



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE

Habitat Conservation Division
James J. Howard Marine
Sciences Laboratory
74 Magruder Road
Highlands, NJ 07732

November 20, 2008

Barbara A. Folk
Director, Public Works
Department of the Army
US Army Installation Management Command
Headquarters, United States Army Garrison, Fort Monmouth
286 Sanger Avenue
Fort Monmouth, New Jersey 07703-5101

ATTN: Wanda Green

Dear Ms. Folk:

Reference is made to your letter dated October 7, 2008 requesting comments on the potential impacts of the planned closure of Fort Monmouth especially with regard to the effects of possible changes to the fort's 1,126 acres of land on natural resources of concern to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). The Army is undertaking the preparation of an environmental assessment (EA) to consider the effects of the disposal and reuse of the property.

Without details on the future uses of the property and the nature and extent of the future development of the fort property, it is not possible to provide detailed information on the potential impacts to resources of concern to NMFS present in and around Fort Monmouth. When such information is offered, we can provide the Department of the Army with general information on aquatic resources in the area as well as offer some general guidance to protect those resources.

Fort Monmouth is bordered by tributaries to the Shrewsbury River including Parkers Creek and Oceanport Creek. These waterways support many resources of concern to NMFS. The lower portions of Parkers Creek and Oceanport Creek have historically supported hard clams (*Mercenaria mercenaria*) and soft clams (*Mya arenaria*). The commercial harvesting of shellfish in these areas is allowed provided further processing of the shellfish is accomplished under special permit by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection either through depuration or by relay. The siphons of clams also provide a food source for federally managed species such as winter flounder (*Pseudopleuronectes americanus*) and scup (*Stenotomus chrysops*). In order to protect shellfish populations in the area and the organisms that use shellfish as a food source, the protection and improvement of the water quality of the surface waters of Fort Monmouth, including all waterways that drain into Parkers and Oceanport Creeks should be a component of any future development on the site. Undeveloped areas along the shoreline should remain undeveloped.

The proposed project area has been designated as essential fish habitat (EFH) for a number of federally managed species including winter flounder, red hake (*Urophycis chuss*) windowpane (*Scophthalmus aquosus*), Atlantic butterfish (*Peprilus triacanthus*), Atlantic herring (*Clupea harengus*),

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black sea bass (*Centropristis striata*), bluefish (*Pomatomus saltatrix*), scup, summer flounder (*Paralichthys dentatus*), cobia (*Rachycentron canadum*), king mackerel (*Scomberomorus cavalla*) and Spanish mackerel (*Scomberomorus maculatus*). The Magnuson Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) requires federal agencies such as the FERC to consult with the Secretary of Commerce, through NMFS, regarding any action or proposed action authorized, funded, or undertaken by the agency that may adversely affect EFH identified under the MSA. The EFH regulations, 50 CFR Section 600.920, outline that consultation procedure.

The EFH final rule published in the Federal Register on January 17, 2002 defines an adverse effect as; "any impact which reduce the quality and/or quantity of EFH." The rule further states that:

An adverse affect may include direct or indirect physical, chemical or biological alterations of the waters or substrate and loss of, or injury to, benthic organisms, prey species and their habitat and other ecosystems components, if such modifications reduce the quality and/or quantity of EFH. Adverse effects to EFH may result from action occurring within EFH or outside EFH and may include site-specific or habitat-wide impacts, including individual, cumulative, or synergistic consequences of actions.

Should any actions proposed in the EA adversely affect EFH as outlined above, the Department of the Army should initiate consultation with NMFS.

Tidal wetlands may exist along some areas of the shoreline of Parkers and Oceanport Creeks. Wetlands perform many important ecological functions including sediment and nutrient retention, fish and wildlife habitats, shoreline stabilization and storm protection. Any proposed future use of the site should avoid impacting any remaining wetlands that exist on Fort Monmouth. Undeveloped areas along the shoreline and in and around wetlands should be protected from development. Restoration of natural habitats and the creation of living shorelines in developed areas should be considered.

No threatened or endangered species under the jurisdiction of the NMFS are known to occur in within the project area. As a result, further consultation by the Department of the Army is not required. However should project plans change that would change the basis for determination, or if new species or critical habitat is designated, consultation should be reinitiated.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Karen Greene at 732 872-3023:

Sincerely,


Stanley W. Gorski
Field Offices Supervisor

cf: J. Crocker NMFS PRD