



Laurie Rounds - NOAA Federal <laurie.rounds@noaa.gov>

State Clearance Letter for FL202410290282C - Open Ocean Trustee Implementation Group Draft Restoration Plan 4 And Environmental Assessment: Fish And Water Column Invertebrates And Sea Turtles, Waters Of Florida

1 message

Stahl, Chris <Chris.Stahl@floridadep.gov>

Mon, Dec 16, 2024 at 12:45 PM

To: Laurie Rounds - NOAA Federal <laurie.rounds@noaa.gov>

Cc: State_Clearinghouse <State.Clearinghouse@dep.state.fl.us>

December 16, 2024

Laurie Rounds

NOAA Restoration Center

[1 Sabine Drive](#)[Gulf Breeze Florida 32561](#)

RE: U.S. Department of the Interior and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Deepwater Horizon Natural Resource Damage Assessment, Open Ocean Trustee Implementation Group Draft Restoration Plan 4 And Environmental Assessment: Fish And Water Column Invertebrates And Sea Turtles, Waters Of Florida

SAI # FL202410290282C

Dear Laurie:

Florida State Clearinghouse staff has reviewed the proposal under the following authorities: Presidential Executive Order 12372; § 403.061(42), Florida Statutes; the Coastal Zone Management Act, 16 U.S.C. §§ 1451-1464, as amended; and the National Environmental Policy Act, 42 U.S.C. §§ 4321-4347, as amended.

Based on the information provided, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission has provided the attached comments on the project and are incorporated herein.

Based on the information submitted and minimal project impacts, the state has no objections to allocation of federal funds for the subject project and, therefore, the funding award is consistent with the Florida Coastal Management Program (FCMP). The state's final concurrence of the project's consistency with the FCMP will be determined during any environmental permitting processes, in accordance with Section 373.428, Florida Statutes, if applicable.

Thank you for the opportunity to review the proposed plan. If you have any questions or need further assistance, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Chris Stahl

Chris Stahl, Coordinator

Florida State Clearinghouse

Florida Department of Environmental Protection

[3900 Commonwealth Blvd.](#), M.S. 47

Tallahassee, FL 32399-2400

ph. (850) 717-9076

Chris.Stahl@floridadep.gov



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SAI FL202410290282C- FWC Response_Draft_11252024.pdf
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850-487-3796
850-921-5786 FAX

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620 South Meridian Street
Tallahassee, Florida
32399-1600
Voice: 850-488-4676

Hearing/speech-impaired:
800-955-8771 (T)
800-955-8770 (V)

MyFWC.com

November 25, 2024

Chris Stahl, Coordinator
Florida State Clearinghouse
Florida Department of Environmental Protection
3800 Commonwealth Blvd., M.S. 47
Tallahassee, FL 32399-2400
Chris.Stahl@floridadep.gov
State.Clearinghouse@floridadep.gov

RE: SAI #FL202410290282C, U.S. Department of the Interior and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration – Deepwater Horizon Natural Resource Damage Assessment, Open Ocean Trustee Implementation Group Draft Restoration Plan 4 and Environmental Assessment: Fish and Water Column Invertebrates and Sea Turtles, Waters of Florida

Dear Mr. Stahl

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) staff have reviewed the Deepwater Horizon Natural Resource Damage Assessment Open Ocean Trustee Implementation Group's (OO TIG) Draft Restoration Plan 4 and Environmental Assessment: Fish and Water Column Invertebrates and Sea Turtles (RP4/EA) and provides the following comments and Recommendations for your consideration in accordance with Chapter 379, Florida Statutes (F.S.), and pursuant to the federal National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the federal Coastal Zone Management Act, and the State of Florida Coastal Management Program.

Project Description

The OO TIG proposes implementing up to 10 restoration projects along Florida's coast. These projects will help address injury from the Deepwater Horizon oil spill and will focus on two restoration types: fish and water column invertebrates, as well as sea turtles. The OO TIG's RP4/EA, which was drafted pursuant to the Oil Pollution Act of 1990 and NEPA, identifies and analyzes these projects.

