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**Species Conservation Guidelines****South Florida****Roseate Tern**

The Species Conservation Guidelines for the roseate tern (*Sterna dougallii dougallii*) provides a tool to assist the user in determining if their project may adversely affect the roseate tern. Here we describe actions which might have a detrimental impact on the roseate tern and how these effects can be avoided or minimized.

**Life History**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) placed the roseate tern on the list of threatened and endangered species in 1987 in response to nesting habitat loss, competition from expanding gull populations, and increased predation. Other threats include human disturbance of nesting sites and oil or contaminant spills that may affect foraging birds and nesting sites.

The North American subspecies of the roseate tern is divided into two breeding populations, one in the northeastern U.S. and Nova Scotia (listed as endangered), and one in the southeastern United States and Caribbean (listed as threatened). These breeding populations winter in South America. During migration roseate terns are found, and can be confused with, the common tern (*Sterna hirundo*) and the Arctic tern (*Sterna paradisaea*). However, neither of these two species nests in south Florida. Still, care should be taken to make the proper identification. The ecology of roseate tern is summarized in the *Caribbean Roseate Tern Recovery Plan* (Service 1993) and the *South Florida Multi-species Recovery Plan* (Service 1999).

**Habitat**

Roseate terns forage in the surf along the shore. In south Florida, they typically nest on isolated islands, rubble islets, dredge spoil, and rooftops (Smith 1996, Service 1999). Fidelity to a natal colony, or a colony where the birds have reproduced successfully, may be as important as preference for a particular habitat (Spendelov 1989). Human disturbance and vegetative growth, *i.e.*, natural succession of native species and exotic species on spoil islands, may cause the birds to desert a nesting site. In south Florida, roseate terns are present on the breeding grounds between May and August (Service 1993).

**Distribution**

Robertson (1978) reported five roseate tern breeding colonies between 1962 and 1973 on islands near the Seven-mile Bridge, on spoil islands in Key West Harbor, on Crawl Key, Molasses Reef

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Dry Rocks, and the Dry Tortugas. Zambrano et al. (2000) reported twelve roseate tern breeding colonies between 1974 and 1998 at Tank Island, Truman Annex, Key West Harbor, Key Haven, Pelican Shoal, Missouri Key, Casa Cayo Condominium, the Marathon Government Center, Vaca Key, Grassy Key, Lower Matecumbe, and Indian Key. Only two colonies remained active in 1998; the natural colony at Pelican Shoal and the rooftop colony at the Marathon Government Center. Surveys between 1988 and 1998 suggest the south Florida breeding population, 150 to 300 pairs, may be stable but the number of breeding individuals is probably still too low to sustain genetic viability (Frankel and Soule 1981).

**Determination**

Encounters with the roseate tern are most common within the consultation area delineated in Figure 1. The SLOPES flowchart in Figure 2 can help you determine the impact of your project on the species.

If your project is outside the consultation area then the project will have no effect on the species. If the project is inside the consultation area then check to see if suitable habitat is present. If suitable habitat is not present then the project will have no effect on the species. In either case you may proceed with the proposed action. If, by chance, you encounter a roseate tern on your site outside the consultation area then appropriate conservation measures should still be implemented (see below).

If suitable habitat is present then the project may affect the species. A nesting season (May to August) survey should be carried out and observations summarized in the consultation package. See the SLOPES Introduction for details on how to prepare a consultation package (Service 2004).

If the roseate tern is not present, and suitable habitat is protected then the project is not likely to adversely affect the species. If the roseate tern is present, or presence is assumed, and the project is modified to avoid suitable or occupied habitat then the project is not likely to adversely affect the species. In both cases you may proceed with the proposed action after obtaining written concurrence from the Service.

If impacts to suitable or occupied habitat are unavoidable then formal consultation is required. Early contact and discussion with the Service will facilitate completion of the project. A consultation package describing the proposed effects should be sent to the South Florida Ecological Services Office to start the formal consultation process. Listed below are measures that can be incorporated into your project to minimize impacts to the roseate tern.

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**Conservation Measures**

- Provide long-term protection of the nest site through acquisition, conservation easements, deed restrictions, or zoning.
- Maintain at least a 180 m (590 ft) buffer around nesting sites to minimize human disturbance to nesting roseate terns.
- Control predators, including but not limited to fire ants, raccoons, and feral cats.
- Retard succession of native vegetation at proven nest sites.
- Control exotic vegetation to enhance spoil island nest sites.
- Provide funds for the establishment and maintenance of artificial nest sites on bridges.
- Establish and maintain an emergency response plan for oil and chemical spills.

**Literature Cited**

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**GIS Layers**

Consultation Area    Roseate\_ca

**Appendices**

None

**Followup Items**

- (1) FWC, FDOT, Service plans to establish nesting grounds on old Keys bridges.
- (2) Contact US Coast Guard and have them add colony sites (esp. Pelican Shoal) to the list of areas that need to be protected by oil booms in the event of a spill.