

GUIDELINES FOR ENDANGERED SPECIES OBSERVERS ACOE DREDGE AND DISPOSAL PROJECTS

NOAA Fisheries seeks endangered species observers who can function on dredges (e.g., hopper dredges) and dredge disposal (e.g., tugboat) operations from Maine to Texas. The species for which an endangered species observer is needed include marine mammals, sea turtles, and shortnose sturgeon. The following criteria should serve as a guideline for endangered species observers. Approved endangered species observers should have a variety of experiences, enabling them to perform the required duties with necessary skill and familiarity. Each observer is evaluated on a case-by-case basis, but the following criteria will assist in determining qualified candidates. Supporting information and documentation on these criteria should be included with the candidate's application. Note that if NOAA Fisheries conditionally approves a candidate and requests dredge watch experience, 60 hours minimum training is required, a portion of which must be alongside a NOAA Fisheries approved observer.

Education

- Does the candidate have a college degree (BS or higher) in marine biology or a related field? Please note that a degree is preferred, but not required if the candidates have a diversity of experiences and/or have taken a suitable endangered species observer training course.

At-sea experience

The candidates will be evaluated in terms of their experience on dredges and other vessels, including but not limited to the criteria listed below.

- Has the candidate worked for a minimum of two months in any capacity aboard dredges (hydraulic)?
- Has the candidate worked for a minimum of four months as a naturalist or wildlife guide aboard an active whale watch vessel or other vessel primarily engaged in the observation of large whales in the wild?

Field experience and equivalents

Please note that any of these criteria will be evaluated favorably by NOAA Fisheries, but do not independently guarantee approval as an endangered species observer.

- Has the candidate successfully completed an endangered species and dredge training course? If yes, please attach details and certification. Note that any ACOE dredge training class will be looked upon favorably.
- Does the candidate have documented field experience focused on the species or its habitat?
- Has the candidate worked for a minimum of four months as an endangered species observer-in-training aboard dredges that have interacted with protected species?
- Has the candidate been actively involved for a minimum of one year in organized responses to protected species stranding events where sea turtles and marine mammals are identified and handled?

Skill sets

The successful observer candidate should possess certain skills in order to effectively perform the observer duties.

- Is the candidate able to identify sea turtle, shortnose sturgeon, and whale species from other marine taxa, including morphological differences (i.e., between sea turtle species; shortnose and Atlantic sturgeon; humpback and right whales)?
- Is the candidate able to handle live sea turtles and shortnose sturgeon, and is he/she knowledgeable of holding and release procedures for the respective species?
- Is the candidate able to take standard field measurements of samples for sea turtles and shortnose sturgeon?
- Is the candidate able to observe and advise dredge operators on the appropriate screening of the dredge's overflow, skimmer funnels and dragheads for sea turtles and sturgeon (if hopper dredges must be employed)?
- Is the candidate able to discern whale behaviors, such as milling, traveling, and feeding?
- Is the candidate aware and knowledgeable of proper operating procedures in the presence of marine mammals?