

Monthly Highlights

January - February, 2009



NOAA FISHERIES SERVICE

Inside This Issue

Gloucester Field Office.....	1
Milford Field Office.....	2
Sandy Hook Field Office.....	3
Chesapeake Bay Field Office....	4
Gloucester Point Field Office...	5

NORTHEAST REGION, HABITAT CONSERVATION DIVISION

GLOUCESTER FIELD OFFICE, GLOUCESTER, MA

REGIONAL EELGRASS MEETING IN PORTLAND, MAINE

NOAA Fisheries Service Habitat Conservation Division (HCD) staff attended the annual regional eelgrass meeting in Portland, Maine at the end of February. This was the first year the meeting was expanded to cover both the Northeast region and Canada. The conference, entitled “Status, Trends, and Conservation of Eelgrass in Atlantic Canada and the Northeastern United States,” brought together eelgrass experts, scientists, and resource managers from the US and Canada representing state and federal agencies, academic institutions, and non profit organizations. Sue Tuxbury of NMFS' HCD presented on the status and trends of eelgrass in Rhode Island, and participated in a panel discussion on changes in eelgrass distribution in the northeast region. Additional topics included protecting habitat functions and values, eelgrass and water quality, impacts from invasive species and climate change, and programs and partnerships for eelgrass conservation. The meeting successfully provided an open forum for discussion of ongoing research, restoration, and policy efforts aimed at protecting eelgrass habitats in the Northeast and Canada. (Susan.Tuxbury@noaa.gov, 978 /281-9176; Sean.McDermott@noaa.gov, 978 /281-9113; marcy.scott@noaa.gov 978/281-9108)

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GREEN ISLAND HYDRO STUDY UPDATE MEETING

NOAA Fisheries Service HCD staff attended the Green Island Power Authority's (GIPA) Updated Study Report meeting on January 26, 2009 for the Green Island Hydroelectric Project. The Green Island Project is located on the Hudson River in Green Island, New York. In the Updated Study Report, the applicant noted that several studies required under the approved study plan were not complete. HCD staff indicated that all studies in the approved study plan should be completed prior to submission of the license application. The Updated Study Report identified changes in the proposed construction plans presented in the Preliminary License Proposal (PLP). GIPA is proposing to expand the generating capacity at the site with the installation of eight new 4.2 m vertical Kaplan-units. HCD staff noted that such revisions may result in a change in potential impacts on fisheries resources in the project area, and that any potential impacts resulting from the updated plans should be reflected in the license application. HCD staff also inquired about plans for upstream passage at the facility. The PLP and the Updated Study Report did not include details pertaining to upstream fish passage. NMFS indicated that the potential for fish passage, both upstream and downstream, should be explored in the license application. (Susan.Tuxbury@noaa.gov, 978/ 281-9176, or Sean.McDermott@noaa.gov, 978/ 281-9113)

MILFORD FIELD OFFICE, MILFORD, CT

GREEN ISLAND HYDROELECTRIC PROJECT

HCD staff provided comments on the Green Island Power Authority's (GIPA) Preliminary Licensing Proposal (PLP) for the Green Island Hydroelectric Project on the Hudson River in Green Island, New York. The Project is located on the west side of the Hudson River at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USCOE) Federal Dam which is approximately 5 miles north of Albany, NY. The Hudson River is tidal downstream of this Dam. The current license for the Green Island Project expires on March 2, 2011. Under the re-licensing process, GIPA is proposing to expand the generating capacity at the site from 6,000 kW to 32,000 kW. The project also includes plans to construct an additional powerhouse, and create a recreation area for public access. The effects of this action are important because the Hudson River supports a number of ecologically important species such as American shad, blueback herring, alewife, American eel, striped bass, and the federally endangered shortnose sturgeon. NMFS' focus will be to protect and enhance historical spawning, rearing, and forage habitat for these species.

