

## **FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

### **Federal Financial Assistance Grant Number: 43429 Creating a Resilient Delaware Bay Shoreline in Cape May and Cumberland Counties, New Jersey**

The U.S. Department of the Interior's (Department) 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. The Program is funded by the Disaster Relief Appropriations Act of 2013 and is administered by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF). 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 that have been negatively impacted by Hurricane Sandy.

The Department, as lead Federal agency, and its project partners, the American Littoral Society (ALS) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, are proposing to use the containment method to recover elevation deficits at Thompsons Beach Marsh by converting mudflats to vegetated salt marsh and monitoring the area for revegetation success. In addition, a conceptual plan for the Maurice River would be developed and considered for potential future restoration in the area. Both components are for the Creating a Resilient Delaware Bay Shoreline in Cape May and Cumberland Counties (NJ), Federal Financial Assistance Grant Number: 43429 (Project). As the project administrator, ALS is managing the project activities. The purpose of the Project is to create more resilient marshes for inland community and ecosystem protection from storm surges and sea level rise and to identify cost-effective and repeatable processes for future restoration projects in Delaware Bay. These processes are important to identify so other impacted areas in the Delaware Bay can be restored, resulting in more robust and resilient coastal areas able to withstand future storm events. The Project is needed to restore fish and wildlife habitat to regain important natural resources lost as a result of environmental degradation.

This Environmental Assessment (EA) evaluates two alternatives to create marshes and identify processes for potential restoration projects in Delaware Bay: a No Action Alternative and one conceptual design Proposed Action Alternative (the Project). The EA further analyzes the potential impacts these alternatives would have on the natural and human environment. This EA has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, the regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality for implementing NEPA (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR]

1500-1508), and Department regulations (43 CFR Part 46), policy and guidance.

### **No Action Alternative**

Under the No Action Alternative, no salt marsh restoration would take place, no post-restoration monitoring would be conducted, no information would be collected to support future restoration projects in Delaware Bay (e.g., successes, failures, and lessons learned), and no planning for the mouth of the Maurice River would take place. Under this alternative, there would be no elevation increase or improvement of salt marsh habitat, and no increased resiliency of coastal communities to sea level rise. For these reasons, the No Action Alternative would not meet the Program and Project's purpose and need to create more resilient marshes for inland community and ecosystem protection from storm surges and sea level rise and identify cost-effective and repeatable processes for future restoration projects in Delaware Bay.

### **Proposed Action Alternative**

The Proposed Action Alternative is to raise the existing salt marsh elevation on a 1.0-acre site within Thompsons Beach Marsh to a level that can support resilient salt marsh vegetation, and protect the surrounding community from future storm surge. The sediment and elevation deficits that were the legacy of historical salt hay farming have not been fully recovered across some of the area, which is now considered open space. The site is unlikely to fully recover its elevation and keep pace with sea level rise without the addition of sediment, further degrading species habitat and increasing potential risks to the area from future storm surges. The Proposed Action involves using dredge material from adjacent waterways for deposition in the restoration site. A containment method would be utilized to recover elevation deficits and prevent sediment loss during severe weather events. This method would result in the mudflats being converted into functioning *Spartina* low marsh. The target is to recover a fully vegetated low marsh platform comprising 80 percent *Spartina alterniflora*.

In addition to the proposed restoration work at Thompsons Beach Marsh, a concept plan for the mouth of the Maurice River would be prepared. Low-lying areas of the Maurice River are typically flooded during severe weather events, as occurred during Hurricane Sandy, resulting in degraded shorelines and salt marshes at the mouth of the river. The conceptual design would propose restoration of approximately 1,830 acres of salt marsh and 2.1 miles of beach, as well as creation of 1.8 miles of living shoreline and 3.3 miles of marsh-edge breakwaters. The goal would be to eventually restore the degraded shoreline and salt marsh at the mouth of the Maurice River, thereby increasing protection of nearby infrastructure and fishing ports.


The Proposed Action Alternative will have minimal or negligible, if any, impacts on geology and sediment, topography, water resources and wetlands, biological resources and vegetation, human health and safety, cultural resources, socioeconomics, environmental justice communities, land use, recreation, coastal zone resources, or air and noise.

The Department finds there will be no significant adverse impacts resulting from the proposed restoration and planning activities of the Project. 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 signed by the responsible Federal Official.



Olivia Ferriter, Deputy Assistant Secretary  
Budget, Finance, Performance and Acquisition  
U.S. Department of the Interior



Date



Reference:

Environmental Assessment

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