DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
CORPS OF ENGINEERS, NEW ORLEANS DISTRICT
7400 LEAKE AVENUE
NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA 70118

8 September 2023

Regional Planning and Environment
Division South
Environmental Planning Branch

Mrs. Virginia Fay
Assistant Regional Administrator
Habitat Conservation Division
5757 Corporate Blvd. Suite 375
Baton Rouge, LA 70808

Dear Mrs. Fay:

The USACE appreciates the continued coordination between our agencies in the essential fish habitat (EFH) consultation process under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act for the Revised Draft Integrated Feasibility Report and Environmental Impact Statement (RDIFR-EIS) for the St. Tammany Parish Louisiana, Feasibility Study. This letter is in response to your consultation letter dated August 14, 2023.

The RDIFR-EIS included an assessment of potential impacts to EFH if the proposed action were implemented. To further the consultation process and develop responses to your comments, a meeting was held on September 7, 2023, and attended by members of both agencies. Based on that meeting, the parties agreed to the following:

(1) The draft mitigation plan as presented in the RIFR-DEIS dated July 2023, is sufficient and no additional changes are necessary to the mitigation plan for the final IFR-EIS. It was agreed that coordination would continue to occur through completion of the final IFR-EIS and signing of the Record of Decision (ROD). It was understood that if the project were authorized and funded to proceed to the preconstruction, engineering, and design phase (PED), the mitigation plan would be refined based on results from additional modeling and project design changes. The draft Mitigation Plan is located in Appendix I to the RDIFR-EIS.

(2) The H&H analysis as presented in the RDIFR-EIS is adequate and no additional modifications are required for the final IFR-EIS. It was understood that if the project were authorized and funded to proceed to PED, the H&H modeling and analysis would be further refined to inform the project design and project impacts. If determined to be necessary, additional NEPA and agency coordination would be conducted at that time. The H&H analysis can be found in Appendix E.

(3) The draft Operations Plan was determined to be adequate at this stage of the feasibility study and it was agreed that no additional changes were necessary for the final IFR-EIS. It was understood that if the project were authorized and funded to proceed to PED, a more refined Operations Plan would be developed and coordinated with the resource agencies, to include the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). The draft Operations Plan will be included in the final IFR-EIS (FIFR-EIS) in Appendix C.

A copy of the H&H Analysis (Appendix E), Mitigation Plan (Appendix I), draft Operations Plan, and KMZ of the proposed project were provided to the NMFS on September 7, 2023.

We will continue to coordinate with NMFS through the development of the FIFR-EIS and ROD. If there are any further questions comments or if NMFS wishes to discuss further, please contact Sandra Stiles, environmental manager at (337) 577-5794 or by email at Sandra.E.Stiles@usace.army.mil

Sincerely,

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Eric M. Williams

Chief, Environmental Planning Branch