



# United States Department of the Interior

## FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

1875 Century Boulevard  
Atlanta, Georgia 30345

In Reply Refer To:  
FWS/R4/ES

MAR 09 2009

Mr. R. D. Curfman  
Environmental Business Line Manager  
Naval Facilities Engineering Command  
6506 Hampton Boulevard  
Norfolk, Virginia 23508-1278

Dear Mr. Curfman:

On January 21, 2009, we received your consultation request for increased use and enhanced capabilities at the Navy's Gulf of Mexico Range Complex. Your consultation package addressed the effects of your preferred action alternative (Alternative 2 from the Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Overseas Environmental Impact Statement) on: the West Indian manatee (*Trichechus manatus*) (including designated critical habitat), piping plover (*Charadrius melodus*) (including designated critical habitat), interior least tern (*Sternula antillarum athalossos*), whooping crane (*Grus Americana*) (including designated critical habitat), red-cockaded woodpecker (*Picoides borealis*), ocelot (*Leopardus (=Felis) pardalis albescens*), eastern indigo snake (*Drymarchon corais couperi*), and Choctawhatchee beach mouse (*Peromyscus polionotus allopshys*) (including designated critical habitat). In your consultation request (including the Biological Evaluation (BE) dated December 2008), the Navy concluded that the proposed use and enhancement of the range complex would have no effect or would not be likely to adversely affect all of the federally-listed species and potentially affected critical habitats under the Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service) jurisdiction.

In response to your consultation request, the Service coordinated your consultation package with all of our affected field offices in the Southeast and Southwest Regions. Based on the review by our field office biologists, we wanted to make you aware of the following comments:

- (1) On page 3-165, 3rd paragraph - The BE indicates that the Choctawhatchee beach mouse occurs in the vicinity of the Demolition Pond. If so, this would be a new occurrence record for the subspecies, and we request any documentation the Navy might have in support of this occurrence.
- (2) On page 3-165, at 3.6.2.4 - The eastern indigo snake is federally-listed as threatened, not endangered.
- (3) On page 3-135, at 3.5.2.5 - The Navy should be made aware of the Florida non-essential whooping crane population. This experimental reintroduction of whooping cranes in Florida

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was initiated in 1993 to establish a non-migratory population at Kissimmee Prairie. A non-migratory population avoids the hazards of migration, and by inhabiting a more geographically limited area than migratory cranes, individuals can more easily find compatible mates. Annual releases of chicks are expected to continue to augment this new experimental population.

A second experimental non-essential population is currently being reintroduced to eastern North America. The intent is to establish a migratory flock which would summer and breed in central Wisconsin, migrate across the seven states and winter in west-central Florida. The first attempt to lead whooping cranes by ultra-light aircraft was made in 2001. The birds were taught the 1,250-mile migration route from Necedah National Wildlife Refuge in Wisconsin to Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge in Florida. A 2008 migration led cranes to St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge for the first time, to establish an additional migratory population in Florida.

Our response represents both the Southwest and Southeast Regions, and is the result of review by all Service field offices within the area affected by your proposed action. We concur that the proposed action (preferred alternative) for increased operations and enhanced capabilities in the Navy's Gulf of Mexico Range Complex will have no effect on, or is not likely to adversely affect the federally-listed species or designated critical habitat as determined in your consultation request of January 7, 2009.

Please be reminded that it may be necessary for you to contact the Service for reconsideration of the effects of this proposed action if:

- (1) New information reveals effects of the action that may affect listed species or critical habitat in a manner or to an extent not considered in your current determination;
- (2) The action is later modified in a manner that causes an effect to the listed species or critical habitat not considered in this informal consultation; or
- (3) A new species is listed or critical habitat designated that may be affected by this action.

Please address any questions concerning this response to Ken Graham at 404/679-7358.

Sincerely yours,



Franklin J. Arnold III  
Acting Assistant Regional Director  
Ecological Services