

Monthly Highlights

July and August, 2009



NOAA FISHERIES SERVICE

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NORTHEAST REGION, HABITAT CONSERVATION DIVISION

GLOUCESTER FIELD OFFICE, GLOUCESTER, MA

HALF MOON COVE BARRAGE PROJECT

NOAA Fisheries Service Habitat Conservation Division (HCD) provided comments on the Preliminary Application Document for the Half Moon Cove tidal barrage project proposed by Tidewalkers, LLC. A tidal barrage project involves building a barrage (dam) across a body of water, such as a bay, to retain water during tidal events. As tidal water flows into and out of the barrage, the reversible turbines installed in the barrage wall generate electricity. The proposed project would be located in Cobscook Bay, between the City of Eastport and the Town of Perry, Washington County, Maine. The project would consist of a 1,200-foot-long, 31-foot-high rock filled barrage style dam; creation of an impoundment basin permanently affecting approximately 880 acres of intertidal and subtidal habitat; and a concrete powerhouse incorporated into the barrage containing two reversible turbines generating units with a total installed capacity of 16 megawatts. HCD staff comments identified concerns for potential significant project related impacts on trust resources, which imply broad scale loss or permanent alteration of habitat functions on which living marine resources depend. Our comments also describe the federal consultation requirements necessary to conduct a review of the proposed activities, the need for current, relevant data for the Half-Moon Cove area, as well as encouraging the applicant to work with NOAA Fisheries Service in the development of the project. (sean.mcdermott@noaa.gov, 978/ 281-9113)

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WELCOMING NEW EMPLOYEE - BILL MCDAVITT

Bill McDavitt joined HCD as a contract employee on August 24th. He will be working primarily on hydropower licensing and relicensing issues in order to protect trust resources. Current projects include review of the Milford fish lift on the Penobscot River, Riverbank Power's Wiscasset Energy Center proposal to develop a pump and store power generation facility on the Back River, and review of two competing license applications at Scotland dam on the Shetucket River in Connecticut. Bill has a master's degree from Utah State University, and has been in environmental consulting for the past ten years. He has recently moved to the North Shore from Connecticut.

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MILFORD FIELD OFFICE, MILFORD, CT HCD HOSTS TANZANIAN AQUACULTURISTS

The women of the Fumba peninsula in Zanzibar, Tanzania have long depended upon local shellfish (clams, oysters, mussels, cockles) and other seafood for basic sustenance, but as is true for many other communities globally, their visions have begun to change as unsustainable harvests have made bivalve mollusks increasingly more difficult to collect. Under the leadership of representatives from Tanzania's Institute of Marine Sciences, members of selected coastal communities have begun modeling what they hope will be a new and successful venture that not only improves fishery management and

environmental stewardship, but also serves as a means of increasing women's economic status in their communities. This new initiative complements the Republic of Tanzania's existing village-based seaweed mariculture program, and is an excellent example of how Tanzania is applying the principles of integrated coastal management by establishing and promoting sustainable aquaculture. Staff from the Milford Field Office were honored to host a contingent of Tanzanian fishermen and extension specialists in a tour of the research and hatchery facilities at the NEFSC Milford Laboratory. An interactive seminar was organized and brought NEFSC staff, representatives of the Regional Office, Rhode Island's Coastal Resource Center, and the State of Connecticut's Aquaculture Division together to discuss the practical and regulatory challenges the Tanzanians are facing as they develop their half pearl oyster culture program. It was amazing to see how many issues and experiences we have in common, despite the many miles that separate our shores. We learned a lot from the successes the Tanzanians already have accomplished with their program and hope the experience will prove mutually beneficial to the Tanzanian fellows as they return to their country to continue developing their pilot aquaculture program. We thank the NEFSC and our own Marjorie Mooney-Suess for their support in making this an informative and successful outreach event.

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STIMULUS BILL PROJECTS UNDERWAY

As Stimulus Bill funding begins to be disbursed, a number of activities have begun to unfold in the greater New York region. Projects proposed for funding range from transportation infrastructure development and maintenance to habitat restoration or enhancement. Due to the sheer number and variety of projects, many of these activities are being coordinated through county- or local-level organizations in addition to our usual clients from the federal regulatory agencies. Staff from the Milford Field Office continues to work with the project proponents regarding activities that may affect aquatic resources and habitats. (Diane.Rusanowsky@noaa.gov, 203/ 882-6504)

HYDROKINETIC PROJECT UPDATE

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission [FERC] continues to proceed with its Pilot Licensing program for hydrokinetic projects. In the greater New York area, proponents for several projects continue to make headway meeting their regulatory milestones and we look forward to seeing the results of their monitoring and studies. The East River region continues to be a primary focus for these activities, but

projects elsewhere in the coastal Middle Atlantic region are becoming more active. Several projects in the Niagara River and coastal Long Island have been withdrawn at the request of the project proponents or terminated by FERC. The situation continues to be fairly dynamic, as new equipment designs are developed, proposed and tested. Milford staff will continue monitoring and coordinating these projects as they arise.

