



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 # RASP15-18 "Inventory of Gulf of Mexico Ecosystem indicators using an ecological resilience framework"

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 Project # RASP15-18, "Inventory of Gulf of Mexico Ecosystem indicators using an ecological resilience framework," 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. This project will create a structured framework to evaluate ecosystem indicators collected by existing monitoring programs, assess their strengths and weaknesses, and make recommendations for a set of scientifically rigorous, practical, and cost-effective indicators for five key ecosystems (salt marsh, mangrove, seagrass, oyster beds/reefs, and coral reefs) across the Gulf of Mexico. To assemble the framework and make recommendations for a comprehensive set of indicators, the investigators will 1) catalog the indicators being used in existing inventory and monitoring programs; 2) develop conceptual ecological models and identify indicators of ecological integrity for the five major ecosystems to help managers understand critical ecosystem functions and stressors that effect ecosystem condition; 3) identify key ecosystem services provided by the ecosystems and identify indicators of their sustainability to elucidate the relationship between ecosystem condition and the services they provide; 4) summarize key indicators of ecological integrity and ecosystem services and identify thresholds for each; 5) hold expert workshops to thoroughly evaluate the models and proposed indicators; and 6) align selected indicators against current indicators used by existing monitoring programs across the Gulf to determine gaps and identify their strengths and weaknesses. The field data required for this project has already been collected. The investigators' activities (i.e., inventorying and evaluating indicators) and their proposed workshops 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.