



**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

**NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE**

Southeast Regional Office

263 13th Avenue South

St. Petersburg, Florida 33701-5505

<http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov>

December 15, 2014

F/SER47:JAR/pw

(Sent via Electronic Mail)

Colonel Alan Dodd, Commander  
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Jacksonville District  
Antilles Permits Section  
400 Fernandez Avenue  
San Juan Puerto Rico 00901-3299

Attention: Carmen Gisela Roman

Dear Colonel Dodd:

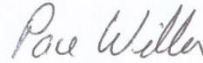
NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) reviewed public notice SAJ-2014-03257, dated December 12, 2014. The Puerto Rico Highway and Transportation Authority requests authorization from the Department of the Army to discharge fill material on approximately 0.66 acres of Rio Blanco in order to place rip-rap along both banks of the river, Municipality of Naguabo. The rip-rap would be part of new bridge crossing the river. Dredged material from the bridge construction, estimated to be 681 cubic yards, would be placed in uplands. The existing bridge will remain. The Jacksonville District has determined this portion of Rio Blanco is upstream of areas designated essential fish habitat (EFH) by the Caribbean Fishery Management Council. NMFS agrees with this determination and offers no comments under the EFH provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. As the nation's federal trustee for the conservation and management of marine, estuarine, and anadromous fishery resources, the following comments and recommendations are provided pursuant to authorities of the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act.

While NMFS has no objection to the proposed rip-rap, NMFS would prefer the bank stabilization be done with vegetation or reticulated mats that allow some vegetation to establish along the riverbank. However in this case, NMFS will defer to the Jacksonville District whether these "softer" approaches to bank stabilization are feasible at this location given river flows and soil conditions. NMFS will also defer to the Jacksonville District and its assessment of the overall public interest on whether the public benefits from providing a new bridge offset the loss of riverbank habitat and river bottom without requiring compensatory mitigation.



NMFS appreciates the opportunity to provide these comments. Related questions or comments should be directed to the attention of Mr. José A. Rivera at NOAA HCD, c/o US Army Corps of Engineers, 400 Fernandez Juncos Avenue, San Juan, Puerto Rico, 00901-3299. He may be reached by telephone at 787-405-3605 or by e-mail at Jose.A.Rivera@noaa.gov.

Sincerely,



/ for

Virginia M. Fay  
Assistant Regional Administrator  
Habitat Conservation Division

cc:

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