waters.
 - Standard BMPs for vessel, diver, and equipment use will be implemented.
 - If ESA-listed species are observed entering monitoring sites, activities will temporarily halt until animals leave the area of their own volition.
 - Field crews will visually survey shorebirds prior to initiating work and avoid or delay activities if birds are present.
 - No permanent modifications to substrate, vegetation, or other habitat features will occur.
- ☐ Critical habitat is not present on site and does not occur within the vicinity of the proposed project.
- ☐ Appropriate avoidance and minimization measures have been included within the project description to ensure physical or biological feature(s) (PBF[s]), and/or primary constituent element(s) (PCE[s]), and/or critical habitat will not be adversely modified or destroyed.
- ☐ The proposed project is completely beneficial to the listed or at-risk species and/or critical habitat considered.

As provided in 50 CFR 402.16, consultation must be reinitiated if (1) take occurs, or (2) new information reveals effects of the action not previously considered, or (3) if the identified action is subsequently modified in a manner that causes an effect to the listed species or critical habitat in a manner or to an extent not previously considered, or (4) if a new species is listed or critical habitat designated that may be affected by the action.

If you have any questions regarding this project, please contact Laura Wright, Fish and Wildlife Biologist, at laura_wright@fws.gov or (352) 448-9151.

Literature Cited

- FFWCC. 2013. Standard Manatee Conditions for In-water Work, 2011. State of Florida, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FFWCC), Tallahassee, Florida.
- NMFS. 2012. Measures for Reducing Entrapment Risk to Protected Species, Revised May 22, 2012. U.S. Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Marine Fisheries Service, Southeast Regional Office, Saint Petersburg, Florida.
- NMFS. 2014. Southeast U.S. Marine Mammal and Sea Turtle Viewing Guidelines. U.S. Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Marine Fisheries Service, Southeast Regional Office, Protected Resources Division, St. Petersburg, Florida.
- NMFS. 2021a. Protected Species Construction Conditions. U.S. Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), Southeast Regional Office (SERO) Protected Resources Division (PRD), St. Petersburg, Florida.
- NMFS. 2021b. Vessel Strike Avoidance Measures. U.S. Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Marine Fisheries Service, Southeast Regional Office, Protected Resources Division, Saint Petersburg, Florida.