



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
6669 Short Lane
Gloucester, Virginia 23061

December 19, 2005

Virginia Marine Resources Commission
Habitat Management Division
2600 Washington Avenue, 3rd Floor
Newport News, Virginia 23607-0756

Dear VMRC Representative,

Enclosed is a Joint Permit Application describing a wetland enhancement project within the Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge. This work is proposed under Nationwide Permit 27 Wetland Restoration because of the minimal wetland impacts this project will have in Section 404 non-regulated waters.

A recreational use survey of the canal adjacent to the site was conducted in order to evaluate project impacts at the request of the Army Corps of Engineers. The initial proposal involved the installation of a berm across Canal No. 1 or Asheville Bridge Creek. However, justification for that proposal was based on the belief that this would alleviate flooding to upstream residential areas resulting from elevated wind tides due to sustained southerly winds coupled with strong summer rain events. A subsequent U.S. Geological Survey modeling study initiated by our office concluded that the proposed structure in Canal No. 1 would neither reduce nor increase flooding in these areas due to substantial storage capacity provided by Lake Tecumseh. Considering the lack of flood relief benefits and the potential disruption to recreational boating that may occur as a result of this option, the in-canal water control structure was dropped from consideration in lieu of the installation of a low level sheet pile structure at the human-made opening to Lake Tecumseh where it enters Canal No. 1. A roller assisted boat portage mechanism over the weir to permit access between the lake and the canal is also proposed. This is the project for which the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is seeking permits.

Our 2004 recreational use survey of Canal No. 1 revealed 80% of recreational use occurred during the summer, 16% in the spring, 4% during the fall, and none in the winter monitoring period. Of the 148 boats observed during the monitoring periods that included Labor Day

weekend, 81% were non-motorized and 20% were motorized. The total number of boats observed included many counted more than once going either up or downstream and back again. In fact, 49% of those observed were traveling upstream and 51% were traveling downstream suggesting many were counted twice. The entire survey methods and results will be provided upon request.

Interviews conducted with local boaters and an active member of the Sandbridge civic league indicates the lake is frequently too shallow to permit use by motorized watercraft. In addition, continuous water level monitoring of the lake in 3 hour intervals between March and December of 2004 indicate the lake is less than 2 feet deep 41% of the time and occasionally draws down completely. We believe the proposed portage mechanism will permit continued access to the lake and have minimal impacts on recreational use.

Please contact me if you have any questions or comments at 804-693-6694 ext. 124.

Sincerely,

Will Smith, Program Biologist

cc: USFWS, Virginia Beach, VA (Jared Brandwein)
CORPS, Norfolk, VA (Melissa Nash)
VDEQ, Virginia Beach, VA (Bert Parolari)