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SANDY HOOK FIELD OFFICE, HIGHLANDS, NJ

NEW JERSEY MEADOWLANDS

Mitigation banks and transportation projects continue to be the main focus of the Meadowlands Interagency Mitigation Advisory Committee (MIMAC). Several very large public transportation and airport safety projects will be required to go to construction within the next six to 12 months. Finding suitable compensatory mitigation for these projects is critical. To help satisfy the mitigation needs of these projects, the MIMAC is reviewing two potential mitigation banks – the Kane Wetland Mitigation Bank and the Evergreen Wetland Mitigation Bank. In the NJ Meadowlands District, the MIMAC functions as the Interagency Review Team (IRT) required under the mitigation regulations.

Sediment sampling has been completed at both sites. HCD has reviewed the prospectuses for both banks. The draft banking instrument has been received for the proposed Kane Wetland

Mitigation Bank and the 30 day review clock has started in accordance with the federal mitigation regulations. Discussions continue on sediment sampling results, site design, credit ratios, monitoring, and long term management.

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PASSAIC RIVER SUPERFUND REMEDIATION

NOAA's National Ocean Service and HCD have been coordinating with EPA on the potential alternatives for remediating the Passaic River Superfund site. The likely remedy will involve dredging several million cubic yards of contaminated sediments from the lower Passaic River. Dredged material disposal options include filling a portion of Newark Bay to create an uplands confined disposal facility or dredged a portion of the bay to construct a subaquatic disposal cell. Several other options are also being considered and no final decision has been made. NOAA is advising EPA and the other State and Federal Trustees on mitigation needs should aquatic disposal be selected as the preferred disposal method. NOAA is also strongly encouraging the careful evaluation of disposal alternatives that do not involve the placement of dredged material into the aquatic environment. **Karen Greene 732 872-3023**

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ATLANTIC SEA ISLAND GROUP, LLC – SAFE HARBOR ENERGY

The U.S. Coast Guard is in the process of preparing an environmental impact statement (EIS) for the construction of a proposed liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminal proposed under the Deepwater Ports Act for a site located approximately 13 miles from Long Island, NY and 19 miles from Sandy Hook, NJ. The applicants, Atlantic Sea Island Group are proposing to fill approximately 116 acres of the Atlantic Ocean on Cholera Banks to construct a 60 acre LNG terminal. NMFS staff from HCD and the Northeast Fisheries Science Center participated on a conference call with the Coast Guard and their EIS contractor to discuss information needs and methods for evaluating the impacts to ichthyoplankton. Also discussed were the need to address benthic impacts and the effects on water and sediment circulation. Stanley.W.Gorski@noaa.gov, 732/ 872-3037 or Karen.Greene@noaa.gov, 732/ 872-3023

NY/NJ BAYKEEPER OYSTER PROJECT

The NY/NJ Baykeeper has proposed installing several types of structures in Raritan Bay near Keyport, NJ to serve as oyster reefs. Structures proposed included reef balls, Reef Bloks, arches developed

by Rutgers University, and foamed glass “lollipops” developed by the Gaia Institute. Several concerns arose during HCD’s review of the information provided to us as part of the Army Corps authorization process. During our review, HCD staff consulted with staff from the Northeast Fisheries Science Center. The use of the “lollipops” to collect spat and the presence of MSX and Dermo in the area were of concern, as was the potential for poaching of oysters on the reef structures. The waters where the reef structures are to be placed are condemned for shellfish harvesting due to the potential presence of human pathogens. Since NOAA’s Restoration Center (RC) staff was reviewing the project for possible funding, HCD and the RC worked together with the applicant to clarify some confusing aspects of the project and to resolve some of HCD’s concerns. Our most serious concerns have been addressed and the project has moved forward. The RC approved the funding and the Army Corps issued a Nationwide 27 for the project. Deployment of the structures is expected in mid-September.

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CHESAPEAKE BAY FIELD OFFICE, ANNAPOLIS, MD

ST. JEROME’S CREEK SMALL NAVIGATION PROJECT, ST. MARY’S COUNTY, MARYLAND

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Baltimore District has initiated a study

for protecting the existing St. Jerome’s Creek Federal Navigation Channel and Turning Basin. The study is being conducted under Section 107 of the River & Harbor Act, which allows for constructing breakwaters and jetties for harbor protection. The study is currently in the feasibility phase, which includes developing alternatives, and collecting and analyzing information on natural resources and potential impacts to those resources. Potential impacts from this proposal on large-scale off-bottom shellfish aquaculture operations located in the Southern Prong of St. Jerome’s Creek will be of particular concern to NOAA Fisheries.