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11th FLATFISH BIOLOGY CONFERENCE

HCD staff attended the 11th Flatfish Biology Conference in Westbrook, Connecticut. The conference was organized by NOAA's Northeast Fisheries Science Center's Milford Laboratory in Milford, Connecticut. The two day conference included speakers from federal and state government agencies, academic organizations, and private and non-profit groups. Participants also included Wilton High School students giving a talk on their winter flounder surveys in Norwalk Harbor. The talks and poster presentations covered the latest information and research on flatfish species in the northeast as well as southern flounder and Pacific halibut. Species responses to climate change, seasonal population patterns, movement studies, habitat usage, stock assessments, and dredging impacts on flatfish species were among the covered topics. The program and abstracts for the conference can be found at:

<http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/publications/crd/crd0819/>.
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SANDY HOOK FIELD OFFICE, HIGHLANDS, NJ

DELAWARE RIVER DEEPENING

After a several year hiatus, the proposal to deepen the Delaware River 102 miles from Philadelphia to the Sea has been reactivated. The project involves the deepening of the Delaware River Federal Navigation Channel from 40 feet to 45 feet 102 miles from Philadelphia Harbor, PA and Beckett Street Terminal, Camden, NJ to the mouth of the Delaware Bay. Dredged material disposal is proposed at several existing disposal sites in New Jersey as beach nourishment material in Delaware and at Kelly Island, and as a beneficial use site also in Delaware. The Philadelphia District has initiated consultations under both the Magnuson Stevens Act and the Endangered Species Act. Review of the essential fish habitat and biological assessments is ongoing.

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OFFSHORE LIQUEFIED NATURAL GAS FACILITIES

Several liquefied natural gas terminals are proposed currently in the New York Bight Apex under the Deepwater Port Act. Two of these proposed facilities would be located offshore of Monmouth County, New Jersey.

Representatives from the U.S. Coast Guard, EPA, New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, the NY District Army Corps, and others met at the James J. Howard Marine Sciences

Laboratory in January to discuss the Excalibur LLC's proposed Liberty Natural Gas project. Liberty Natural Gas and their consultants explained the proposed project and their progress on data collection, design, and the preparation of the permit application. The project will consist of four liquefied natural gas (LNG) offloading buoys similar to the Northeast Gateway project in Massachusetts. All re-gasification will occur on board the ships. To transport the gas onshore, a 50-mile 36-inch diameter subsea pipeline is proposed from the mooring area into Sandy Hook and Raritan Bays across the Raritan River entrance into Perth Amboy. Once onshore, the pipeline will extend 11 miles to Linden. Liberty Natural Gas is planning to file permit/license applications in the second quarter of 2009.

A smaller group of representatives of Blue Ocean Energy met with HCD staff at Sandy Hook in February to provide an update on their proposed LNG facility. Blue Ocean proposes to construct a floating platform offloading and re-gasification facility. The floating facility will be a closed loop system and would store and re-gasify LNG. A 49-mile, 36-inch diameter subsea pipeline would run from the facility into Sandy Hook and Raritan Bays into South Amboy. The pipeline would be directionally drilled under the Raritan River to Sayreville and extend to Woodbridge. Applications for permits and licenses are likely this year. (Karen.Greene@noaa.gov, 732/ 872-3023 or Stanley.W.Gorski@noaa.gov, 732/ 872-3037)

MINERALS MANAGEMENT SERVICE EFH CONSULTATION

HCD received the *Essential Fish Habitat Assessment for the Issuance of Non-Competitive Leases for Wind Resource Data Collection on the Northeast Atlantic Outer Continental Shelf* prepared by the Minerals Management Service (MMS). MMS is proposing to issue non-competitive leases authorizing wind resource data collection on the Northeast Atlantic Outer Continental Shelf (OCS). A total of seven lease blocks located offshore of Delaware and New Jersey are being considered. We concurred with the proposed impact mitigation measures described in Section 5 of the assessment and the MMS's conclusions regarding impacts on EFH and on federally managed species. No additional EFH conservation recommendations were offered on the overall plan, but we requested that MMS reinitiate EFH consultation upon receipt of the project plan for each individual meteorological tower and buoy so that we may evaluate whether any site specific EFH conservation recommendations are needed. **Karen Greene 732 872-3023** ((Karen.Greene@noaa.gov, 732/ 872-3023 or Stanley.W.Gorski@noaa.gov, 732/ 872-3037)

CHESAPEAKE BAY FIELD OFFICE,
ANNAPOLIS, MD

**MID-CHESAPEAKE BAY ISLAND
RESTORATION PROJECT,
HABITAT DEVELOPMENT
SUBGROUP**

With issuing of the USACE Final Integrated Feasibility Report & Environmental Impact Statement in September 2008 for the Mid-Chesapeake Bay Island Restoration Project, the Maryland Port Administration (the local sponsor of this project) has initiated an interagency review process (i.e., Mid-Bay Island Habitat Development Subgroup) for developing ecological design criteria for the James Island and Barren Island components of this project. During several meetings of the Subgroup, design criteria matrices were compiled to assist in selecting target parameters (e.g., priority resources and habitats, habitat mix ratios, morphometry, and elevations) for each island. As with the Poplar Island Restoration Project, NOAA Fisheries Service Habitat Conservation Division (HCD) has stressed the importance of diversifying the periphery of the proposed 2,000-acre James Island Project to create habitats that will attract use by migratory and predatory fish species, and link energy production within the interior marshes of the island to higher trophic levels of the Chesapeake Bay food web. Meetings of the Subgroup are scheduled to continue throughout 2009 on a monthly basis.

