

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

**Federal Financial Assistance Grant Number: 43006
Coastal Resiliency via Integrated Salt Marsh Management, Suffolk County, NY**

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 stormwater 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 partner, Suffolk County, are proposing to restore approximately 200 acres of tidal salt marsh located on the south shore of Long Island in the Great South Bay. Restoration will utilize the ecosystem-based Integrated Marsh Management (IMM) Approach. As the project administrator, Suffolk County is managing the project activities. The purpose of the project is to provide flood and storm surge risk reduction, wave energy reduction, and increased resiliency of coastal ecosystems and communities to rising sea levels and extreme storm events. One of the main goals of the Project is to develop and implement sustainable salt marsh rehabilitation methodologies under the conceptual umbrella of IMM. Such ongoing stewardship of the tidal wetlands would enhance resiliency of coastal ecosystems and communities to address rising sea levels and extreme storm events. The primary goal of the Project can be realized by extending the use of IMM techniques to Suffolk County marshes in a sustainable manner.

This Environmental Assessment evaluates two alternatives to improve coastal resiliency and reduce risks from storm and flood surges to coastal habitats and surrounding areas through restoration of tidal marshes; No Action Alternative and one Action Alternative. Two additional Action Alternatives were eliminated from further consideration as they did not meet the need of the Project. The Environmental Assessment further analyzes the potential impacts these alternatives would have on the natural and human environment. This Environmental Assessment has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act 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 action would be taken to improve coastal resiliency and reduce risks related to storm and flood surges to coastal habitats and surrounding areas through restoring tidal marsh services. Historical grid ditches would remain, and no efforts would be taken to prevent further loss of vegetation. The tidal marshes and surrounding communities would continue to be at risk from flooding due to storm surge and potential future sea level rise. Additionally, existing areas of stagnant water within the tidally isolated internal pools and ditches provide habitat for salt marsh mosquitoes, which can be vectors for serious human pathogens including Eastern equine encephalitis virus (EEEV) and West Nile virus (WNV). Both EEEV and WNV can pose serious risk to human health ranging from acute illness to death and have been found in Suffolk County.

Proposed Action Alternative

The Proposed Action includes: 1) creating small micropools irregularly shaped up to 10 × 10 × 2 feet (length × width × depth) that closely resemble natural salt marsh ponds to create habitat for fish and wildlife; 2) creating shallow connecting channels to prevent waterlogging of the marsh, allow access to micropools by estuarine fish, and allow access to the marsh surface for native killifish that control mosquito larvae; 3) filling select obsolete grid ditches using coir logs and excavated material; and 4) spreading excavated material on the marsh surface to provide the proper elevation for desirable vegetation and eliminate habitats for mosquito larvae.

Sustained benefits of the Project include heightened ecosystem resiliency and coastal security, reduction of local nutrient pulses and nonpoint source pollution, invigorating native vegetation, and increased cover for enhanced estuarine fish, crabs, and shrimp habitat. Restored tidal flow would enable marshes to drain more quickly during storm events. Restored native vegetation would contribute to marsh elevation and increase sediment capture, mitigating sea level rise impacts by providing storm buffering. As a result, mosquito-borne threats would also be reduced.

The Proposed Action Alternative will have minimal or negligible impacts on geology, soils, sediment, water resources, wetlands, biological resources, vegetation, human health and safety, cultural resources, socioeconomics, environmental justice and protection of children, land use, recreation, coastal zone management, air quality or noise.

The Department finds there will be no significant adverse impacts resulting from the proposed restoration 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.



Grayford Payne, Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary
Budget, Finance, Performance and Acquisition
U.S. Department of Interior



Date



Reference:

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