

Feds Yank DPNR's Boating Infrastructure Grant for Summers End Marina

In a one-page letter, the Planning and Natural Resources Department on Monday wrote that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was “within its discretion to reevaluate its position” when it said it would yank the bulk of \$1.3 million in a Boating Infrastructure Grant to be funneled through the department to the planned Summers End Marina in Coral Bay. [1]

The letter was signed by J.P. Oriol, who heads DPNR’s Coastal Zone Management program, for acting Commissioner Dawn Henry, and sent to federal Fish and Wildlife’s Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program chief Michael L. Piccirilli.



Federal Fish and Wildlife told DPNR in a letter stamped March 17 that it had until Monday to respond to 21 points that focused on the environment or it would close out the grant on June 1.

According to the March 17 letter from Piccirilli to Henry, the project is ineligible for the rest of the funding if it will “significantly degrade or destroy valuable resources or alter the cultural or historic nature of the area.”

The Monday letter from DPNR to Piccirilli makes note of federal Fish and Wildlife’s reasoning for discontinuing the grant.

The 21 points began with a request for a complete analysis of onsite and offsite alternatives to the marina project. It asks for information on the acoustic impact on sea turtles when piles are driven, impacts on mangroves, a proposed mooring plan, spill containment plans for barges, data on hurricanes, tropical storms, and tidally influenced and wind-driven transport patterns in Coral Bay, in addition to impacts to the V.I. National Park and V.I. Coral Reef National Monument.

The Monday letter from DPNR made no mention of the up to \$303,815 that Summers End can collect even if the grant is terminated. That money was allocated to pay for

environmental assessments and other soft costs associated with applications for 36 slips slated for transient boaters. The Summers End marina plans a total of 145 slips.

It's unclear if Summers End received any of that money.

Rick Barksdale, a principal in the Summers End project, did not return a phone call requesting comment.

In the Monday letter, DPNR wrote that the department stands behind the Coastal Zone Management permit issued for the Summers End project.

The St. John CZM Committee on Oct. 1, 2014, with only two members voting, approved the permit. The decision was controversial because the committee's third member, Brion Morsette, has ties to the Summers End project. Morsette did not vote but attended the meeting in order to make a quorum.

Coastal Zone Management staff recommended approval of the CZM permit. Oriol was acting DPNR commissioner when the permit was approved.

Sharon Coldren, president of the Coral Bay Community Council, said she found it odd that Planning would defend its analysis given that many federal agencies pointed out how bad the project would be for the environment.

In the Monday letter to Piccarilli, the department said that during the permit process, DPNR weighed the potential environmental impacts, including those within the scope of the Boating Infrastructure Grant, as well as economic and community benefits. The letter indicates it concluded that the marina project would benefit St. John and the territory.

However, DPNR concludes by noting that it recognized there are unavoidable impacts associated with this development and is mindful that further regulatory scrutiny awaits the project.

The Summers End project still needs to get an Army Corps of Engineers permit but opposition is fierce to the agency giving the okay.

David Silverman, who helped spearhead the ad hoc group Save Coral Bay, said previously that 828 people donated a total of \$94,794 to help the group with legal expenses. He said Save Coral Bay in conjunction with the V.I. Conservation Society filed an appeal with the territory's Board of Land Use Appeals to overturn the CZM decision. That appeal is pending.

Silverman also said that a thousand people wrote letters to the Army Corps and sent copies to him. Additionally he said another 12,500 people wrote letters to the Army Corps through the National Parks Conservation Association opposing the Summers End project.

He said Monday he was pleased that DPNR is not opposing federal Fish and Wildlife's decision to rescind the Boating Infrastructure Grant.

Coldren said she wasn't surprised at federal Fish and Wildlife's decision.

"Fish and Wildlife had no choice as soon as they realized the environmental damage the marina would cause," she said.

St. John resident Barry Devine was one of several people who wrote many letters to federal Fish and Wildlife to note that funding any portion of Summers End Marina was an improper use of the Boating Infrastructure Grant funds.

"It did pay off," he said of the effort.

Devine said the Coral Bay community is now discussing how it can develop its own marina that suits the needs of the community. Devine said he hopes that federal Fish and Wildlife will consider using the Boating Infrastructure Grant funds to assist with that project.

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