

# **Gulf Coast Parkway**

## **Coastal and Marine Action Plan**

The Project Development and Environment (PD&E) Study for the Gulf Coast Parkway will be developed in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended; and to comply with all federal and state laws and requirements. Given that the alternatives developed for the proposed project will be on new alignment or in combination with existing roadways, the level of documentation will be an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Coordination with state, federal and local agencies, including those with jurisdiction over the referenced requirements, will be conducted throughout the EIS process.

In order to further define the project study, a scoping meeting will be conducted with the regulatory agencies to ensure that the scope of work adequately addresses all of the issues raised by the agencies. Agency coordination will continue throughout the study with regular conference calls to report on the project's progress and discuss agency concerns. The project team will meet with the Environmental Technical Assistance Team (ETAT) at key points in the study's development. In addition, the ETAT will have the opportunity to formally comment during the review period for the Draft EIS, Final EIS and Record of Decision (ROD).

Several members of the ETAT, through their review of the project in the Efficient Transportation Decision Making (ETDM) Programming Screen, had comments regarding a number of environmental issues. While Action Plans have been prepared to address several issues, the focus of this plan is the procedure to be used to address comments concerning potential impacts of the proposed action on Coastal and Marine resources. Among the concerns expressed are: the road's potential impact on and the need to maintain the natural hydrology and freshwater inflow to the estuarine environment; the effects of increased traffic and automobile-associated pollutants carried by stormwater runoff; and the effect of residential and commercial development resulting from the presence of the new road.

Given that the information presented in the ETDM programming screen was on the corridor level, most of the issues raised by ETAT members will be addressed during the development of alignments within the corridors selected for further study. Estimates of impacts will be based on the right-of-way width for the alternative(s) developed rather than the corridor widths. The general study process that will be utilized to address issues raised by the agencies is as follows:

- The study team will submit the proposed methodology for conducting essential fish habitat surveys to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FFWCC) prior to conducting field investigations.

- The study team will conduct field investigations to identify the nature and extent of the essential fish habitat resources within the alternative alignments in accordance with Part 2 of the FDOT *PD&E Manual*. This will include the identifying the location of listed species and their habitats within the alternative alignments, including vegetation surveys (salt marsh, sea grass, etc.); determining the habitat suitability for listed species; the determination of actual or potential impacts of the proposed alternatives fish species and/or their habitats; and conducting an Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) assessment.
- The analysis of the alternatives impacts will also consider the barrier effect the new roadway might have on the area hydrology and the estuarine environment and the potential for, and impacts of, coastal and riverine flooding, such as changes in salinity.
- An EFH assessment report will be prepared that documents the available habitat and species that occur or have a potential to occur in the study area, the potential impacts of the project alternatives on essential fish habitat, and proposed mitigation. Coordination with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) will occur, as will similar coordination with various state agencies with jurisdiction over Marine and Coastal resources including fisheries and habitat.
- Based upon the data gathered and coordination with the agencies, adjustments will be made and/or design changes implemented to the alternative alignments to minimize or avoid impacts where feasible to do so.
- Coordination with all appropriate ETAT member agencies will be maintained throughout the process, as indicated above.
- Consistency with the Coastal Zone Management Act will be determined by the Florida Department Environmental Protection (FDEP).

Through project scoping and direct consultation with the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the NMFS, and the FFWCC, the level of detail and scope of the Essential Fish Habitat analysis will be determined. Specifically, NMFS noted that the salt marsh, tidal flats, marine and estuarine water column, and non-vegetated bottom found within the project's study area have been identified as EFH for postlarval/juvenile penaeid shrimp; postlarval/juvenile, sub-adult, and adult red drum; juvenile Spanish and king mackerel; juvenile and adult gray snapper; and juvenile gag grouper. Any federal activities which may adversely impact EFH are required to consult with NMFS and provide an EFH assessment.

Once the assumptions and expectations for the analysis of EFH impacts have been established, the analysis will be initiated. The procedure for analyzing the effects on Coastal and Marine resources will be conducted in the following manner and summarized in the Essential Fish Habitat Assessment and the Draft EIS.

- Define the boundaries for each issue/resource.
- Identify managed species and existing habitats.
- Identify potential project impacts.
- Evaluate the potential project impacts.
- Compare potential impacts among alternatives
- Assess the consequences and develop strategies for avoidance, minimization, and mitigation.

Direct consultation with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FFWCC), the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS), and the FDEP will address such Coastal and Marine issues as and potential project impacts to recreational and commercial fisheries, shellfish, water quality, salt marsh, and sea grass.