



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

CESAM RD-A
PUBLIC NOTICE NO. SAM-2022-00749-JCC

December 4, 2024

JOINT PUBLIC NOTICE
U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS AND
STATE OF ALABAMA
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

REQUEST TO INSTALL AN INTEGRATED MULTITROPHIC AQUAFORT
STRUCTURE IN THE GULF OF MEXICO

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN: This District has received an application for a Department of the Army permit pursuant to Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899 (33 U.S.C. 403). Please communicate this information to interested parties.

APPLICANT: Dauphin Island Sea Lab
Attention: Ashley McDonald
101 Bienville Boulevard
Dauphin Island, Alabama 36528

LOCATION: The project is located in the Gulf of Mexico, approximately 1.7 nautical miles south of the Fort Morgan Peninsula; at Latitude 30.201833 and Longitude - 87.965000.

PROJECT PURPOSE: The basic project purpose is to install a temporary floating structure platform capable of cultivating finfish, shellfish, and macroalgae to develop a community-based seafood aquaculture system to grow out native species, including Red Drum (*Sciaenops ocellatus*), Eastern Oyster (*Crassostrea virginica*), and Graceful Red Seaweed (*Gracilaria tikvahiae*).

PROPOSED WORK: The applicant has proposed to install an AquaFort floating platform. The platform consists of two (2) 20-foot-square containment bays with a multi-net system to a depth of -12 feet below mean low water (MLW). A 4-foot-wide walkway with handrails will be installed on the platform's perimeter. The combined structure will be 56-foot-long by 28-foot-wide and will be anchored to the seafloor by four (4) stingray-type anchors.

AVOIDANCE AND MINIMIZATION: The AquaFort platform has been designed to withstand worst-case wave and current scenarios to ensure survival in extreme conditions. The multi-net system has been designed to prevent predation and ensure containment of the species by including an outer predator defense net consisting of an upper "jump net" connected to a lower net. Additionally, during the first two months of the growout season, inner net nursery pens will be installed to contain smaller fingerlings until they are large enough to not escape the outer predator defense net. The AquaFort platform, fish, shellfish, and seaweed are planned to be installed onsite during the non-hurricane season, which extends from November to June. A Multi-

Criteria Decision Analysis, which considered multiple data layers including but not limited to bathymetry, military zones, shipping lanes, vessel traffic, shrimp vessel activity, artificial reefs, submarine cables, oil and gas platforms, oil and gas wells, oil and gas leases, oil and gas pipelines, lightering zones, corals, shipwrecks, critical habitats, and essential fish habitats, was used to avoid resources. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Mobile District, has not verified the adequacy of the applicant's avoidance and minimization efforts at this time.

MAINTANENCE AND MONITORING: Maintenance of the Gulf of Mexico Integrated MultiTrophic Aquaculture (GoM IMTA) site will be the responsibility of both the IMTA project personnel and the farm participants, who will be recruited to train and work at the site. Weekly responsibilities will include cleaning and maintaining oyster baskets, checking for fish mortality, recording hand-feeding observations and data collection, and checking and conducting maintenance on the satellite camera, satellite location beacon, and environmental monitoring equipment. Biweekly responsibilities will also include loading feed into the automatic food distribution hoppers and taking growth measurements of the aquaculture species, including total length and weight of Red Drum, oyster length, and macroalgae biomass and color (as an indication of nutrient availability). Monthly responsibilities will include net pen inspections and repair, net pen cleaning, mooring inspections, and line replacement when necessary.

MITIGATION: Compensatory mitigation would not be required because the activity consists of construction of structures that would not adversely impact special aquatic sites.

WATER QUALITY / COASTAL ZONE MANAGEMENT: The applicant will apply for certification from the State of Alabama in accordance with Section 401(a)(1) of the Clean Water Act, as well as Coastal Zone Management (CZM) consistency certification in accordance with the Alabama Coastal Zone Management Program. Upon completion of the required advertising and public comment review, a determination relative to Water Quality Certification and Coastal Zone consistency will be made by the ADEM. This notice will serve as the notification to the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) pursuant to section 401(a)(2) of the Clean Water Act.

HISTORIC PROPERTIES: In accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and Appendix C of 33 CFR Part 325, the undertaking defined in this notice is being considered for the potential to affect cultural and historic properties within the permit area. In accordance with Appendix C of 33 CFR Part 325, the Mobile District has determined the permit area consists of the entire undertaking in waters of the United States. The National Register of Historic Places will be consulted for properties listed in or eligible for the National Register, which are known to exist and would be affected by the proposed work. The Mobile District is seeking comment from the State Historic Preservation Officer regarding the existence, or the potential for existence, of significant cultural and historic properties within the permit area.

ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT: This notice initiates the Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) consultation requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. The proposed project would impact approximately 0.036-acre (1,568-square-foot) of marine substrate utilized by various life stages of multiple marine species. Our initial determination is that the proposed action would have minimal adverse effects on EFH or federally managed fisheries due to the temporary, localized disturbances associated with the installation and operation of the AquaFort platform. Our final determination is subject to review by and coordination with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and/or the U.S. Department of Interior, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

ENDANGERED SPECIES: Preliminary review of this application and the U.S. Department of the Interior's List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants indicates the proposed activity may affect the Kemp's ridley sea turtle (*Lepidochelys kempii*), loggerhead sea turtle (*Caretta caretta*), green sea turtle (*Chelonia mydas*), leatherback sea turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*), hawksbill sea turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricate*), Gulf sturgeon (*Acipenser oxyrinchus desotoi*), and giant manta ray (*Mobula birostris*), and would have no effect on the fin whale (*Balaenoptera physalus*), sei whale (*Balaenoptera borealis*), sperm whale (*Physeter microcephalus*), Bryde's whale (*Balaenoptera edeni*), and oceanic whitetip shark (*Carcharhinus longimanus*). There is no designated critical habitat within the action area, and no direct or indirect effects to designated critical habitat are anticipated as a result of the project activities. At this time, the USACE, Mobile District has made no final determination regarding effects of the project on the above-listed species. Further coordination with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and NMFS will be performed as determined to be appropriate.

COMMENTS: This public notice is being distributed to all known interested persons in order to assist in developing facts on which a decision by the USACE can be based. The Mobile District is soliciting comments from the public, federal, state and local agencies and officials; Indian tribes; and other interested parties in order to consider and evaluate the impacts of this proposed activity. Any comments received will be considered by the USACE to determine whether to issue, modify, condition or deny a permit for this proposal. To make this decision, comments are used to assess impacts on endangered species, historic properties, water quality, general environmental effects, and the other public interest factors listed below. Comments are used in the preparation of an Environmental Assessment and/or an Environmental Impact Statement pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act. Comments are also used to determine the need for a public hearing and to determine the overall public interest of the proposed activity. Any person may request, in writing, within the comment period specified in this notice, that a public hearing be held to consider this application. Requests for public hearings shall state with particularity, the reasons for holding a public hearing. For accuracy and completeness of the record, all data in support of or in opposition to the proposed work should be submitted in writing, setting forth sufficient detail to furnish a clear understanding of the reasons for support or opposition.

The decision whether to issue a permit will be based on an evaluation of the probable impact, including cumulative impacts, of the proposed activity on the public interest. That decision will reflect the national concern for both protection and utilization of important resources. The benefit, which reasonably may be expected to accrue from the proposal, must be balanced against its reasonably foreseeable detriments. All factors which may be relevant to the proposal will be considered, including the cumulative effects thereof; among those are conservation, economics, aesthetics, general environmental concerns, wetlands, historic properties, fish and wildlife values, flood hazards, flood plain values, land use, navigation, shoreline erosion and accretion, recreation, water supply and conservation, water quality, energy needs, safety, food and fiber production, and in general, the needs and welfare of the people. Evaluation of the probable impacts involving deposits of dredged or fill material into waters of the United States will also include the application of guidelines established by the Administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

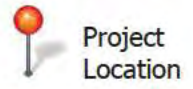
Correspondence concerning this notice should refer to Public Notice Number **SAM-2022-00749-JCC**, and should be directed to the project manager, Mr. Dana J. Leach by e-mail at Dana.J.Leach@usace.army.mil, or to the USACE, Mobile District, Regulatory Division, Attention: Ms. Jessica C. Comeaux, Post Office Box 2288, Mobile, Alabama 36628-0001. Copies of all comments should be furnished to the Alabama Department of Environmental Management at coastal@adem.alabama.gov, or sent to: Alabama Department of Environmental Management, Mobile Branch / Coastal Section, 3664 Dauphin Street, Suite B, Mobile, Alabama 36608. **All comments should be received no later than 30 days from the date of this Public Notice.**

For additional information about our Regulatory Program, please visit our web site at www.sam.usace.army.mil/Missions/Regulatory.aspx.

MOBILE DISTRICT
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Attachments

Legend

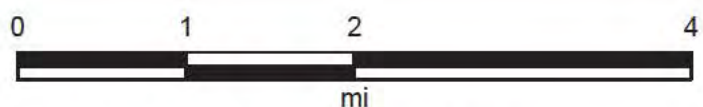


 **PROJECT LOCATION:**
30.201833, -87.965000

Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors, CC-BY-SA, City of Mobile GIS Department, Esri, HERE, Garmin, INCREMENT P, USGS, METI/NASA, EPA, USDA



SAM-2022-00749-JCC // Vicinity Map



Map Center: 87.960251°W 30.218294°N

Map Created by: Dane J. Leach, Senior Project Manager

Coordinate System: WGS 1984 Web Mercator Auxiliary Sphere
Projection: Mercator Auxiliary Sphere

