

Monthly Highlights

May / June, 2009



NOAA FISHERIES SERVICE

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NORTHEAST REGION, HABITAT CONSERVATION DIVISION

GLOUCESTER FIELD OFFICE, GLOUCESTER, MA

FISH PASSAGEWAY WORKSHOP, PORTLAND, OREGON

NOAA Fisheries Service Habitat Conservation Division (HCD) staff attended a workshop on fish passage organized by engineers and biologists from NOAA's Northwest Regional office in Portland, OR. The conference was attended by NOAA's hydro staff from all the regions as well as staff from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. The five-day workshop covered all aspects of fish passage including hydraulics, engineering and design, monitoring studies, as well as training for negotiating fish passage. The workshop included classroom work, group discussions on specific case studies, and a field trip to Bonneville Dam on the Columbia River. Bonneville Dam is the largest fish passage facility in the country and provided examples on a large scale for all types of passage designs. In addition to offering a comprehensive review of all issues related to fish passage, the workshop provided a unique opportunity to get advice on specific project concerns and challenges by a group of experts in the field. (Susan.Tuxbury@noaa.gov, 978/281-9176)

NOAA FISHERIES SERVICE EDUCATION AND OUTREACH CONFERENCE

For four days in June, educators, outreach specialists, and public affairs officers from across NOAA Fisheries Service gathered at NERO in Gloucester to discuss how the agency could better use social media to reach constituents. The first day of the meeting was devoted to discussing media relations and new ways of pitching and packaging stories for a changing news media. In particular, the group discussed

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the shrinking newspaper industry and the growing use of social media like blogs, FACEBOOK, Twitter, and YouTube which provides more immediate means for sharing news.

On day two, attendees took part in an all day training to learn how to effectively use these new tools. During the third and fourth days of the meeting, educators and outreach staff participated in various discussions and heard presentations about how educators use social media to reach their students and about what is happening with NOAA Fisheries Service marketing campaign and plans for overhauling national and regional websites. The group also got a preview of the agency's YouTube site which is now live. A big topic of discussion was how to move forward and still be mindful of the challenges of being a regulatory agency with a need to maintain adequate security.

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WASHBURN AND DOUGHTY BOATYARD

Washburn & Doughty Associates applied for a permit from the Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) to build three landing platforms for a dry dock system at the commercial boatyard in East Boothbay, Maine. One of these dry dock landing areas would be located adjacent to the waterside work area, which was constructed to allow continued operations of the boatyard after a major fire destroyed parts of the facility in July 2008. (For further details on this portion of the project

please see the July-August 2008 issue of the Highlights). The dry dock landing platform, which would consist of submerged piles arranged in a rectangular pattern, will provide a facility for the finishing work of newly constructed tug boats. The tug boat would be moved by crane from the waterside work area and then placed on a floating frame, while the bottom rests on the submerged pile supported platform to create a dry dock system. Although the use of this dry dock is not expected to be frequent, the finishing processes would require several weeks to complete. Unfortunately the original location for this dry dock platform coincided with portions of a previously mapped eelgrass bed. NOAA Fisheries Service HCD staff expressed concerns that both the construction of the platform and the operation of the dry dock system were likely to impact the health of the eelgrass bed. HCD staff requested that additional eelgrass surveys be performed to confirm the current extent of the eelgrass bed and suggested the applicant explore alternative placement of the dry dock along the waterside work area to minimize overlap with the eelgrass bed. The applicant performed additional resource surveys as requested in May. The applicant has submitted revised plans for this dry dock, which successfully avoided the entire range of the current eelgrass bed by shifting the position of the dry dock platform to the Northwest end of the existing seawall. (Marcy.Scott@noaa.gov, 978/ 281-9108)