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MARYLAND WETLAND MONITORING STRATEGY TECHNICAL WORKSHOP

The Maryland Department of the Environment Wetlands and Waterways Program will hold a series of technical workshops, beginning in late September 2009, to formulate a monitoring strategy for the state’s tidal and non-wetlands. The strategy will also be developed to support and expand a variety of regulatory and non-regulatory actions, including routine functional and condition assessment of wetlands during permit review, determining success of compensatory mitigation, preparing watershed plans, encouraging voluntary wetland restoration projects in priority areas, estimating pollutant reductions and other water quality benefits, and setting wetland conservation and management priorities. Attendees will include federal, state and county regulatory and resource agencies, private coalitions (e.g., Nature Conservancy, Chesapeake Bay Foundation), and university staff (e.g., University of Maryland). NOAA Fisheries Habitat Protection will participate in this interagency forum. (John.Nichols@NOAA.GOV, 410/267-5675)

GLOUCESTER POINT FIELD OFFICE, GLOUCESTER POINT, VA

LYNNHAVEN RIVER FEDERAL NAVIGATION PROJECT, VIRGINIA BEACH, VIRGINIA

The Virginia Field office of NOAA Fisheries Service HCD recently reviewed the essential fish habitat assessment (EFH) prepared by the Norfolk District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for the Lynnhaven River Federal Navigation project. Lynnhaven Inlet is relatively constricted, though it provides tidal connection between the Chesapeake Bay and the extensive Lynnhaven River system including the river’s Eastern and Western Branches, Lynnhaven Bay, Broad Bay, and Linkhorn Bay. The Lynnhaven Inlet Federal Navigation project consists of five main components: the main entrance channel,

the mooring and turning basin, the eastern side channel, Long Creek channel, and the Narrows. Project depths range between -10 to -12 ft. MLLW for various sections of the project. Dredging will be conducted hydraulically, with sandy material used for beach nourishment along Cape Henry beach which extends from Lynnhaven Inlet eastward.

Approximately, 1,500,000 cubic yards of beach quality sand is anticipated to be dredged and deposited along the Cape Henry beach during this maintenance cycle. The Lynnhaven River is designated as EFH for various life stages of 19 federally managed species, including redfish and summer flounder. Because the lower Chesapeake Bay is characterized as an important nursery area for summer flounder, NOAA HCD provided conservation recommendations including a time of year restriction (TOYR) on all dredging activity in the immediate vicinity of Lynnhaven Inlet between April 1 and June 30 of any year to help protect summer flounder. This conservation recommendation has been accepted by the Norfolk District ACOE and will be incorporated into the operational plan for this project. It is hoped that conservation measures such as this will help to restore depressed summer flounder stocks in the Mid-Atlantic.

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SOUTH NORFOLK JORDAN BRIDGE, PORTSMOUTH, VIRGINIA

NOAA Fisheries Service HCD staff has reviewed the EFH assessment it

recently requested from the U.S. Coast Guard for the proposed South Norfolk Jordan Bridge project. The proposed high-rise, fixed span bridge across the Southern Branch of the Elizabeth River will replace the existing Jordan Bridge which was closed November 2008 due to its severely deteriorated structural condition. The proposed replacement bridge is desperately needed to provide an alternative route for commuter and emergency vehicle across the Southern Branch of the Elizabeth River between the cities of Portsmouth and Chesapeake. The Elizabeth River is designated as EFH for 14 federally managed species. Following our review of the EFH assessment, NOAA HCD has provided the U.S. Coast Guard concurrence that if the proposed best management practices and mitigative measures (i.e. installation of turbidity curtains and oil booms surrounding the concrete piles during installation) are incorporated into the construction plan; the project will not substantially adversely affect EFH, managed species, or their prey. The South Norfolk Jordan Bridge project was permitted by the Virginia Marine Resources Commission during their August 25 meeting in which NOAA HCD staff provided comment on the project. (David.L.O'Brien@noaa.gov, 804/ 684-7828)

NASA WALLOPS FLIGHT FACILITY, WALLOPS ISLAND

Several projects proposed for NASA's Wallops Flight Facility (WFF) have been reviewed recently by HCD staff. Projects include an expansion of the facility's launch range including the renovation of launch Pad 0-A, payload fueling facility (PFF), construction of an unmanned aerial systems (UAS) runway, and the protection of nearly 15,000 linear ft. of Wallops Island shoreline requiring nearly 3 million cubic yards of beach nourishment. Several sites, approximately 12-15 miles offshore, have been identified as a sand source for the shoreline protection project. Though the Wallops facility has traditionally supported the launch of sub-orbital, sounding (measurement) rockets, an expansion in the number of orbital rocket missions is forecast to help maintain the international space station when NASA's shuttle program ends. Recently, a presentation conducted by HCD staff for WFF and NEPA staff outlined obligations mandated under Magnuson-Stevens Act, and included a discussion of EFH designations and the role of NOAA Fisheries Service in the review of any actions undertaken or authorized by other federal agencies with the potential to adversely affect EFH, managed species, or their prey species. HCD staff will continue working with WFF staff to help ensure that mitigative measures designed to reduce impacts to EFH and managed species are incorporated into these and future projects. (David.L.O'Brien@noaa.gov, 804/ 684-7828)

