

INTRA-SERVICE SECTION 7 BIOLOGICAL EVALUATION FORM

Originating Person: Ben Frater
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Date: 02/07/2012

Project Name: Pensacola Beach Dune Restoration

I. Service Program: Ecological Services

II. State: Regional Office

III. Station Name: Deepwater Horizon NRDAR Field Office

IV. Description of proposed action:

This project is being proposed and implemented by the State of Florida (State). However, as a member of the Department of Interior, the Deepwater Horizon NRDAR Field Office is (in part) a co-Trustee to the State in the Natural Resources Damage Assessment and Restoration planning currently unfolding for the *Deepwater Horizon* incident. Trustees bare the responsibility to approve or disapprove of any other Trustee's project. We believe this decision is a federal action that warrants consultation under Section 7 of the ESA.

Primary vegetated dune habitat located in the Pensacola Beach area of Escambia County and other parts of Florida was injured by exposure to *Deepwater Horizon* oil and/or the extensive use of all-terrain vehicles, heavy equipment and personnel on beaches during response activities undertaken to prevent, minimize and/or remediate oiling. This habitat is located along seaward, frontal dunes, and characterized by a mixture of open sandy areas, grasses and forbs. The vegetative community is typically dominated by plants such as sea oats, panic grass, beach morning-glory, and seashore elder. The Pensacola Beach Dune Restoration Project would help restore primary vegetated dune habitat lost due to spill-related activities.

The goal of this project is to provide early restoration for some of the natural resources that have been injured as a result of the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill. The project would help restore an area of the beach where oiling and the extensive use of all-terrain vehicles and heavy equipment has inhibited plant growth and prevented the natural seaward expansion of the dunes since June 2010. The primary dunes are the first natural line of defense for coastal Florida to prevent the loss of wildlife habitat and private property due to hurricanes, sea level rise, oil spills, and other threats.

Pensacola Beach is located toward the western end of Santa Rosa Island in Escambia County, Florida. The western boundary of Pensacola Beach lies approximately 7.5 miles east of Pensacola Pass. From that point of origin the project would extend approximately 4.2 miles to the east. This beach segment has been engineered and augmented through two prior nourishment projects.

Approximately 394,240 native plants would be planted approximately 40 feet seaward of the existing primary dunes within designated project areas. Proportions of plants would include approximately 70% sea oats grasses, 20% panic and smooth cord grasses, and 10% ground cover plants (sea purslane, beach elder, white morning glories and railroad vine) to maximize sand stabilization and limit wind erosion. All plants would be grown from seeds or cuttings from the Alabama or North Florida coast to ensure appropriate genetic stocks are used in the project. Plants would be installed at 18-inch centers and 6 inches deep to ensure that sufficient moisture is available to roots, and properly covered with sand to stabilize and protect the plants. Planting would be targeted for the March – August of 2012 or 2013. Slow release fertilizer would be added during plant installation and plants would be periodically watered, as needed, to facilitate establishment.

V. Pertinent Species and Habitat:

Species	Status
Loggerhead sea turtle	Threatened
Kemp's Ridley sea turtle	Endangered
Piping Plover	Endangered/Threatened

VI. Location (attach map):



Figure 1. Project area (red box) in relation to Pensacola and Panama City, FL.

