



FEB 17 2010

To All Interested Government Agencies and Public Groups:

Under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), an environmental review has been performed on the following action.

TITLE: Regulatory Amendment to the Fishery Management Plan for the Reef Fish Fishery of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands Modifying the Bajo de Sico Seasonal Closure

LOCATION: Bajo de Sico, Caribbean Exclusive Economic Zone

SUMMARY: The proposed rule would modify the seasonal closure of Bajo de Sico, an area off the west coast of Puerto Rico that has been identified as critically important habitat for commercially exploited snappers and groupers. Current regulations prohibit all fishing activities, including Highly Migratory Species (HMS) from December 1 through the end of February each year as well as a year-round prohibition of bottom tending gear (i.e., traps, pots, gillnets, trammel nets, and bottom longlines). The proposed rule would prohibit fishing for and possession of Council-managed reef fish from October 1 through March 31, each year, but fishing for HMS will be allowed all year. Restrictions on bottom-tending gear will not be affected by the proposed rule. A year-round prohibition of anchoring by fishing vessels within Bajo de Sico will also be implemented through the proposed rule to provide further protection of established essential fish habitat. In addition, environmental conditions (i.e. fast currents and deep water) and weather often prevent fishers from utilizing Bajo de Sico during the closed season. As a result, the proposed action is considered to be not significant.

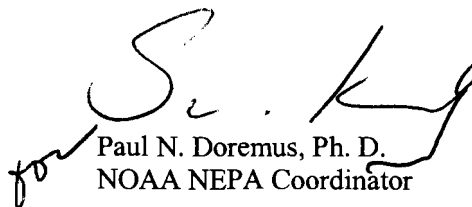
RESPONSIBLE

OFFICIAL: Roy E. Crabtree, Ph.D.
Regional Administrator
National Marine Fisheries Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)
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727-824-5305

The environmental review process led us to conclude that this action will not have a significant impact on the environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement was not prepared. A copy of the finding of no significant impact (FONSI), including the environmental assessment (EA), is enclosed for your information.

Although NOAA is not soliciting comments on this completed EA/FONSI, we will consider any comments submitted that would assist us in preparing future NEPA documents. Please submit any written comments to the Responsible Official named above.

Sincerely,


Paul N. Doremus, Ph. D.
NOAA NEPA Coordinator

Enclosure

