

**Steps to determine if a Proposed Action Area includes
suitable EASTERN BLACK RAIL (*Laterallus jamaicensis jamaicensis*) (BLRA) habitat**

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1. Use IPaC to map your proposed project area and generate a species list and consultation code. This consultation code should be included along with the generated IPaC letter in communications with the Service. If eastern black rails (BLRA) are on your species list proceed to step 2.
2. Desktop Modeling of BLRA habitat: In order to prioritize areas that may be used by eastern black rails, habitat within the action area should be estimated for BLRA. We recommend using habitat features that are appropriate for modeling this species including Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) Texas Ecosystem Analytical Mapper (TEAM); National Wetland Inventory (NWI), National Hydrography Dataset (NHD), the USDA Soil Surveys, aerial and possibly satellite imagery. All or some of these data sources can be used to identify and assess potential rail habitat. Additional data sources and methods are also valid. Please include the rationale and any citations for other methods used when submitting information to the Service. Important features for rails include:
 - a. Vegetation type
 - i. On the Gulf Coast, in Texas coastal salt marshes, eastern black rails occupy high elevation zones dominated by gulf cordgrass (*Spartina spartinae*) and salt meadow cordgrass (*S. patens*), which may be accompanied by few shrub species such as eastern baccharis (*Baccharis halimifolia*) or marsh elder (*Iva frutescens*). Two additional dominant plant species found in association are salt grass (*Distichlis spicata*) and sea oxeye (*Borrchia frutescens*).
 - ii. The TPWD TEAM vegetation associations include but are not limited to 2201 – Gulf Coast: salty prairie; 5607 – Coastal: salt and brackish low tidal marsh; 5617 – Coastal: salt and brackish high tidal marsh; 5817 – Chenier Plain: fresh and intermediate tidal marsh. These types are not the only habitat that BLRA may be found in but examples of layers and habitat types that have documented occurrences.

- b. Vegetation cover (i.e., dense overhead groundcover of herbaceous mainly graminoid species).
- c. Areas that may be irregularly flooded (e.g. NWI – E2EM1P, PEM1J, E2EM1N, etc.) and their transitional zones to uplands. These are examples not an exclusive list.
- d. In any documentation shared with the Service, please describe the mapping process that was used to identify potential suitable eastern black rail habitat.

Note: The structure of the vegetation canopy is more important than its species composition. Plant species other than those listed above can also provide suitable cover.

- 3. Ground Truthing: The Service recommends doing site visits to verify the desktop assessment of potential suitable habitat. In-person surveys should include the review of:
 - a. Vegetation species composition;
 - b. Vegetation height;
 - c. Water distribution from rain, alluvial, or tidal influence. Have the suitable shallow water features with shallow slopes between lower elevations and higher elevations;
 - d. Transitional zones and uplands that rails use during high water events;
 - e. Documentation from this site visit and any additional information (e.g., photographs, etc.) should be provided to the Service to support conclusions from the ground truthing exercise. Absence of the listed species is not a sufficient indicator of habitat unsuitability
- 4. Timing of the proposed action within suitable eastern black rail habitat: Coordinate with the Texas Coastal Ecological Service's Field Office to determine the next steps and potential conservation measures that may be implemented to avoid and minimize adverse effects to rails within the project's action area. The Service recommends avoiding modification to habitat during the breeding, nesting, and molting season (March to September).