NATURAL RESOURCES TECHNICAL REPORT

Replace Bridge No. 7 on US 64 over the Alligator River Dare and Tyrrell counties, North Carolina

> STIP HB-0001 WBS Element No. 49475.1.1



THE NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION Environmental Coordination and Permitting

April 2021

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) proposes to replace bridge no. 7 on US 64 over the Alligator River (STIP HB-0001) in Dare and Tyrrell counties (Figures 1 and 2). The following Natural Resources Technical Report (NRTR) has been prepared to assist in the preparation of a document for the purposes of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) or the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA).

2.0 METHODOLOGY

All work was conducted in accordance with the NCDOT Environmental Coordination and Permitting's Preparing Natural Resources Technical Reports Procedure and the latest NRTR Template November 2017. Field work was conducted on February 25 and 26, 2021. Jurisdictional areas identified in the study area were verified by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), the North Carolina Division of Water Resources (NCDWR), and the North Carolina Division of Coastal Management (NCDCM) on March 31, 2021. The principal personnel contributing to the field work and document is provided in Appendix B.

3.0 TERRESTRIAL COMMUNITIES

Three terrestrial communities were identified in the study area. Figure 4 shows the approximate location and extent of these terrestrial communities. Terrestrial community data are presented in the context of total coverage of each type within the study area (Table 1).

| Community | Dominant Species | Coverage (ac.) | |
|------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------|-------|
| | Tall fescue (Festi | uca arundinacea) | |
| Maintained / Disturbed | Lamp rush (Ja | uncus effusus) | 24.9 |
| | Loblolly pine | | |
| | Pond pine (P | inus serotina) | |
| Riverine Swamp Forest | Willow oak (Q | 69.5 | |
| | Common reed (Ph | | |
| | Black needlerush (J | uncus roemerianus) | |
| Tidal Freshwater Marsh | Smooth cordgrass (S | 18.7 | |
| | Sawgrass (Cladium mariscoides) | | |
| | | Total | 113.1 |

 Table 1. Coverage of terrestrial communities in the study area

4.0 PROTECTED SPECIES

4.1 Endangered Species Act Protected Species

As of October 8, 2020 and September 17, 2020 the United States Fish and Wildlife (USFWS) Information for Planning and Consulting (IPaC) and USFWS County Listing

lists eighteen federally protected species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) for Dare and Tyrrell Counties, respectively (Table 2). For each species, a discussion of the presence or absence of habitat is included below along with the Biological Conclusion rendered based on survey results in the study area.

| Scientific Name | Common Name | Federal Status | County | Habitat Present | Biological Conclusion |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|
| Alligator mississippiensis | American alligator | T (S/A) | Dare / Tyrrell | Yes | Not Required |
| Laterallus jamaicensis | Black rail | Т | Dare | Yes | MA-NLAA |
| Chelonia mydas | Green sea turtle | Т | Dare | No | No Effect |
| Eretmochelys imbricata | Hawksbill sea turtle | E | Dare | No | No Effect |
| Lepidochelys kempii | Kemp's ridley sea turtle | E | Dare | No | No Effect |
| Dermochelys coriacea | Leatherback sea turtle | E | Dare | No | No Effect |
| Caretta caretta | Loggerhead sea turtle | Т | Dare | No | No Effect |
| Myotis septentrionalis | Northern long- eared bat | Т | Dare / Tyrrell | Yes | MA-LAA |
| Charadrius melodus | Piping plover | Т | Dare | No | No Effect |
| Calidris canutus rufa | Red knot | Т | Dare / Tyrrell | No | No Effect |
| Canis rufus | Red wolf | EXP | Dare / Tyrrell | Yes | MA-NLAA |
| Picoides borealis | Red-cockaded woodpecker | E | Dare / Tyrrell | Yes | Unresolved |
| Sterna dougallii dougalli | Roseate tern | Т | Dare | No | No Effect |
| Trichechus manatus | West Indian manatee | E | Dare / Tyrrell | Yes | MA-NLAA |
| Amaranthus pumilus | Seabeach amaranth | Т | Dare | No | No Effect |
| Acipenser brevirostrum | Shortnose sturgeon ¹ | Е | Dare / Tyrrell | Yes | MA-NLAA |
| Acipenser oxyrinchus oxyrinchus | Atlantic sturgeon ¹ | Е | Dare / Tyrrell | Yes | MA-NLAA |

 Table 2. ESA federally protected species listed for Dare and Tyrrell counties.

E-Endangered; T-Threatened; T(S/A) - Threatened due to similarity of appearance

EXP – Experimental Population; MA-LAA - May Affect - Likely to Adversely Affect; MA-NLAA - May Affect - Not Likely to Adversely Affect

* - Historic record (the species was last observed in the county more than 50 years ago)

1 – Species listed by NMFS only.