MILFORD FIELD OFFICE, MILFORD, CT

NEW YORK TIDAL ENERGY PROJECT FILES DRAFT APPLICATION

The proponents for a proposed hydrokinetic pilot project in the Hell Gate reach of the East River recently filed their draft application materials with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC). The proposed activities entail installation and testing of two devices that generate electricity from tidal currents and would be deployed in the greater Wards Island/Astoria area. HCD staff has begun its review of the draft application package and will be preparing comments as part of its pre-application coordination in FERC's Integrated Licensing Process [ILP] as described under § 241 of the Energy Policy Act of 2005. (Diane.Rusanowsky@noaa.gov, 203/ 882-6504)

ULSTER COUNTY TRANSPORTATION COUNCIL BEGINS APPROVAL PROCESS FOR ECONOMIC STIMULUS PROJECTS

The Ulster County Transportation Council (UCTS) has begun implementing transportation-related economic stimulus projects in its

geographic area. The Policy Committee recently approved two types of projects under consideration for receiving funds under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). These are identified as Round 1 and Round 2 proposals. As explained by the UCTC, Round 1 projects are first in line to receive stimulus funding. Round 2 projects are a second tier of proposals established as a contingency plan in the event that Round 1 projects fail to meet implementation, or in the event that additional funds otherwise become available. The UCTC has identified a number of highway and bridge projects, transportation enhancements, and transit projects that have been selected to fill their Round 1 and 2 project lists. The total funding for Round 1 projects is estimated at nearly \$28M. In its role coordinating with the federal funding and authorizing agencies, NMFS staff from the Milford Field Office will review and comment on those bridge and highway construction projects which may have an adverse effect on living aquatic resources and/or essential fish habitat.

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ACOE PROPOSES MAINTENANCE DREDGING & BEACH NOURISHMENT FOR FIRE ISLAND INLET AND SHORE

The New York District, Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) is proposing to dredge approximately 1.175 M cubic yards of material from Fire Island Inlet to maintain navigable depths in the inlet. The dredged material

predominantly would be placed as beach nourishment at Gilgo Beach. A portion of the material also could be placed at Robert Moses State Park's beach, contingent on state funding. The New York District anticipates that the material would be removed by pipeline dredge or hopper dredge. HCD staff is reviewing the Corps' documentation for completeness and will be coordinating with them on this significant coastal project. (Diane.Rusanowsky@noaa.gov, 203/ 882-6504)

SUFFOLK COUNTY DREDGING PROPOSAL

The Suffolk County Department of Public Works proposes to perform maintenance dredging with beach placement at Mud Creek/Buds Pond, tributary to Southold Bay. The material to be removed is described as predominantly sand and gravel. Approximately 6,000 cubic yards of this material would be extracted with a hydraulic dredge, and subsequently placed on Port of Egypt Island beach. Approximately half of the material would be placed waterward of spring high water. In addition, the project proponents request approval to perform up to three additional dredging events [approximately 6,000 CY per episode] should the New York District ACOE issue a ten year permit. (Diane.Rusanowsky@noaa.gov, 203/ 882-6504)

FISHERS ISLAND YACHT CLUB

The subject applicant has requested Department of the Army authorization to dredge up to 19,000 cubic yards from its boat basin and to subsequently place the material at the New London Disposal Site with capping. The material is proposed to be extracted using a clamshell and deposited into barges with no permissible overflow; removal is anticipated to take about 50 days. This project iteration is said to be the first such maintenance dredging at these facilities in nearly 40 years. The project proponents also plan to reconfigure their dockage. HCD staff is reviewing the matter.

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SANDY HOOK FIELD OFFICE, HIGHLANDS, NJ

MINERALS MANAGEMENT WORKSHOP

The Minerals Management Service (MMS) Office of Offshore Alternative Energy Programs held several public workshops throughout the country to provide an overview of the final federal regulations to establish a program for alternate energy projects in the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS). These workshops are follow ups to the ones held last summer to introduce the proposed regulations. HCD staff from Sandy Hook attended the workshop held at Monmouth University on June 11, 2009. MMS's alternate energy

program will be starting up on June 29, 2009 when the new regulations take effect. A Request for Interest (RFI) for leases will be issued in New Jersey and Delaware in the near future. Both States hope to have operating units by 2012. Rhode Island will likely be the next state since they have also expressed interest in wind farms off their coast. Before the RFI is issued, MMS will establish a federal/state/local task force. NOAA Fisheries Service will be asked to participate on the taskforce. (Karen.Greene@noaa.gov, 732/ 872-3023)

NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION (NJDOT) – ROUTE 72 BRIDGE REPLACEMENT

The Route 72 bridge/causeway connecting Stafford Township to Long Beach Island is in need of replacement due to significant deterioration and issues with the original design. The NJDOT is in the preliminary design phase of the replacement project. They plan to advertise for construction in 2012. Work proposed includes the construction of a new bridge to the south of the existing one, a major rehabilitation of the three small bridges on the eastern end of the causeway and finally the closure and major reconstruction of the existing bridge. The NJDOT hopes to complete the environmental studies by June of this year including the submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) monitoring. The NJDOT has not identified the nature and extent of the impacts that will

result from the project. The acreage of wetlands filled or SAV impacted has not been determined. (Karen.Greene@noaa.gov, 732/ 872-3023)

NEW JERSEY MEADOWLANDS

The Meadowlands Interagency Mitigation Advisory Committee (MIMAC) is continuing the review of two wetlands mitigation banks proposed within the Hackensack Meadowlands. Because there are several very large public transportation and airport safety projects that will be required to go to construction within the next six to 12 months, compensatory mitigation has become a critical issue in the Meadowlands. HCD has reviewed public notices with each bank's draft prospectus. Draft mitigation banking instruments are expected in July.

An emerging issue in the Meadowlands is wetlands mitigation and restoration and wildlife hazard management near airports. This past January, a passenger jet crashed into the Hudson River following a collision with a flock of birds shortly after take off from La Guardia Airport. As a result, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has begun to take a strong position against the creation or enhancement of bird habitat near airports. Several agencies including the Department of Defense have signed a Memorandum of Agreement with the FAA regarding wildlife hazard mitigation. While this is a national issue, it has become a critical issue in New Jersey's Meadowlands because it has the very strong potential to alter or preclude compensatory mitigation for wetland losses taking place in much of the Meadowlands. (Karen.Greene@noaa.gov, 732/ 872-3023)

ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS ENVIRONMENTAL CHIEFS MEETING

As part of their annual meeting, the environmental chiefs from the ACOE North Atlantic Division visited the Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) at the James J. Howard Marine Sciences Laboratory at Sandy Hook. HCD hosted the meeting which included presentations by NEFSC staff on the research done at Sandy Hook, a tour of the facilities, and a discussion of the EFH designation process and collaborative efforts between NOAA Fisheries Service and the ACOE. Also discussed was the need for the ACOE to undertake EFH consultations on all of the operations and maintenance projects. (Stanley.W.Gorski@noaa.gov, 732/ 872-3037 or Karen.Greene@noaa.gov, 732/ 872-3023)

CHESAPEAKE BAY FIELD OFFICE, ANNAPOLIS, MD

Patuxent Beach Road (Maryland Route 4) Improvement Study

Interagency NEPA coordination continues on the Maryland Route 4 (Patuxent Beach Road) Improvement Study, which includes the Thomas Johnson Bridge crossing of the Patuxent River, connecting Calvert and St. Mary's Counties. Two build alternatives for upgrading the Thomas Johnson Bridge have been retained for detailed study: 1) Constructing a parallel two-lane span adjacent to the existing bridge, with upgrade of the existing span; and, 2) Constructing a new parallel four-lane span adjacent to the existing bridge, and removal of the existing bridge. A controversial alternative proposing an entirely new crossing upstream of the existing bridge has been dropped from further consideration. NOAA Fisheries Service habitat concerns for those crossing alternatives retained for detailed study are construction-related; i.e., involving acoustical impacts to finfish from pile-driving and subaqueous blasting (if required for demolishing the existing bridge).

