

## **FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

**May 2017**

**Federal Financial Assistance Grant Number: 43281**

### **Restoring Delaware Bay's Wetlands and Beaches in Mispillion Harbor Reserve and Milford Neck Conservation Area**

The Hurricane Sandy Coastal Resiliency Competitive Grant Program (Program) supports projects that reduce communities' vulnerability to the growing risks from coastal storms, sea level rise, flooding, erosion, and associated threats through strengthening natural ecosystems that also benefit fish and wildlife. Funding for the Program is administered by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) through the Department of the Interior (DOI) Hurricane Sandy disaster relief appropriation (Disaster Relief Appropriations Act of 2013).

The purpose of the Program is to undertake a variety of actions to restore wetlands and other natural areas, better manage storm water using green infrastructure, and assist states, tribes and local communities in protecting themselves from major storms such as Hurricane Sandy. Overall, the Program goals relate to coastal resiliency and ecosystem enhancement. The Program provides technical and financial assistance to identify, protect, conserve, manage, enhance, or restore habitat and infrastructure on both public and private lands in states officially declared a natural disaster as a result of the 2012 Hurricane Sandy storm event.

The DOI, as lead federal agency, and its project partner, the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC), are proposing to restore the beach and dune system that protects tidal flow and the navigation channel along the Delaware Bayshore at Mispillion Harbor Reserve and adjacent Milford Neck Conservation Area (MNCA) in Kent County, Delaware, immediately west of Delaware Bay, in the Restoring Delaware Bay's Wetlands and Beaches in Mispillion Harbor Reserve and Milford Neck Conservation Area, Federal Financial Assistance Grant Number 43281 (Project). As the Project administrator, DNREC is managing the Project activities.

The purpose of the Project is to restore a beach and stone dike to enhance Atlantic horseshoe crab (*Limulus polyphemus*) spawning and habitat for migratory birds, including foraging habitat for the federally listed red knot (*Calidris canutus rufa*), as well as to protect the tidal flow and navigation channels of the Mispillion River and Cedar Creek. The Project is needed to avoid future additional damage within the Project area as well as potential damage to habitat outside of the Project area by restoring beach for spawning and foraging areas. Additionally, this Project is needed to restore the rock wall at the Mispillion Harbor to re-establish flow of the Mispillion River.

The Project Environmental Assessment (EA) evaluates two alternatives to address the beach and dune erosion at the north end of the existing rock sill of the Mispillion Harbor navigation channel: the No Action Alternative and one Action Alternative. The EA analyzes the potential impacts these alternatives would have on the natural and human environment. This EA was prepared in accordance with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), the regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality for implementing NEPA (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 1500-1508), and DOI regulations (43 CFR Part 46), policy and guidance.

**No Action Alternative:** Under the No Action Alternative, restoration of the beach or stone dike at Mispillion Harbor would not take place. This alternative does not meet the Program or Project purpose and need. It would not provide re-establishment of degraded and lost horseshoe crab spawning and red knot foraging habitat and could result in the complete loss of these habitats. The No Action Alternative does not re-establish flow of the Mispillion River at Mispillion Harbor that would be corrected by restoration of the stone dike at the harbor. Immediate vulnerabilities and resiliency needs would not be addressed. Current conditions of the stone dike suggest that there is a risk of a catastrophic breach which could result in a complete loss of back beach and possible effect on the Fish and Wildlife Service Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge. Flood risk to adjacent human communities and agricultural lands would not be reduced and navigation channels supporting regional commerce and recreational access to Delaware Bay would remain in their current condition.

**Proposed Action Alternative:** Under the Proposed Action Alternative, immediate vulnerability and resiliency needs in the Project area would be addressed. Approximately 3,000 feet of beach and dune habitat would be restored by placing approximately 45,000 to 60,000 cubic yards of sand along the harbor side of the existing rock sill and north along the bay shoreline to fill the breach north of the stone wall and rebuild beach and dunes able to withstand future coastal storms. Beach grass would be planted to stabilize the restored dune. To ensure longer-term resiliency of the sandy shoreline habitat required by spawning crabs and migratory shorebirds, beach restoration work would be coupled with restoration of a 490-foot northern extension of the existing rock sill and the addition of new groins, protecting the navigation channel in the Mispillion River portion of the harbor and preventing the river from creating a new inlet into Delaware Bay. Based on the EA analysis, the Proposed Action Alternative meets the Program and Project's purpose and need. The Proposed Action Alternative, which would restore eroded beach damaged by previous storms and would restore the stone dike at the Mispillion Harbor to re-establish the course of the Mispillion River, constitutes the Proposed Action and is the preferred alternative for this EA.

The Proposed Action Alternative will have minimal or negligible, if any, impacts on geology and sediment, water resources and wetlands, biological resources and vegetation,

human health and safety, cultural resources, socioeconomics, environmental justice communities, land use, recreation, coastal zone resources, air and noise, or climate change.

The Department finds there will be no significant impacts resulting from the proposed restoration activities of the Project. The Proposed Action Alternative provides net benefits that outweigh its potential impacts on the natural and human environment. Therefore, the Department concludes that a Finding of No Significant Impact be issued for the proposed Project.

This Environmental Assessment/Finding of No Significant Impact becomes a Federal Document when evaluated and signed by the responsible Federal Official.

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Name, Title  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
Date 5/31/2017



Reference:

Environmental Assessment

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