



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 # RASP15-26 "Evaluation of Gulf of Mexico oceanographic observation networks, impact assessment on ecosystem management and recommendations"

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 # RASP15-40, "Evaluation of Gulf of Mexico oceanographic observation networks, impact assessment on ecosystem management and recommendations," qualifies to be categorically excluded from further National Environmental Policy Act review.

Project Description

The project will assess Gulf of Mexico observation networks from an ecosystem management perspective using an approach that has been successfully used to assess the capacity of ocean observing networks to effectively monitoring ocean circulation. Specifically, the investigators will 1) assess the performance of existing observation networks to monitor the Gulf of Mexico ecosystem in ways relevant to resource management, expanding the rigorous observing system evaluation approach implemented for Gulf of Mexico physical oceanography observations; 2) investigate the connections between ocean physics, biogeochemistry and ecosystem dynamics; and 3) make recommendations to improve existing observing networks to address particular resource management objectives. The investigators will use existing ocean transport and biogeochemical models and observations of ocean circulation, chemistry, and biology from satellites and existing observing platforms in the water. Resource managers and experts on the Gulf of Mexico and Florida Keys will evaluate the impact of simulation observations on the outputs from ecosystem models to decide whether adding actual observations at specific locations would increase the quality of information they have available to use in making decisions. The result will be recommendations on how to better evaluate models for use by managers and how to improve observing networks in the Gulf of Mexico. The field data required for this project has already been collected. The investigators' activities (i.e., evaluating existing observing network and models) and their work with resource managers 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.