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Maryland Aquaculture Enterprise Zones

In response to Maryland Senate Bill 271 (Shellfish Aquaculture), and recommendations of the Maryland Aquaculture Enterprise Zone Workgroup (AEZW) and county oyster committees, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is

proposing to establish Aquaculture Enterprise Zones (AEZ) in the Chesapeake Bay and tidal tributaries, and Maryland Coastal Bays. AEZs would be reserved solely for leasing to private interests for conducting off-bottom and/or on-bottom culture of shellfish (i.e., native American oysters, hard clam, bay scallops, etc.). During June 2009, at least four AEZs were delineated/proposed (e.g., in the Patuxent River and West River), with more recommended areas forthcoming at the discretion of the AEZW and county oyster committees. DNR is considering elimination of Natural Oyster Bar boundaries within the Maryland portion of the Chesapeake Bay, to be replaced by AEZs, and Public Grounds.

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GLOUCESTER POINT FIELD OFFICE, GLOUCESTER POINT, VA

OLD DOMINION ELECTRICAL COOPERATIVE, SURRY, VIRGINIA

Old Dominion Electrical Cooperative (ODEC), a non-profit power generator and provider of electricity in the Mid-Atlantic, has proposed the construction of a new coal-fired power plant in southeastern Virginia. Known as the Cypress Creek Power Station, the proposed plant is a supercritical pulverized coal/biomass steam power electric generation facility, to be constructed on one of two sites identified in Surry County, Virginia. The preferred site is a 1,600 acre parcel located near the town of Dendron. Due to the potential for significant environmental impacts resulting from the construction and continued operation of the proposed power plant, the ACOE has committed to preparing an environmental impact statement (EIS) to help evaluate the proposed project. The proposed construction of intake and outfall structures located in the James River, water transmission lines traveling 14 miles from the James River to the facility, and a new railroad spur will impact wetlands and waters of the United States regulated under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act and Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899. In addition, the James River serves as important essential fish habitat (EFH) for federally managed species and is used as migration, spawning, and nursery habitat by numerous anadromous fish species including striped bass, American shad, alewife, blueback herring, and the Atlantic sturgeon, a NMFS candidate species petitioned for listing under the Endangered Species Act. Following an agency scoping meeting conducted in early June and in response to the Public Notice solicitation of information to include in the EIS, NOAA Fisheries Service HCD provided scoping comments regarding water withdrawal and cooling system design, intake and outfall structure configuration, effluent temperature,

effluent heavy metal concentration, and antifouling biocides for inclusion in the environmental document. NOAA Fisheries HCD will continue to work closely with ODEC, the ACOE and other federal, state, and local agencies throughout the development of the project and EIS review process.

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SOUTH NORFOLK JORDAN BRIDGE, PORTSMOUTH, VA

NOAA Fisheries Service HCD recently review the combined environmental assessment (EA) / finding of no significant impact (FONSI) prepared 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, constructed in 1928 and closed November 2008 due to its severely deteriorated structural condition. Construction of the proposed bridge requires a permit from the U.S. Coast

Guard, as well as other local, state, and federal agencies including the ACOE for impacts to waters of the United States including wetlands as regulated under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. The Elizabeth River is designated as EFH for 14 federally managed species and is a confirmed anadromous fish use area by Virginia's Department of Conservation and Recreation. An EFH assessment, not included in the combined EA / FONSI document, has been requested by NOAA Fisheries Service HCD in order to fully evaluate the project's potential to adversely affect EFH. In an effort to ensure a comprehensive EFH assessment, HCD has identified numerous concerns regarding potential impacts to EFH such as the methodologies to be employed in demolition of the piers and superstructure of the existing Jordan Bridge (i.e. installation of coffer dams, physical extraction, water jetting, explosives, etc.) and the design and construction of the new bridge including the number and size of support piles/piers, and proposed construction methods (i.e. vibratory hammer, impact hammer, jetting, dredging, etc.). Mitigative measures limiting the re-suspension of contaminated sediments in the water column during demolition and construction were also recommended for inclusion in the document. Following a review of the EFH assessment, NOAA Fisheries Service HCD may provide recommendations designed to help reduce adverse affects to EFH, managed species, their prey species, and anadromous fish.

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