Christina Fellas - NOAA Federal <christina.fellas@noaa.gov>

1 of 2 - Re: Request for EFH consultation: Chandeleur Island Restoration, Louisiana

Craig Gothreaux - NOAA Federal <craig.gothreaux@noaa.gov> Mon, Jun 2, 2025 at 2:27 PM
To: Christy Fellas <christina.fellas@noaa.gov>
Cc: _NMFS ser HCDconsultations <nmfs.ser.hcdconsultations@noaa.gov>

Christy,

In response to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, NOAA and the other Trustee agencies propose to fund a large-scale restoration project at the Chandeleur Islands in St. Bernard Parish, Louisiana. The restoration project would result in minimal and temporary impacts to estuarine habitats, including tidal wetlands, submerged aquatic vegetation, water column, and water bottoms categorized as essential fish habitat (EFH) under provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act).

The NOAA's Restoration Center (RC) prepared a biological evaluation (BE) form and an EFH assessment in addition to the draft Joint Restoration Plan and Environmental Assessment (JRP/EA #1), and provided the documents for our review by electronic mail dated May 12, 2025. Technical assistance has been provided by the Southeast Regional Office's Habitat Conservation Division (SERO HCD) to avoid and minimize impacts to EFH. Those changes were incorporated into the BE forms and draft JRP/EA #1, which will be shared with the public in the near future (late May/June 2025). The NOAA's RC determined the projects would not have a substantial adverse effect on EFH because the projects are restorative in nature, and have been designed to avoid impacts to high quality EFH (i.e., Thalassia seagrass beds) and minimize permanent impacts to EFH. The SERO HCD has reviewed the EFH assessment and determined the documents adequately evaluate proposed project impacts to EFH. We concur that the project's implementation would result in minimal temporary impacts to estuarine EFH; however, these impacts will not be substantial. Best management practices to minimize both short-term construction impacts and long-term impacts to habitats have been developed. The SERO HCD has no EFH conservation recommendations to provide pursuant to Section 305(b)(2) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act at this time. Further consultation on this matter is not necessary unless future modifications are proposed and such actions may result in adverse impacts to EFH.

Thank you for your coordination,
Craig
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