

Saludos José:

This is in response to the public notice published December 10, 2015, for the construction of a new 92-slip marina for vessels 35-70 ft in length in Coral Harbor, St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands. Based on a review of the information in the public notice, the construction of the marina will directly impact fringing mangroves and seagrass beds through dredging and installation of the docking structures, as well as boat launching facilities. The marina construction and operation could also affect green and hawksbill sea turtles that use the area as habitat and due to potential acoustic impacts associated with the installation of a sheet pile bulkhead and 420 concrete piles, as well as ESA-listed corals and other listed species, including leatherback sea turtles and scalloped hammerhead sharks, that may be present in areas where vessels using the marina transit and where sediment plumes could be transported during marina construction. It is noted that a vibratory hammer will be used where possible to install piles required to support the proposed docks and catwalks but no information was included in the public notice as to how many piles could be installed using a vibratory hammer versus an impact hammer, which would have additional acoustic impacts to sea turtles in particular. NMFS is also proposing the listing of Nassau grouper as threatened and this species is also present in the area where the marina is proposed.

It does not appear that the design of the marina has incorporated avoidance and minimization measures to protect shoreline mangroves and seagrass beds. The proposed decking will be precast concrete that will not allow light penetration in areas containing seagrass beds, a 0.34-acre area of shallow water along the shoreline will be filled to construct a bulkhead and concrete apron as well as a new boat ramp with 2 docks on either side, and a 0.92-acre area will be dredged to provide adequate depths for use of the boat ramp and the creation of a portion of the proposed marina basin. No information was provided indicating the water depth where the existing boat ramp is located and why this ramp cannot be incorporated into the proposed project. A portion of the dredged material will be used as backfill for the bulkhead construction and the rest will be disposed of offsite (the location of this disposal area does not appear to have been provided in the public notice). No information was provided indicating that the sediments in the area to be dredged have been tested to determine whether there is the potential for contamination of the water column in Coral Bay as a result of the resuspension and transport of these sediments outside the project footprint during dredging. The dewatering of dredged material is proposed to take place on the barge that will be used to complete the dredging and the public notice states that this water will be discharged directly back into the bay. The project also proposes the construction of upland facilities, with no information provided regarding stormwater and sediment and erosion control measures to be implemented during construction and operation of these upland facilities. Similarly, the project proposes the construction of sewage pump-out and fueling facilities, with no information provided regarding control measures to minimize the potential for accidental spills from these facilities into Coral Bay. The public notice also notes that the use of the existing dinghy dock and boat ramp will not be feasible during the 12-month construction time frame needed to complete the marina project. It is stated that temporary facilities will be constructed elsewhere to

accommodate boaters during project construction but no information is provided regarding the location of these facilities or the method of construction and removal. As stated previously, it does not appear that the project has been designed to avoid and minimize impacts to mangroves and seagrass beds in particular and the mitigation proposed, namely the removal of marine debris from different areas in Coral Bay and the installation of markers in shallow areas is likely not to be adequate to compensate for the loss of over 1.2 acres of seagrass and 0.14 acre of shoreline mangroves.

An ESA Section 7 consultation will be required for this project and the information noted as missing above, as well as details specific to avoidance and minimization of all impacts associated with the construction and operation of the marina on ESA-listed species and designated critical habitat that may be located in the project area, should be submitted as part of any consultation request. Given the location and nature of the project, an essential fish habitat consultation under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act may also be required. For this reason, I have copied my Habitat Conservation Division colleagues on this message.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on this public notice,  
Lee