

NOAA Restoration Center, F/HC3
9721 Executive Center Drive North
Suite #114
St. Petersburg, FL 33702-2449

July 02, 2002

MEMORANDUM TO: Ricky Ruebsamen, EFH Coordinator
Habitat Conservation Division, F/SER4

FROM: LT Mark Sramek, NOAA
NOAA Restoration Center, F/HC3

SUBJECT: EFH Assessment of Mangrove Habitat Creation in Dade County as
Compensation for Florida Mystery Spill Ecological Losses

This Memo serves to inform you that the NOAA Restoration Center has evaluated the potential for no impact to Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) resulting from the construction of a mangrove habitat restoration areas in Virginia Key, Dade County, Florida. The NOAA Restoration Center has conducted an on-site inspection of the Virginia Key project area and believes that no impacts to EFH will result from the creation of mangrove habitat at this area.

The purpose of the construction of the mangrove habitat area is to compensate for lost ecological resources as a result of the August 08, 2002 Florida Mystery Spill. Ecological resources impacted from the spill include hatchling and adult sea turtles, marine biomass injuries and sea birds. Preferred ecological projects include funding increased sea turtle lighting enforcement programs in West Palm Beach and Brevard Counties, mangrove habitat creation, and seabird education signage installation; however, only the mangrove creation project requires EFH consultation. Details of the damage assessment and preferred restoration projects are found within the attached Draft Damage Assessment and Restoration Plan/Environmental Assessment (DARP/EA).

The preferred mangrove habitat restoration alternative will replace existing mixed vegetation coastal habitat with mangrove through scrape down and excavation actions to attain desired elevations beneficial to mangrove success. As a result, there will be no loss of EFH through these grading actions, and the resulting mangrove habitat created will provide additional habitat for the following stages of South Atlantic Fisheries Management Council fish species:

- juvenile Goliath Grouper (*Epinephelus itajara*);
- postlarval/juvenile Gray Snapper (*Lutjanus griseus*);
- juvenile Mutton Snapper (*Lutjanus analis*), and;
- adult White Grunt (*Haemulon plumeri*).

In consideration of your Essential Fish Habitat consultation authority, please review the proposed project described in the DARP/EA and provide written comments to:

Mark Sramek
NOAA Restoration Center, F/HC3
9721 Executive Center Drive North
Suite 114
St. Petersburg, FL 3372-2449

Cc: Linda Burlington, NOAA GCNR
Tony Penn, NOAA DAC
Tom Moore, NOAA RC

Encl.