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FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Funding of Boat Ramp Projects in American Samoa

Implemented by the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council Sustainable Fisheries Fund American Samoa Marine Conservation Plan

November 9, 2011

Introduction

This Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) was prepared according to the guidelines established in National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Instruction 30-124-1 (July 22, 2005) and the requirements set forth in National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Administrative Order 216-6 (NAO 216-6, May 20, 1999), concerning compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) as well as CEQ regulations (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508). This FONSI is supported by the environmental impact analysis prepared in accordance with the requirements of NEPA and documented in the attached environmental assessment (EA).

Background

The construction of new boat ramps was identified in the American Samoa Marine Conservation Plan (MCP) and will be implemented by the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council under the Sustainable Fisheries Fund and pursuant to the Magnuson-Steven Fishery Conservation and Management Act Section 204(e)(7) and NOAA Cooperative Grant NA10NMF441067.

Tutuila, which is the currently has only two operational public boat ramps, one in Pago Pago Harbor, and one on the northern side of the island. Additional boat ramps on Tutuila are need for two primary reasons: 1) support fisheries development by enhancing access by fishing vessels to fishing locations as well as reducing travel times to boat ramps, 2) improve emergency response in the event that the main road on Tutuila is inaccessible.

The Council has been working in close coordination with the American Samoa government's Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources (DMWR), Department of Public Works, and Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) on the design and location of the new boat ramps. Initially, the two locations that were identified were Lion's Park in Nuuili and Leone. However, the Leone location is no longer suitable due to damage from the 2009 tsunami. Faga'alu was identified as the second location. Both the Lion's Park and Faga'alu locations are on government owned land administered by the DPR. Boat ramp construction plans have been provided by DPW.

Proposed Action
The proposed action is the funding of the ASMCP projects of two new boats ramps on Tutuila, one in Lion's Park in Nuuli, and other in Faga'alu.

Agencies Consulted, Approvals and Authorizations

Land use approvals for boat ramps has been provided by DPR. American Samoa's Project Notification Review System board has also approved the projects. The American Samoa Department of Commerce, Coastal Management Program has issued a Federal Consistency Certification for the construction of the boat ramps. The American Samoa Environmental Protection Agency has issued a Section 401 Water Quality Certification for the boat ramps. The US Army Corps of Engineers has also provided a Nationwide Permit (36) for the boat ramps

Significance Analysis
NAO 216-6 contains criteria for determining the significance of the environmental impacts of a proposed action. In addition, the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) regulations at 40 CFR 1508.27 state that the significance of an action should be analyzed both in terms of "context" and "intensity." Each criterion listed below is relevant in making a finding of no significant impact and has been considered individually, as well as in combination with the others. The significance of this action is analyzed based on the NAO 216-6 criteria and CEQ's context and intensity criteria for the selected alternative.

1) Can the proposed action reasonably be expected to jeopardize the sustainability of any target and non-target species that may be affected by the action?

No. No adverse impacts to target and non-target species are expected to occur. Fish stocks are considered healthy around American Samoa. While the new boat ramps will allow vessels to access offshore areas to conduct fishing activities, the boat ramps are not expected to increase the number of fishing vessels or the amount of fishing effort around Tutuila. The majority of the working population in the American Samoa earn below the poverty level and it is believed that access to resources to purchase new vessels is not available to many residents. If an increase in fishing vessels and associated fishing effort occurs, this activity will be monitored by the Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources (DMWR) which conducts surveys of fishermen at boat ramp locations. . Fisheries data is collected and compiled and incorporated into assessments of the health of the fishery. Annual catch limits (ACLs) have been established for coral reef, bottomfish, and crustacean fisheries in American Samoa. Annual catch limits are not required for pelagic species due to their highly migratory nature. The potential increase in fishing for bottomfish species as a result of the proposed action will be minimal and not believed to lead to an overage of any ACL.

2) Can the proposed action reasonably be expected to cause substantial damage to the ocean and coastal habitats and/or essential fish habitat as defined under the Magnuson-Stevens Act and identified in Fishery Management Plans?

No. The impact of the boat ramp construction on the physical environment and Essential Fish Habitat would be minimal and limited during the construction phase of the project. Best Management Practices such as silt screens will be employed during the construction period. No additional sedimentation will be added to the system, but existing sedimentation made be stirred up during the construction phase and last temporarily in a limited area. No dredging or removal of coral reefs will result from the projects.

4) Can the proposed action reasonably be expected to have a substantial adverse impact on public health or safety?

No. The addition of two new boats will improve public health and safety from in terms of search and rescue and natural disaster relief efforts. The new boat ramps are not expected to significantly increase the number of boaters on Tutuila, because vessel ownership is not cheap and includes fuel and safety equipment costs, as well as regular maintenance. A large majority of Tutuila's population is considered to earn an average income of below national poverty line. Although significant boating activity is not expected to result, channels to the boat ramps with be properly marked with buoys according to US Coast Guard regulations. Appropriate signage will be displayed near the boat ramps indentifying safe boat practices and conditions.

