



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL OCEAN SERVICE
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Record

FROM: Mary Erickson
Director, National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science

SUBJECT: Categorical Exclusion for Project # RASP15-09 "Indicators and assessment framework for ecological health and ecosystem services"

NAO 216-6, Environmental Review Procedures, requires all proposed projects to be reviewed with respect to environmental consequences on the human environment. This memorandum addresses the determination that the Project # RASP15-09, "Indicators and assessment framework for ecological health and ecosystem services," qualifies to be categorically excluded from further National Environmental Policy Act review.

Project Description

An indicator is a relatively simple measure of a component or process in an ecosystem that can serve as a proxy for overall functioning of the ecosystem. The project will identify, develop, and evaluate ecological health and ecosystem services indicators and an associated assessment and decision framework. This process will further develop the use of indicators to support restoration and sustainable management of the Gulf of Mexico ecosystem through three activities. The investigators will survey and evaluate existing ecological health and ecosystem services indicators including their links to human well-being and survey and evaluate assessment and decision frameworks for their applicability and utility in the Gulf of Mexico. This will include conducting workshops to solicit input from resource managers and scientists in the region. The investigators will then develop an integrated assessment and decision framework and associated indicators based on what they have learned tailored to management needs in the Gulf of Mexico. Lastly, the investigators will test the integrated approach they have developed to support management at the Mission Aransas National Estuarine Research Reserve and evaluate its utility for use broadly in the Gulf of Mexico. The field data required for this project has already been collected. The investigators' activities (i.e., inventorying and evaluating indicators and assessment and decision frameworks) and their proposed workshop will be conducted in an office environment.

Effects of the Project

There will be no field work conducted as part of this project. Thus, project actions will not result in cumulative environmental impacts. In addition, the proposed project does not involve air, noise, or water quality impacts; and does not otherwise have a significant impact on the human environment. No activities will be conducted in areas where children may congregate. 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. There are no

uncertain environmental impacts or unknown risks. 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.

Categorical Exclusion Determination

As defined in NAO 216-6, Section 6.03c.3(d), this is an applied research project which can be considered a routine NOAA program function with limited or short-term environmental consequences. As such, it can be categorically excluded from the need to prepare an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement.