



REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
CORPS OF ENGINEERS, MOBILE DISTRICT
P.O. BOX 2288
MOBILE, AL 36628-0001

CESAM-PD-EC

DATE TBD

DRAFT FINDINGS OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)
OKALOOSA COUNTY COASTAL STORM RISK MANAGEMENT
STUDY AND PROJECT
OKALOOSA COUNTY, FLORIDA

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Mobile District (Corps) has conducted an environmental analysis in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended. The Final Integrated Draft Feasibility Report with Environmental Assessment, Okaloosa County, Florida (IFR/EA) dated **DATE OF IFR/EA** for the Okaloosa County Coastal Storm Risk Management Study addresses coastal storm damages, including critical shoreline erosion, opportunities, and feasibility in Okaloosa County, Florida. The final recommendation is contained in the report of the Chief of Engineers, dated **DATE OF CHIEF'S REPORT**.

The Final IFR/EA, incorporated herein by reference, evaluated various alternatives that would reduce storm damage and flood risks in the study area.

A. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

Okaloosa County is located approximately 40 miles east of Pensacola, Florida and 140 miles west of Tallahassee, Florida. The beaches of Okaloosa County encompass approximately 26 miles of shoreline extending eastward from the Santa Rosa/Okaloosa County line to the Okaloosa/Walton County line. The shoreline is interrupted by East Pass, an opening to the Gulf of Mexico from Choctawhatchee Bay located on the west side of the City of Destin, Florida. The Okaloosa County coastal shoreline includes about 7.3 miles of state-designated critical erosion. The study area includes the coastal shoreline of Okaloosa County as well as the back bay shorelines along Choctawhatchee Bay.

The Recommended Plan (Proposed Action) for the Okaloosa CSRM Feasibility Study consists of berm and dune nourishment along the shoreline of Okaloosa County in two areas; about 17,000 feet in the Okaloosa Island reach and 16,000 feet in the West Destin reach of the study area. In the Okaloosa Island reach, the plan consists of providing a dune with a crest elevation of 14 feet, NAVD 88, with a crest width of 10 feet with a side-slope of 5 horizontal (H) on 1 vertical (V), and a berm with a crest elevation of 5.5 feet, NAVD 88, with a berm crest width of 10 feet with a fore slope of 15 H on 1 V. The initial nourishment in this area will require about 100,000 cubic yards of fill material. In West Destin, the plan consists of providing a vegetated dune with a crest elevation of

14 feet, NAVD 88, with a crest width of 10 feet with a side-slope of 5 H on 1 V, and a berm with a crest elevation of 5.5 feet, NAVD 88, with a berm crest width of 30 feet with a fore slope of 15 H on 1 V. Once constructed, dune vegetation will include regionally appropriate native species with direct plantings and broadcasted seed mix. Analysis of the projected 50-year life determined that the project will require periodic renourishment. Four renourishment events will occur on a 10-year cycle and require about 4,000,000 cubic yards (cy) of material. Material for the initial fill placement and renourishments will come from a nearby offshore borrow area that already has been permitted by the state of Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) as having suitable material for placement on the Okaloosa County shoreline. A second non-permitted borrow area was also considered in this Final IFR/EA for future supplemental use.

B. DESCRIPTION OF ALTERNATIVES

During the Study, the plan formulation process developed multiple alternatives from applicable management measures. The modeling and associated analysis filtered the focused array to the final array. Three alternatives were considered in the Final IFR/EA which included the Proposed Action, a No Action Alternative, and a Local Alternative. The Proposed Action was selected and is described above. This alternative would provide protection to the coastal shoreline natural resources associated with dune and beach ecosystems from the effects of erosion along the northern shoreline. The No Action alternative would consist of not nourishing the continuing eroded shoreline of Okaloosa County, and consequently leaving all habitats vulnerable to degradation and potential loss to the species that depend on them. The non-federal sponsor is currently permitted to construct a project at Okaloosa Island and West Destin that is larger in footprint and configuration than Proposed Action. This Local Alternative is described in the Final IFR/EA. Although the Local Alternative is not part of the federal recommendation, there is a likelihood that it could be constructed in the future to supplement the Proposed Action at the non-federal sponsor's direction and expense. It is being included in this Final IFR/EA for purposes of transparency and completeness.

C. SUMMARY OF POTENTIAL EFFECTS

For all alternatives, the potential effects were evaluated, as appropriate. A summary assessment of the potential effects of the recommended plan are listed in Table 1:

Table 1: Summary of Potential Effects of the Recommended Plan

	Insignificant or Temporary effects	Beneficial effects as a result of Project*	Resource unaffected by action
Aesthetics		X	
Air quality			X
Aquatic resources/wetlands	X		
Invasive species**			X
Native species vegetation**		X	
Fish and wildlife habitat		X	

	Insignificant or Temporary effects	Beneficial effects as a result of Project*	Resource unaffected by action
Threatened/Endangered species/critical habitat**		X	
Historic properties			X
Benthic resources	X		
Other cultural resources			X
Floodplains			X
Hazardous, toxic & radioactive waste			X
Hydrology			X
Land use		X	
Navigation			X
Noise levels	X		
Public infrastructure		X	
Socio-economics/Recreation		X	
Environmental justice			X
Soils	X		
Tribal trust resources			X
Water quality**	X		
Climate change			X

* = Resource will not be adversely affected, but would benefit by the action.

**= Monitoring to be conducted pre-construction, during construction or post-construction per anticipated terms and conditions of Biological Opinion or State permits.

D. FACTORS CONSIDERED IN DETERMINING THAT NO ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT IS REQUIRED

Environmental impacts associated with the Proposed Action are fully described in the Final IFR/EA. The Final IFR/EA identified environmental characteristics that may be affected by the proposed action, and determined the significance of the impact to each of these characteristics. With vegetation planting included as a dune design feature in the recommended plan, no compensatory mitigation is required resulting from the proposed action. The Final IFR/EA concluded that the proposed renourishment to the dune and beach within the described project limits would have no significant impacts to the existing environment.

E. COORDINATION WITH FEDERAL AND STATE AGENCIES

ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT

Pursuant to Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973, as amended, Mobile District coordinated the Proposed Action with federal agencies. Letters requesting informal consultation with both U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Protected Resources division (PRD) were submitted to these named agencies on January 6, 2021. Mobile District determined that the recommended plan may affect but is not likely to adversely affect the following federally listed species or their designated critical habitat for those species presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Endangered Species Act Species within Proposed Action

Common/ Scientific Name	Status ¹	Programmatic Biological Opinion	Jurisdictional Agency
Fish			
Giant Manta Ray <i>Manta brostris</i>	T		NMFS
Gulf sturgeon <i>Acipensor oxyrinchus desoti</i>	T (CH)	GRBO ²	NMFS
Smalltooth sawfish <i>Pristis pectinate</i>	E		NMFS
Reptiles			
Atlantic loggerhead turtle <i>Caretta caretta</i>	T	SPBO ³ /GRBO	USFWS/NMFS
Leatherback turtle <i>Dermochelys coriacea</i>	E	SPBO/GRBO	USFWS/NMFS
Kemp's ridley <i>Lepidochelys kemp</i>	E	SPBO/GRBO	USFWS/NMFS
Green sea turtle <i>Chelonia mydas mydas</i>	E	SPBO/GRBO	USFWS/NMFS
Hawksbill turtle <i>Eretmochelys imbricata imbricata</i>	E	SPBO/GRBO	USFWS/NMFS
Birds			
Piping plover <i>Charadrius melodus</i>	T	P3BO (except PCFO)	USFWS
Red knot <i>Calidris canutus rufus</i>	T		USFWS
Mammals			
West Indian (FL) manatee <i>Trichechus manatus floridanus</i>	T		USFWS
Choctawhatchee beach mouse <i>Peromyscus polionotus allophrys</i>	E (CH next to project)	SPBO	USFWS
Blue Whale <i>Balaenoptera musculus</i>	E		NMFS
Finback whale <i>Balaenoptera physalus</i>	E		NMFS
Humpback Whale <i>Megaptera novaengliae</i>	E		NMFS
Bryde's Whale <i>Balaenoptera edeni eden</i>	E		NMFS
Sei Whale <i>Physeter macrocephalus</i>	E		NMFS
Plants / Lichen			

Gulf coast lupine <i>Lupinus westianus</i>	SSC		USFWS
Cruise's goldenaster <i>Chrysopsis gossypina cruseana</i>	SSC		USFWS
Perforate reindeer lichen <i>Cladonia perforata</i>	E		USFWS
Insect			
Gulf Coast Solitary Bee <i>Hesperapis oracria</i>	P		USFWS

¹ E= Endangered, T= Threatened, SSC = Species of special concern, P = Petitioned; CH = Critical Habitat designation;

² GRBO = Regional Biological Opinion for Dredging of Gulf of Mexico Navigation Channels and Sand Mining Areas Using Hopper Dredges by COE Galveston, New Orleans, Mobile, and Jacksonville Districts (Consultation Number F/SER/2000/01287) dated November 19, 2003 and associated amendments in 2005 and 2007.

³ SPBO = Statewide Programmatic Biological Opinion, 2011, amended 2015

A letter of concurrence (LOC) from NMFS-PRD was received by the Mobile District on June 24, 2021, that determined “because all potential project effects to listed species and critical habitat were found to be extremely unlikely to occur, insignificant, or beneficial, we conclude that the proposed action is not likely to adversely affect listed species and critical habitat. ” The LOC states “this concludes USACE consultation responsibilities under the ESA for species under NMFS’s purview.”

The USFWS combined ESA Consultation and FWCAR was received by the Mobile District on July 19, 2021. USFWS concurred with USACE determination of likely to adversely affect listed sea turtles following the Terms and Conditions of the Statewide Programmatic Biological Opinion, (SPBO, 2015)., but not likely to adversely affect the West Indian manatee through implementation of the Standard Manatee Conditions for in-water work. USFWS also concurred with USACE determination that the Recommended Plan (RP) is not likely to adversely affect the red knot or piping plover. The Choctawhatchee beach mouse critical habitat is located outside of, but nearby the project site. This buffer, along with USFWS request to follow the SPBO (2015) Terms and Conditions applicable to this species, no adverse effect to beach mouse or its nearby critical habitat is anticipated to occur as a result of the Recommended Plan. Copies of all ESA Section 7 documents are provided in Environmental Appendix C.

NATIONAL HISTORIC PRESERVATION ACT

Coordination Pursuant to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers determined that the recommended plan has no effect on historic properties. Letters and other communications of concurrence were received from Florida Department of State and Tribes. In a letter February 4, 2021, the Florida State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) concurs with the Mobile District determination that proposed activities are unlikely to affect historic properties; the letter includes steps to address any unexpected discoveries during project activities. The Seminole Tribe of Florida Tribal Historic Preservation Office sent a communication on January 26, 2021 which stated the Tribe has no objections or comments regarding the Proposed Action at this time. The Muscogee Nation sent a communication on February

23, 2021 stating their concurrence that there should be no effects to any known historic properties, and that the work can continue as planned.

CLEAN WATER ACT SECTION 404(B)(1) COMPLIANCE

Pursuant to the Clean Water Act of 1972, as amended, the discharge of dredged or fill material associated with the recommended plan has been found to be compliant with Section 404(b)(1) Guidelines (40 CFR 230). The Clean Water Act Section 404(b)(1) Guidelines evaluation is found in Environmental Appendix C of the IFR/EA.

CLEAN WATER ACT SECTION 401 COMPLIANCE

A water quality certification pursuant to section 401 of the Clean Water Act will be obtained from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) prior to construction. In a letter dated April 19, 2021, the FDEP stated that the recommended plan appears to meet the requirements of the water quality certification, pending confirmation based on information to be developed during the pre-construction engineering and design (PED) phase. All conditions of the water quality certification will be implemented to minimize adverse impacts to water quality.

COASTAL ZONE MANAGEMENT ACT

A determination of consistency with the state of Florida Coastal Zone Management program pursuant to the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972 will be obtained from the FDEP prior to construction. In a letter dated February 21, 2021, the FDEP stated that the recommended plan appears to be consistent with state Coastal Zone Management plans, pending confirmation based on information to be developed during the pre-construction engineering and design phase. All conditions of the consistency determination shall be implemented to minimize adverse impacts to the coastal zone.

OTHER SIGNIFICANT ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLIANCE

All applicable environmental laws have been considered and coordination with appropriate agencies and officials has been completed. A letter submitted to NMFS Habitat Resource Division (HRD) on January 22, 2021 addressed Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) consultation. In a letter of response dated March 8, 2021, NMFS-HRD stated that based upon their review of the EA and EFH assessment, any anticipated impacts from the Project on EFH would be minimal.

F. CONCLUSION

Technical, economic, and environmental criteria used in the formulation of alternative plans were those specified in the Water Resources Council's 1983 *Economic and Environmental Principles and Guidelines for Water and Related Land Resources Implementation Studies*. All applicable laws, executive orders, regulations, and local government plans were considered in evaluation of alternatives. No mitigation actions are required for the Proposed Action. Based on this report, reviews by other Federal, State and local agencies, Tribes, public input, and review by USACE Mobile District, it is my determination that the recommended plan would not cause significant adverse effects on the quality of the human environment; therefore, preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

DATE _____

Jeremy J. Chapman
Colonel, U.S. Army
District Commander