Comments and Recommendations

FWC staff provides the following comments and recommendations:

3.5.8.ST1, Sea Turtle Nesting Habitat Protection Expansion in Florida (Long Term Nesting Habitat Protection Sea Turtles)

This project proposes to spend \$5,000,000 for project planning, implementation including parcel acquisition and removal of derelict structures, monitoring, oversight, and management.

Protection of sea turtle nesting habitat is vital to maintaining viable sea turtle populations and achieving recovery of these threatened and endangered species. This proposal would target land acquisition in the Archie Carr and Hobe Sound National Wildlife Refuges, areas with some of the most expensive real estate in Florida. FWC Sea Turtle management staff are supportive of this project and offer the following suggestions and comments to ensure maximum success.

Likelihood of Success: Many remaining parcels in both target areas are adjacent to upland developed properties. Activities by adjacent property owners, such as trimming or removing

seaward vegetation, can decrease the value of adjacent nesting beach for successful sea turtle reproduction. The management plan should include clearly defined and enforceable options to address such impacts, as well as sufficient resources and staffing for effective oversight.

Additionally, available lands on Hutchinson Island in St. Lucie and Martin Counties, and undeveloped lands on Manasota Key in Charlotte and Sarasota Counties, should be considered for inclusion in this project.

3.5.9 ST2 Gulf-wide Sea Turtle Bycatch Reduction

A total of \$8,500,000 including project planning, implementation, monitoring, oversight, and management. This project references reducing bycatch in shrimp trawls and commercial hook-and-line fisheries via voluntary implementation of gear modifications and bycatch reduction strategies. Insufficient information is provided for substantive comments. This project is dependent on the willingness of commercial fishers to implement bycatch reduction strategies, which may be informed by results of similar previous projects.

Projects that involve capturing hatchling loggerhead sea turtles in Florida, transporting them to be raised outside of Florida, and then returning to Florida for TED testing trials in the Gulf of Mexico require an FWC permit as well as permits from other states or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

3.5.10 ST3, Gulf-wide Sea Turtle Vessel Strike Reduction

Vessel-strike injuries are often the most frequent mortality factor indicated in Florida sea turtle strandings. This project requests \$3,500,000 for a phased approach with hotspot identification, assessment of risk factors, and implementation of localized outreach and education.

Overall, this is an important issue to address using this funding source. The FWC manages an extensive Sea Turtle Stranding and Salvage network, with its numerous dedicated staff and volunteers dedicated to documenting and tracking such events, would be a valuable partner. Collaborating with existing program staff would improve project integration. Several ongoing projects in Florida also aim to identify vessel strike hotspots:

- Helping to Reduce Sea Turtle Vessel Strikes on Florida's Gulf Coast
 - Organizations: FWC Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute
 - Location: East Pass (Walton County), Blind Pass/Johns Pass (Pinellas County), and Big Sarasota Pass/New Pass (Sarasota County)
 - Funding: Florida TIG Restoration Project
- Sea Turtle Protection Zone Project
 - Organizations: Loggerhead Marinelife Center and Archie Carr Center for Sea Turtle Research
 - Location: one mile offshore from Jupiter Inlet to Lake Worth Inlet, Palm Beach County, March 1 to October 31
 - Funding: Florida Sea Turtle License Plate
- Understanding the exposure of sea turtles to potential impacts of vessel strike in south Florida
 - Organization: Florida State University, Marine Turtle Research, Ecology and Conservation Group
 - Location: Crystal River
 - Funding: National fish and Wildlife Foundation Sea Turtle Program, Florida Sea turtle License Plate

ST4, Gulf-Wide Sea Turtle Stranding Network and Emergency Response Enhancements

A total of \$5,300,000 of ST Restoration funds and \$5,700,000 MAM Allocation are proposed for this project to identify in-water threats and then additional monitoring of these in-water threats. Funds would also support emergency response efforts and provide funding to rehabilitation facilities. All Florida sea turtle rehabilitation facilities operate under FWC authority; thus, close coordination with the FWC Marine Turtle Management program for coordination with rehabilitation facilities will be essential during the implementation of this project.

If you need any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact our staff at ConservationPlanningServices@MyFWC.com

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Gareth G Leonard".

Gareth G Leonard
Gulf Restoration Coordinator
Office of the Executive Director