



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL OCEAN SERVICE
National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Record

FROM: Steven Thur, Ph.D.
Acting Director

SUBJECT: Categorical Exclusion for RESTORE Act Science Program Award
#NA17NOS4510090, "SPAT: Shellfish Portfolio Assessment Tool"

NOAA Administrative Order (NAO) 216-6A, Environmental Review Procedures, requires all proposed projects be reviewed with respect to environmental consequences on the human environment. This memorandum addresses the determination that the activities described below for Award #NA17NOS4510090, "SPAT: Shellfish Portfolio Assessment Tool", qualifies to be categorically excluded from further National Environmental Policy Act review.

Project Description

The RESTORE Act Science program is considering funding a three-year project to Mississippi State University researchers and sub-awardees to design, test, and implement a decision tool that optimizes the benefits in choosing a portfolio of three oyster-based resource types (shell plantings vs off-bottom oyster farms vs living shoreline reefs) within Mississippi for landowners and state agencies. They would use modern portfolio theory from economics to account for costs and both market and non-market benefits accruing as a result of the ecosystem services generated.

The investigators would first conduct a meta-analysis on the ecosystem services and their values provided by the three oyster-based resource uses from existing published research and available data. They would quantify benefits and assess variability in the lab statistically. Expert opinion interviews would be conducted to determine valuations where needed. They would next, develop budgets of construction and maintenance costs for each type of oyster resource use via consultation with state and other relevant agencies and oyster farmers. They would then integrate all of the above information in the lab to develop an oyster-based resource management/restoration decision support tool based on Modern Portfolio Theory (MPT) from financial investing. The tool would be in an interactive database format. The investigators would also train end users in its use and conduct outreach at meetings and conferences.

Effects of the Project and Extraordinary Circumstances

All activities (data compilation, analyses, model implementation and user interface and tool development) associated with this project would be conducted in an office setting using existing data, statistical algorithms and software or interviews with experts. All work would be conducted within



existing facilities using existing infrastructure. There would be no fieldwork conducted as part of this project. Thus, there would be no uncertain adverse environmental impacts, unknown risks or cumulative impacts associated with this project. Further, the proposed project does not involve air, noise, or water quality impacts; and does not otherwise have a significant impact on the human environment. These activities are not the subject of controversy based on potential environmental consequences and do not establish a precedent or decision in principle about future proposals. In addition, as there are no field activities, there is no impact on geographically- or ecologically-critical areas, (sanctuaries, wetlands, watersheds), National Historic Sites, and no adverse impacts to marine mammals, essential fish habitat or threatened and endangered species or their critical habitat. Low-income and minority populations would not be adversely affected by project activities. Thus, there are no extraordinary circumstances present that may require further analysis in an EA or EIS.

Categorical Exclusion Determination

This action would not result in any changes to the human environment. This project's activities are covered by the E1 Categorical Exclusion, as Defined in Appendix E of the NAO 216-6A Companion Manual. E1, describes activities conducted in laboratories and facilities where research practices and safeguards prevent environmental impacts and fall within the scope of the E1 categorical exclusion, the proposed project is conducted in a laboratory where research practices and safeguards prevent environmental impacts. Cumulative effects are negligible. As such, project activities are categorically excluded from further NEPA review.