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 # RASP15-61 "The central role of the Mississippi River and its delta in the oceanography of the Gulf of Mexico large marine ecosystem"

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 # RASP15-61, "The central role of the Mississippi River and its delta in the oceanography of the Gulf of Mexico large marine ecosystem," qualifies to be categorically excluded from further National Environmental Policy Act review.

Project Description
This project will investigate the influence of the Mississippi River and its delta on the oceanography, ecology, and economy of the Gulf of Mexico; identify the gaps in data collection, model availability and model integration that would allow managers to better sustainably manage and monitor the Gulf's natural resources; evaluate the role of extreme events and potential climate change impacts on the oceanography, ecology and economy of the Gulf of Mexico; and disseminate the results of this work. The investigators will accomplish their goals through two activities. They will conduct a series of workshops, comprised of experts in the oceanography, ecology and economy of the Gulf of Mexico. These experts will be tasked with identifying, understanding and interpreting the physical drivers in the region; the ecological, water quality, and economic responses to these forcings; and the data sources and models that will allow the investigators to quantify these impacts. To provide a quantitative base for discussion in the workshops, the investigators will also compile historical outputs from physical oceanographic models to provide an overview of the Gulf of Mexico and the role of riverine and deltaic forcings. The environmental drivers that the investigators will examine include variability in magnitude of Mississippi River discharge, changes in the direction of river plume, variability in coastal currents, extreme weather events (cold fronts and hurricanes), and nutrient and carbon loadings. The field data required for this project has already been collected. The investigators' activities (i.e.,workshops and the collecting of model outputs) 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.