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**DOMINION COVE POINT LIQUEFIED NATURAL GAS
(LNG) TERMINAL UPGRADE**

Dominion Cove Point LNG is preparing (in accordance with Federal Energy Regulatory Commission guidelines) a series of resource reports and a Supplemental Environmental Assessment (EA) for proposed changes in their plans to upgrade their LNG terminal at Cove Point, Calvert County, Maryland. Proposed actions include re-enforcement of the terminal pier and dredging of terminal berths to accommodate access for larger LNG tankers. HCD has assisted the applicant during the past two years in developing mitigative measures for minimizing acoustical impacts on fish resources from power-driving of large-diameter steel piles, and selecting a disposal option for the 150,000 cubic yards of dredge material that will be generated from maintenance of the terminal berths. The preferred option for placement of the dredge material will involve restoring a breached shoreline at Cove Point to protect a Natural Heritage Trust freshwater marsh which lies adjacent to the Chesapeake Bay. HCD is entering the final stages of negotiations on the project with review of the applicant's essential fish habitat assessment, submitted in advance of the EA. (John.Nichols@NOAA.GOV, 410/ 267-5675)

GLOUCESTER POINT FIELD OFFICE, GLOUCESTER POINT, VA

**U.S. NAVY, CHEATHAM ANNEX PROPOSED
MAINTENANCE DREDGING**

The Navy has proposed to maintenance dredge Pier CAD-A at Naval Weapons Station Yorktown, Cheatham Annex, located on the York River in Yorktown, Virginia. Approximately 64,700 cubic yards of material will be dredged on a one-time basis over 5.7 acres of subtidal bottom. Project depths for the various slip areas vary between -22 ft. to a maximum depth of -37 ft. MLW. Dredging will be conducted using a closed clamshell bucket and transported to Shirley Plantation in Charles City County, Virginia for upland disposal.

Under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Management and Conservation Act (MSA), the project site is designated as EFH for the various life stages of 11 federally managed species, and is also a habitat area of particular concern (HAPC) for sandbar shark. Though dredging impacts are expected to be temporary in nature and are not anticipated to significantly adversely affect EFH and HAPC, the York River is also a confirmed anadromous fish use area by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. Six anadromous species

including striped bass, American shad, hickory shad, blueback herring, alewife, and yellow perch are known to use the York River for migration and spawning. Anecdotal evidence suggests Atlantic sturgeon are also found in the York River. Under the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act, NOAA Fisheries Service has recommended a time of year restriction on dredging activities between February 15 and June 30 of any year to help protect anadromous fish migration and spawning.

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PROPOSED MARINA, ELIZABETH RIVER, CHESAPEAKE, VIRGINIA

A 190-slip marina known as Bellharbour Watercraft Service Center has been proposed on the Southern

Branch of the Elizabeth River in the City of Chesapeake, Virginia. NOAA Fisheries Service HCD staff expressed concerns during the public notice comment period that as currently proposed the marina appears incompatible with on-site environmental constraints, particularly the existing shallow depths and proximity to an adjacent oyster reef.

Under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA), the Southern Branch of the Elizabeth River is designated as EFH for 10 federally managed species. The proposed dredging will affect approximately 5.39 acres of EFH. The project area is also a confirmed anadromous fish use area by Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF). HCD staff has recommended reconfiguring the proposed slips to take advantage of naturally deeper water and the use of zonation dredging, whereby boat slips are dredged to different depths based on vessel draft requirements, in an effort to reduce dredging. HCD staff has recommended a time of year restriction (TOYR) for all in-water construction activities between February 15 and June 30 to help protect anadromous fish migration and spawning. A second TOYR has been recommended between July 1 and September 30 to help protect oyster spawning and larval settlement. HCD staff will continue working closely with the Norfolk District Corps on efforts to reduce impacts on NOAA trust resources. (David.L.O'Brien@noaa.gov, 804/ 684-7828)