American Alligator

USFWS optimal survey window: year round (only warm days in winter)

Biological Conclusion: Not Required

Suitable habitat, consisting of large forested swamps, is present within the study area. However, species listed as threatened due to similarity of appearance do not require Section 7 consultation with the USFWS. A review of NCNHP records, accessed March 25, 2021, indicates no known occurrences within 1.0 mile of the study area.

Black Rail

USFWS optimal survey window: year round

Biological Conclusion: May Affect, Not Likely to Adversely Affect

Suitable habitat for the black rail is present within the study area, however minimal impacts to large marsh areas are anticipated to result from the project. No surveys for this species have been performed. A review of NHP records, accessed March 25, 2021, indicates no known occurrences within 1.0 mile of the study area.

Green Sea Turtle

USFWS/NMFS Recommended Survey Window: April-August

Biological Conclusion: No Effect

No habitat for the green sea turtle exists within the study area. The turtle is not expected to venture inland as far as the Alligator River, or to enter any of the canals that connect the study area to the Alligator River. This project will not affect the green sea turtle. A review of the NCNHP records, accessed March 25, 2021, indicates no known occurrences within 1.0 mile of the study area.

Hawksbill Sea Turtle

USFWS/NMFS Recommended Survey Window: April-August

Biological Conclusion: No Effect

No habitat for the hawksbill sea turtle exists within the study area. The turtle is not expected to venture inland as far as the Alligator River, or to enter any of the canals that connect the study area to the Alligator River. This project will not affect the hawksbill sea turtle. A review of the NCNHP records, accessed March 25, 2021, indicates no known occurrences within 1.0 mile of the study area.

Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle

USFWS/NMFS Recommended Survey Window: April-August

Biological Conclusion: No Effect

No habitat for the Kemp's Ridley sea turtle exists within the study area. The turtle is not expected to venture inland as far as the Alligator River, or to enter any of the canals that connect the study area to the Alligator River. This project will not affect the Kemp's Ridley sea turtle. A review of the NCNHP records, accessed March 25, 2021, indicates no known occurrences within 1.0 mile of the study area.

Leatherback Sea Turtle

USFWS/NMFS Recommended Survey Window: April-August

Biological Conclusion: No Effect

No habitat for the leatherback sea turtle exists within the study area. The turtle is not expected to venture inland as far as the Alligator River, or to enter any of the canals that connect the study area to the Alligator River. This project will not affect the leatherback sea turtle. A review of the NCNHP records, accessed March 25, 2021, indicates no known occurrences within 1.0 mile of the study area.

Loggerhead Sea Turtle

USFWS/NMFS Recommended Survey Window: April-August

Biological Conclusion: No Effect

No habitat for the loggerhead sea turtle exists within the study area. The turtle is not expected to venture inland as far as the Alligator River, or to enter any of the canals that connect the study area to the Alligator River. This project will not affect the loggerhead sea turtle. A review of the NCNHP records, accessed March 25, 2021, indicates no known occurrences within 1.0 mile of the study area.

Piping Plover

USFWS Recommended Survey Window: year round

Biological Conclusion: No Effect

No suitable habitat is present within the study area. There are sandy beaches located along the eastern shore of the Alligator River within the study area. However, these areas are minimal in size and appear to be experiencing active erosion, preventing them from acting as suitable nesting habitat. A review of the NCNHP records, accessed March 25, 2021, indicates no known occurrences within 1.0 mile of the study area.

Red Knot

USFWS Recommended Survey Window: None

Biological Conclusion: No Effect

No suitable habitat is present within the study area. No coastal intertidal sediment areas are present within the study area. A review of the NCNHP records, accessed March 25, 2021, indicates no known occurrences within 1.0 mile of the study area.

Red Wolf

USFWS optimal survey window: year round

Biological Conclusion: May Affect – Not Likely to Adversely Affect

Suitable habitat for the red wolf, consisting of heavy vegetative cover and suitable availability of prey, is present within the study area. A review of NCNHP records, accessed March 25, 2021, indicates one known occurrences (EO ID: 23088) within 1.0 mile of the study area. Roadway improvements at either bridge approach are likely to result in only temporary disturbances and temporary territorial shifts for the red wolf.

Red-Cockaded Woodpecker

USFWS optimal survey window: year round; November-early March (optimal)

Biological Conclusion: Unresolved

Suitable nesting and foraging habitat for RCW is located within the project study area. Surveys for RCW in the project area are being performed in 2021. A summary will be provided upon conclusion of the surveys.

Roseate Tern

USFWS optimal survey window: June-August

Biological Conclusion: No Effect

No suitable habitat is present within the study area. No isolated, less disturbed coastal islands are present within the study area. A review of the NCNHP records, accessed March 25, 2021, indicates no known occurrences within 1.0 mile of the study area.

West Indian Manatee

USFWS Recommended Survey Window: year round

Biological Conclusion: May Affect, Not Likely to Adversely Affect

Suitable habitat is present within the study area in Alligator River. A review of the NCNHP records, updated July 2018, indicates no known occurrences within 1.0 mile of the study area. The *Guidelines for Avoiding Impacts to the West Indian Manatee: Precautionary Measures for Construction Activities in North Carolina Waters* (USFWS, 2003) will be implemented for this project to ensure no adverse effects occur.

