



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
National Ocean Service
1305 East West Highway
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Record

FROM: Lauren Latchford
Chief of Staff
National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science

REFERENCE: Environmental Review of the RESTORE Science Program Project, Cooperative Research and Management for Fish Spawning Aggregations in the Gulf of Mexico

This memorandum summarizes the environmental compliance steps taken by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) National Ocean Service (NOS) NCCOS for the referenced project. It serves as the Record of Environmental Consideration (REC) for the proposed project, as defined by NOS policy 0300-01. The information in Table 1 identifies the project under review. Table 2 indicates if the proposed project falls within the scope of the November 2022 [Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for Surveying and Mapping Projects in U.S. Waters for Coastal and Marine Data Acquisition \(PEIS\)](#) and its January 2023 Record of Decision (ROD), which were prepared pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Table 3 indicates how NCCOS has complied with requirements of the PEIS and other applicable environmental laws. Table 4 identifies the appropriate Best Management Practices (BMPs).

Table 1 identifies the project and provides basic information on its scope.

Table 1. Location and Timing of the Proposed Project

Item Number	Requested Project Characteristic	Response
1.1	Name/location of project	Cooperative Research and Management for Fish Spawning Aggregations in the Gulf of Mexico
1.2	Vessel(s) to be employed	Chartered fishing vessels or study fleet
1.3	Project number	Proposal # 5158589
1.4	Origin of the incoming transit	Key West, Florida; Galveston, TX; other ports depending on selected sampling sites
1.5	Destination for outgoing transit	Proposed sites Western Florida Shelf and the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary. Other sites will be discussed in the first two years of the project
1.6	Approximate dates of the project	October 2025 - September 2030

Note that, as with all activities at sea, the dates of the proposed project could be affected by poor weather, equipment difficulties, or other unforeseen circumstances.

Table 2-1. Components of the Proposed Project

Item Number	Question	Yes	No	Additional Notes
Project Scope				
2.1	Would any part of the project (excluding transits) occur outside of U.S. waters?		X	
Project Activities				
2.2	Would the project require operation of echo sounders at frequencies lower than 1 kilohertz (kHz)?		X	Frequencies in use:
2.3	<p>Would the project damage or otherwise affect submerged land (e.g., anchoring, sediment sampling, mooring, or instrument installation, etc.)?</p> <p>If yes, provide the locations, types (moorings, sediment sampling, instruments installed, etc.), the extent of the disturbance, and the length of time that the mooring or instrument will remain in place in the additional notes section.</p>	X		<p>Precise Location(s): to be determined in years 1 and 2</p> <p>Instrument bundles will be installed with acoustic release devices.</p> <p>Type(s): Instrument bundle consisting of a temperature, salinity, and dissolved oxygen logger, a SoundTrap hydrophone, passive acoustic telemetry receivers</p> <p>Off the western Florida shelf a Octopus 360 camera</p> <p>Extent: undefined</p> <p>Duration: 5 years at three sites, 2 or 3 years at an additional 3 sites</p>

Item Number	Question	Yes	No	Additional Notes
2.4	Would any part of the project require terrestrial land disturbance? If yes , provide the location, extent, and depth of any terrestrial land disturbance, and the length of time that the disturbance will persist in the additional notes section.		X	Location(s): Extent: Depth: Duration:
2.5	Would the project require any discharges (such as expendable bathythermographs), excluding those related to normal ship operation? If yes , provide the location, extent, volume/number of any discharges in the additional notes section.		X	Location: Extent: Volume/Number of Discharges:

Table 2-2: Summary of Project Activities

Activity	Page(s) in PEIS	To Be Conducted During the Project? (Yes or No)	(If Conducted) Approximate Linear Nautical Miles (Inm)	(If Conducted) Approximate Number of Times Activity to be Conducted During Project
Crewed Vessel Operations	40-42	Yes	10,000 (estimate)	N/A
Anchoring	42	Yes	N/A	N/A
Operation of ROVs, USVs, and AUVs	42-43	No		N/A
Use of Echo Sounders	43-45	No		N/A
Use of mobile ADCPs	45-46	No		N/A
Installation of Stationary ADCPs	45-46	No	N/A	
Maintenance of Stationary ADCPs	45-46	No	N/A	
Removal of Stationary ADCPs	45-46	No	N/A	

Activity	Page(s) in PEIS	To Be Conducted During the Project? (Yes or No)	(If Conducted) Approximate Linear Nautical Miles (Inm)	(If Conducted) Approximate Number of Times Activity to be Conducted During Project
Use of Acoustic Communication Systems	46	Yes	N/A	deployed continuously
Use of Sound Speed Data Collection Equipment	46-48	No	N/A	
Operation of Drop/Towed Cameras and Magnetometers	48	Yes	N/A	Each of 6 sites, once installed, will be monitored with drop cameras (or ROVs) at least 2 times/year
Collection of Bottom Grab Samples	48-49	No	N/A	
Use of Passive Listening Systems	49	Yes	N/A	deployed continuously
SCUBA Operations	49	Yes	N/A	90
Installation of Tide Gauges	49-53	No	N/A	
Maintenance of Tide Gauges	49-53	No	N/A	
Removal of Tide Gauges	49-53	No	N/A	
Installation of GPS Reference Stations	53	No	N/A	

