



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 # RASP15-40 "Ecosystem modeling efforts in the Gulf of Mexico: current status and future needs to address management and restoration activities"

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 activities for Project # RASP15-40, "Ecosystem modeling efforts in the Gulf of Mexico: current status and future needs to address management and restoration activities," qualifies to be categorically excluded from further National Environmental Policy Act review.

Project Description

The project will conduct a comprehensive review and assessment of ecosystem modeling efforts in the Gulf of Mexico (GOM) and align current and future ecosystem modeling efforts with management needs and restoration activities. The investigators will first conduct an inventory and evaluation of existing ecosystem models for the Gulf of Mexico, bringing together these disparate modeling approaches into a common framework. The investigators will then test the application of selected ecosystem models not currently implemented in the Gulf of Mexico, which is anticipated to provide insights leading to further model improvement. They will then convene a workshop that will serve to inform and elicit input from the management and research communities. The next step will be to test existing models capacity to address the needs identified in the workshop. The investigators will also link two internationally recognized global information systems on fish and marine organisms, a fish diet database, and one of the ecosystem modeling approaches employed in the Gulf of Mexico to test the optimization of the model and climate impact scenarios. The field data required for this project has already been collected. The investigators' activities (i.e., inventorying and evaluating ecosystem models) 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.