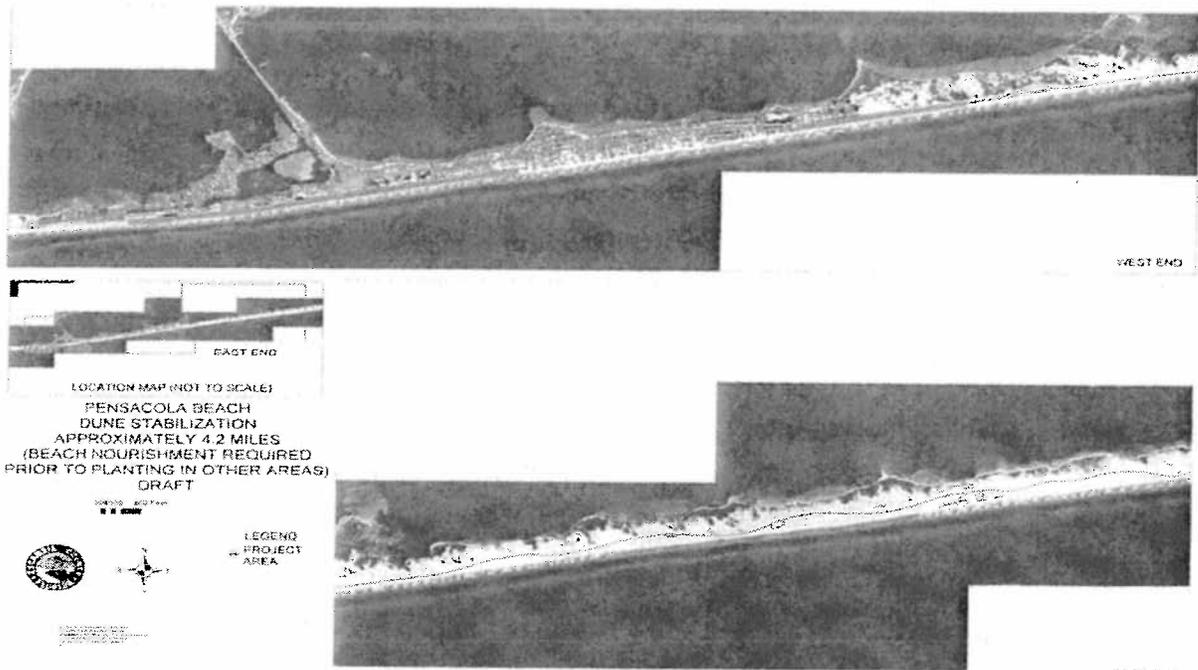


Figure 2. Pensacola Beach Dune Restoration Project planting areas.

A. County and State: Escambia County, Florida

B. Species/habitat occurrence: Sea turtles are known to nest on the beaches within the project area. The project area also contains potential wintering habitat for the Piping Plover.

VII. Determination of effects:

A. Explanation of effects of the action on species in item V. Planting vegetation while Piping Plover are present could disturb their foraging and loafing. Planting crews could crush sea turtle nests or impede the movement of hatchlings to the water by the improper placement of sand fencing or dense vegetation.

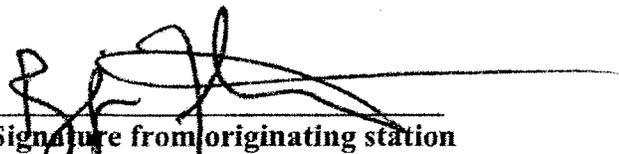
B. Explanation of actions to be implemented to reduce adverse effects:

Species	Actions to Minimize/Avoid
Loggerhead and Kemp's Ridley sea turtle	Restoration activities will minimize impacts to loggerhead sea turtle nesting activities (May-October): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Restoration activities should ideally occur from April through June and will most likely avoid the highest loggerhead sea turtle nesting/hatching activity that occurs from mid-June through mid-August. However, when restoration occurs during

	<p>nesting season the below precautions will be followed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actual installation of dune plants and sand fencing will occur during daylight hours and will therefore not impact nesting females or hatchlings that are active during the evening hours. Additionally, no restoration equipment will be left on the beach overnight. Likewise, all loggerhead sea turtle nests in the project area are marked each morning by survey crews by 9a.m. Therefore, restoration crews shall not begin work in an area until after it is cleared by the survey crews. If a nest occurs in a restoration area the nest will be avoided by no less than ten feet. • To minimize potential impacts of any sand fencing used on sea turtle nesting after installation the Florida Department of Environmental Protection guidelines for use of sand fencing (attached) will be followed.
Piping Plover	<p>Restoration activities will minimize impacts to piping plovers and associated overwintering habitat.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project-related activity will occur during early and mid-summer when individuals should not be present. • Vehicles used for the project that need to travel on the sandy beach seaward of the dune will move no faster than 10 miles per hour. • If piping plover are seen, a qualified biologist will mark occupied habit, which will be avoided as long as birds remain.

VIII. Effect determination and response requested:

Our determination is that this project may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect the Kemp's Ridley sea turtle, the Loggerhead sea turtle, and the Piping Plover. We are requesting concurrence from you on this determination.



 Signature from originating station

Restoration Specialist

 Title

2/7/12

 Date

DWA NRDAR

 Office

Re: Pensacola Beach Dune Restoration

IX. Reviewing ESO Evaluation:

A. Concurrence Nonconcurrency _____

B. Formal consultation required _____

C. Conference required _____

D. Informal conference required _____

E. Remarks (attach additional pages as needed): See MBTA attachment. (3 attachment)

Patty P. Kelly
Signature of reviewing official

Biologist
Title

3-23-2012
Date

PCFO
Office

