



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>

March 6, 2015

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(Sent via Electronic Mail)

Colonel Kevin P. Landers, Sr., Commander
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Wilmington District
69 Darlington Avenue
Wilmington, North Carolina 28403-1398

Attention: Josh Pelletier

Dear Colonel Landers:

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) reviewed the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Town of Kill Devil Hills Shore Protection Project (public notice for Action ID No. SAW-2014-02203 dated February 5, 2015). The Town of Kill Devil Hills is seeking Department of Army authorization to dredge 947,500 cubic yards of beach-quality sediments from two offshore borrow sources and deposit the material along approximately 2.75 miles of oceanfront shoreline in the Town of Kill Devil Hills, Dare County. The Wilmington District's initial determination is the proposed project may adversely affect, but not likely to adversely affect, essential fish habitat (EFH) or associated fisheries managed by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC), the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC), or NMFS. As the nation's federal trustee for the conservation and management of marine, estuarine, and diadromous fishery resources, the following comments and recommendations are provided pursuant to the authorities of the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act and the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act).

The Public Notice states the applicant submitted an EFH document to NMFS for review. NMFS never received an EFH document but is aware one is near completion for the three Dare County beach nourishment projects (personal communication from Jennifer Culbertson, Ph.D., Bureau of Ocean Energy Management). Sections 4.5 and 5.5 of the EA relate to EFH, and NMFS comments are directed at these two sections. Additional comments may be provided once NMFS has an opportunity to review the EFH assessment being prepared by the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management.

The proposed beach nourishment would include sand placement along a 2.75-mile section of the Town's oceanfront shoreline. Beach quality sand would be dredged using a self-contained, ocean-certified hopper dredge and/or a hydraulic cutterhead pipeline dredge. Material would be obtained from two Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) borrow areas located in federal waters offshore of Dare County. Borrow Area A is 5.0 to 6.5 miles offshore, while Borrow Area C is 4.1 to 5.2 miles offshore. Placement onto the beach would be accomplished via submerged pipeline with direct pump-out. Once discharged, the sand would be shaped and graded according to the design template using earth-moving equipment, such as bulldozers and excavators.

The fishery management plans for bluefish (MAFMC), coastal migratory pelagic species (SAFMC), highly migratory species (NMFS) designate marine waters, which includes the inner shelf waters associated with the borrow areas and surf zone, as EFH. The fishery management plans for coastal migratory pelagic species also designate offshore shoal complexes as EFH. Potential effects from



elevated turbidity levels may be expected to occur in the inner shelf waters surrounding the proposed borrow area resulting from the dredging activities and in the surf zone from sand placement on the beach. These impacts are expected to be minor, localized, and of short-term duration. Dredging in the offshore shoals may result in effects associated with shoal morphology, benthic abundance, and elevated turbidity. The proposed maximum extent of the borrow areas encompass a total of 1,600 acres or approximately 2.5 square miles.


In summary, the EA adequately describes EFH and federally-managed fishery species in the area of Kill Devil Hills, and the EFH conservation recommendations NMFS typically provides for a project of this nature are already included in the project design. While no EFH conservation recommendations are provided at this time, NMFS has one general request:

- To facilitate rapid recovery of the benthic community, NMFS recommends shallow dredge furrows (up to 5 feet deep) oriented in a longitudinal pattern be employed. The undisturbed space between the dredge cuts would allow the relatively intact benthic communities between the furrows to be a source of colonists to adjacent disturbed areas, thereby hastening recovery of the infaunal community.

As noted earlier, NMFS may provide additional comments once it has reviewed the EFH assessment being prepared by the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments. Related questions or comments should be directed to the attention of Mr. Fritz Rohde at our Beaufort Field Office, 101 Pivers Island Road, Beaufort, North Carolina 28516-9722, or at (252) 838-0828

Sincerely,



/ for

Virginia M. Fay
Assistant Regional Administrator
Habitat Conservation Division

cc:

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