Table 3. Environmental Impacts of the Proposed Project

Item Number	Question	Yes	No	Additional Notes
National Marine Sanctuaries Act (NMSA)				
3.1	Would the proposed project take place in, or within 2.0 Inm of, a national marine sanctuary? This can be determined using the NOAA Sanctuaries Mapper . If yes , please list identified sanctuaries in the additional notes section.	X		Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary
3.1-a	If yes , have you contacted the sanctuary to determine whether a Sanctuary permit is necessary?	X		
3.1-b	If yes , have you received the required sanctuary permit?		X	Will apply for permits prior to project start
3.1-c	If yes , have you added BMPs proposed by the sanctuary to the list created in Section 4 below?			
National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)				
3.2	Some projects may have the potential to affect historic properties through ground disturbance, seafloor disturbance, or viewshed impacts. Activities that may have the potential to affect historic properties include: anchoring, use of sub-bottom profilers, installation/maintenance/removal of ADCPs, collection of bottom grab samples, installation/maintenance/removal of tide gauges, and installation of GPS reference stations. If your project will involve activities with potential to affect historic properties , have you identified and contacted the State or Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO/THPO) for Section 106 consultation? SHPO contact information can be found on the National		X	

Item Number	Question	Yes	No	Additional Notes
	<p>Conference of SHPOs (NCSHPO) online directory or on individual state websites. THPO contact information can be found on the National Association of THPOs (NATHPO) online directory or tribe websites.</p> <p>If yes, please list the SHPOs and THPOs contacted in the additional notes section.</p>			
3.2-a	If yes , have you added any BMPs that resulted from SHPO/THPO consultation to the BMP list in Section 4?		X	
Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA)				
3.3	<p>Would the proposed project take place in, or within state waters or on state land?</p> <p>If yes, please list the state(s) in the additional notes section and remember to identify any relevant state-specific BMPs in Section 4. Note that pre-survey notifications are required for some work in Maine, New Hampshire, and New Jersey.</p>		x	
Clean Water Act (CWA)				
3.4	Will the project require the installation of instruments or equipment (ADCPs, buoy moorings, etc) that may disturb the lakebed, seafloor, or soil?	X		
3.4-a	Will the instrument be installed within three nautical miles of shore?		X	
3.4-b	If yes to both questions 3.5 and 3.5-a , have you completed the steps outlined in CWA Section 404 Permitting for NOS Projects Using Scientific Measurement Devices Guidance ?			
Other Permits Requirements				

Item Number	Question	Yes	No	Additional Notes
3.5	Is the proposed project located in a National Forest, Wildlife Refuge, Park, or other federally-protected area (excluding National Marine Sanctuaries)?		X	
3.5-a	If yes , have the necessary required special use permit(s) been obtained? Please list the permits required and obtained in the additional notes section.			
3.5-b	Are any of the permit conditions or other restrictions identified through the environmental compliance process not possible for the field crews to implement? If yes , please list any permit conditions, mitigation measures, or other restrictions that would not be feasible and explain why in the additional notes section.			

Table 4. Identification of Appropriate BMPs

Item Number	Question	Yes	No	Additional Notes
4.1	Using the attached BMP document , have you identified the applicable BMPs using the activities to be conducted, project location, and protected species that could be encountered and communicated to project staff?	X		
4.2	Have any additional BMPs proposed through consultation with USFWS, NMFS, SHPO, THPO, or other permitting authority been added to the BMP list and communicated to project staff?		X	

Item Number	Question	Yes	No	Additional Notes
4.3	<p>Are any of the BMPs identified through the environmental compliance process not possible for the field crews to implement?</p> <p>If yes, please list any BMPs that would not be feasible and explain why in the additional notes section.</p>		X	

Conclusion

NEPA COMPLETED

X

Based on the information in Sections 1, 2, and 3 above, NCCOS has determined that the proposed project falls within the scope of the November 2022 *Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for Surveying and Mapping Projects in U.S. Waters for Coastal and Marine Data Acquisition* and its January 2023 Record of Decision. Therefore, no additional NEPA analysis for the proposed project is required.

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Date: *5/22/25*

Table 1. Proposed sentinel sites for year 1: 1) Warsaw Hole; 2) Californian wreck; and 3) Wayne's Lump. Three additional sites will be added during Years 2-4. Verification evidence: D = direct evidence (hydrated oocytes); I = indirect evidence (B. Venura, W. Werner, pers. comm). SSMZ = Spawning Special Management Zone.

Sentinel site	Location	Primary species with evidence (D/I)	Management	References
1 Warsaw Hole	W. FL Shelf	Warsaw grouper (D), Greater amberjack (I)	SSMZ	Collier and LGL unpubl.
2 Californian	W. FL Shelf	Goliath grouper (D)	None	Heyman et al., 2019
3 Wayne's Lump	FGBNMS	Cubera snapper (D), Dog snapper (I)	none	Heyman et al., 2019

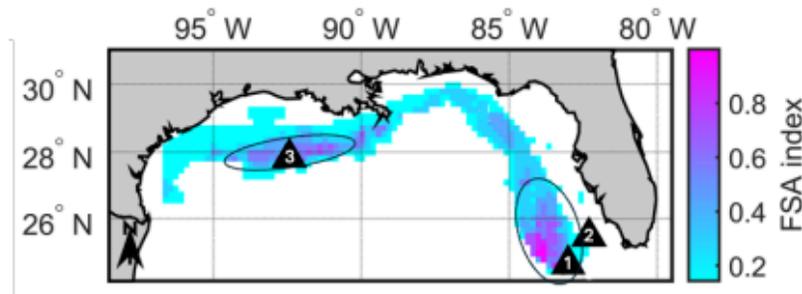


Figure 3. Initial Sentinel Sites, including (1) Warsaw Hole, (2) Californian Wreck and (3) Wayne's Lump, overlaid on priority areas for FSA management in the Gulf using multi-species FSA indices (Grüss et al., 2019) and highlighted in ovals (Flower Garden Banks and southwestern Florida shelf).

