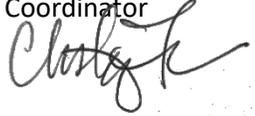




MEMORANDUM FOR: FILE

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

DATE: November 23, 2022

SUBJECT: Florida TIG RP/EA #2: Project Changes to Assessing Risk and Conducting Public Outreach to Reduce Vessel Strikes on Sea Turtles along Florida's Gulf Coast, No Additional ESA, EFH or MMPA Reviews Required

Based on my review of project materials including the change memo (Fall 2022), the NOAA Restoration Center (RC) determined that the project location change does not alter the previous determinations of no effect to species or habitats listed under the Endangered Species Act, designated Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) or animals protected by the Marine Mammal Protection Act under the jurisdiction of National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS).

One of the three original project sites, San Carlos Bay Entrance (Lee County), located just above Fort Myers Beach and east of Sanibel Island, is no longer feasible due to impacts from Hurricane Ian. Given the destruction that occurred in the region, the logistics to conduct research (e.g., availability of accommodation, boat ramps, supplies) continue to be challenging. Further, the waterways are full of debris and in some areas are contaminated. In addition, the destruction caused to the boating community, and the vessels in the region, could bias the initial surveys and not portray what once was a more active boating community.

Therefore, the proposed new site is Big Sarasota Pass/New Pass, located approximately 60 miles north of the San Carlos Bay Entrance site. Big Sarasota Pass and New Pass are separated by Lido Key which is only ~0.4 km, so both passes will be considered one site. The remaining two original project sites, East Pass (Walton County) and Blind Pass (Pinellas County), were not impacted by the hurricane. There are no changes to the project other than the site change.

This project change will not require further evaluation under ESA, EFH or MMPA for species or habitats under the jurisdiction of NMFS. The new site is within the bounds of the analyses made during preparation of Florida TIG RP/EA #2, and permits held to conduct the work include the new location. If the project is further modified in a way that could change these determinations, it will be reevaluated as appropriate.