5) Can the proposed action reasonably be expected to adversely affect endangered or threatened species, marine mammals, or critical habitat of these species?

No. No interactions or adverse effects to protected species are expected to result from the construction of the two boat ramps. The project areas are not nesting beaches for marine turtles. The minimal footprint of the boat ramps will not result in significant habitat exclusion within the project areas. No marine mammals have been sighted in the project areas and no interactions or adverse impacts are anticipated from the project to marine mammals.

6) Can the proposed action be expected to have a substantial impact on biodiversity and/or ecosystem function within the affected area (e.g., benthic productivity, predator-prey relationships, etc.)?

No. The proposed action involving the funding of the ASMCP projects of two new boats ramps on Tutuila, one in Lion's Park in Nuuli, and other in Faga'alu will have no impacts to ecosystem function or biodiversity. The projects do not involve dredging nor the removal of any important ecosystem features such as coral reefs. No reduction of biodiversity is anticipated because the boat ramps will not involve the harvest or removal of any species. Because the project footprints are also so small, negligible habitat loss is expected and no species displacement will occur.

7) Are the effects on the quality of the human environment likely to be highly controversial?

No. The effects of the proposed action are not controversial. The footprint of the project site is small and no major sedimentation is expected to result. The Army Corps of Engineers has consulted with relevant agencies on the projects and all necessary authorizations have been provided.

9) Can the proposed action reasonably be expected to result in substantial impacts to unique areas, such as historic or cultural resources, park land, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas?

No. Both boat ramps will be located on public land owned by the American Samoa government and administered by the Department of Parks and Recreations. The footprint of the boat ramp will only take up a small percentage of parks. Neither boat ramp location is within ecologically critical areas or unique areas. No dredging or removal of coral or other important nearshore habitat will be conducted.

10) Are the effects on the human environment likely to be highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks?

No. The funding of the ASMCP projects of two new boats ramps on Tutuila, one in Lion's Park in Nuuli, and other in Faga'alu leading to the construction of boat ramps is not a novel project nor does it involve unique or unknown risks. Boat ramp projects are commonplace and as such the Army of Corps of Engineers has a developed a general Nationwide Permit program for such projects.

11) Is the proposed action related to other actions with individually insignificant, but cumulatively significant impacts?

No. The proposed locations of the boat ramps are not pristine areas, and have been subject to dredging and sedimentation in the past. Although such conditions exist in these areas, the short-term impact to the immediate project area is not expected to be significant, nor are impacts expected to be adverse when added to existing conditions. This is because the amount of sedimentation or turbidity in the surrounding nearshore is expected to short-term, minimal amounts, and limited to the immediate surrounding area of the project site. Furthermore, the boat ramps are expected to serve approximately up to 5 vessels per week, which compared to boat ramps in Hawaii for example is indicative of minimal use. There are less than 20 vessels on Tutuila on trailers that potential could use the ramps.

12) Is the proposed action likely to adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources?

No. Neither of the boat ramp locations affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

13) Can the proposed action reasonably be expected to result in the introduction or spread of a nonindigenous species?

No. It is believed that all of the vessels using the boat ramps will be local, small vessels from Tutuila (<20 vessels on trailers). Due to the distances involved, is is unlikely that the small

vessels that will use the boat ramps will go inter-island within American Samoa (e.g. 65 nm to the Manu'a Islands) or to neighboring Samoa (45 nm from Tutuila). Therefore the potential for the boat ramp projects to result in the spread of nonidigenous is negligible.

14) Is the proposed action likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represent a decision in principle about a future consideration?

No. The new boat ramps will not result in automatic approval of future boat ramps as each would need to be evaluated on a case by case basis. The proposed action involving the funding of the ASMCP projects of two new boats ramps on Tutuila was subject to FY2010 NMFS cooperative grant and using the Sustainable Fisheries Fund. The Council applies annually for cooperative grant funding to use the SFF, and projects and funding levels vary between years.

15) Can the proposed action reasonably be expected to threaten a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment?

No. The proposed action complies with requirements of Federal law. The proposed specifications and a preliminary environmental analysis were coordinated with a variety of other agencies and no violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements for environmental protection was found.

Other Findings

NMFS also considered the effects of the project on climate change and climate change impacts on the feasibility of the project. Sea level is expected to rise approximately 1 meter by 2100, therefore, DMWR and the Council will need to monitor the boat ramps to assess if sea level rise is affecting the boat ramps and take appropriate action as necessary and as authorized.

Determination

In view of the information presented in this document and the analysis contained in the supporting Environmental Assessment, I have determined that the proposed action will not significantly impact the quality of the human environment as described above and in the supporting EA. In addition, all beneficial and adverse impacts of the proposed action have been addressed to reach the conclusion of no significant impacts. Accordingly, preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement for this action is not necessary.

Michael D. Tosatto
Regional Administrator

11.10.11
Date