Seabeach Amaranth

USFWS Optimal Survey Window: July through October

Biological Conclusion: No Effect

No suitable habitat is present within the study area. No barrier island beaches are present within the study area. A review of the NCNHP records, accessed March 25, 2021, indicates no known occurrences within 1.0 mile of the study area.

Shortnose Sturgeon

USFWS/NMFS Recommended Survey Window: surveys not required; assume presence in appropriate waters

Biological Conclusion: May Affect, Not Likely to Adversely Affect

The Alligator River may offer suitable habitat for the sturgeon within the study area. Some canals and ditches in the study area may be adequate to support smaller anadromous species such as river herring, but are unlikely to provide habitat for the shortnose sturgeon. NCNHP records document no occurrences of shortnose sturgeon within the Alligator River. The closest NCNHP record is a historical occurrence in Albemarle Sound approximately 4 miles north of the project. Based on available information and communication with NOAA Marine Fisheries on 1/7/2021, the Biological Conclusion for shortnose sturgeon is May Affect, Not Likely to Adversely Affect due to lack of known occurrences.

Atlantic Sturgeon

USFWS/NMFS Recommended Survey Window: surveys not required, assume presence in appropriate waters

Biological Conclusion: May Affect - Not Likely to Adversely Affect

The Alligator River may offer suitable habitat for the sturgeon within the study area. Some canals and ditches in the study area may be adequate to support smaller anadromous species such as river herring, but are unlikely to provide habitat for the Atlantic sturgeon. NCNHP records document EO 38940, the northern NC range of Atlantic sturgeon, within the study area. Based on available information and communication with NOAA Marine Fisheries on 1/7/2021, the Biological Conclusion for Atlantic sturgeon is May Affect, Not Likely to Adversely Affect due to lack of known occurrences.

Northern long-eared bat

The US Fish and Wildlife Service has revised the previous programmatic biological opinion (PBO) in conjunction with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), and NCDOT for the northern long-eared bat (NLEB) (*Myotis septentrionalis*) in eastern North Carolina. The PBO covers the entire NCDOT program in Divisions 1-8, including all NCDOT projects and activities. Although this programmatic covers Divisions 1-8, NLEBs are currently only known in 19 counties, but may potentially occur in 11 additional counties within Divisions 1-8. NCDOT, FHWA, and USACE have agreed to two conservation measures which will

avoid/minimize mortality of NLEBs. These conservation measures only apply to the 30 currently known/potential counties shown on Figure 2 of the PBO at this time. The programmatic determination for NLEB for the NCDOT program is **May Affect, Likely to Adversely Affect**. The PBO will ensure compliance with Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act for ten years (effective through December 31, 2030) for all NCDOT project with federal nexus in Divisions 1-8, which includes Dare and Tyrrell counties, where HB-0001 is located.

4.2 Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act

The bald eagle is protected under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, and enforced by the USFWS. Habitat for the bald eagle primarily consists of mature forests in proximity to large bodies of open water for foraging. Large dominant trees are utilized for nesting sites, typically within 1.0 mile of open water.

Suitable nesting and foraging habitat for bald eagle are present within the project study area. Surveys for bald eagles are being performed in 2021. A summary will be provided upon completion of the surveys.

4.3 Essential Fish Habitat

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has identified the Alligator River as an Essential Fish Habitat. Table 3 lists the fish species that may occur in the study area that are managed by NMFS, including the life stages which are reported to occur.

| Species | Life Stage |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Snapper Grouper ¹ | Egg, Larva, Juvenile, Adult |
| Red Drum | Egg, Larva, Juvenile, Adult |
| Bluefish | Egg, Larva, Juvenile, Adult |
| Summer Flounder | Larva, Juvenile, Adult |
| Gag Grouper | Juvenile |
| Gray Snapper | Juvenile |
| Spanish Mackerel | Juvenile, Adult |
| Black Sea Bass | Larva, Juvenile, Adult |
| Spiny Dogfish | Juvenile, Adult |
| Brown Shrimp | Egg, Larva, Juvenile, Adult |
| Pink Shrimp | Egg, Larva, Juvenile, Adult |
| White Shrimp | Egg, Larva, Juvenile, Adult |

 Table 3. Managed fish species reported to occur in the study area

1 – Snapper Grouper listed by NMFS as having EFH within the project area. All other species in Table 3 are listed on the Draft List of Essential Fish Habitat Species by Waterbody in North Carolina (October 1999).

5.0 WATER RESOURCES

Water resources in the study area are part of the Pasquotank River basin [U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) Hydrologic Unit 03010205]. One stream was identified in the study area (Table 4). The location of the stream is shown in Figure 3.

| Stream Name | Map ID | NCDWR Index Number | Best Usage Classification | Bank Height (ft) | Bankfull width (miles) | Depth (ft) |
|-----------------|-----------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|---------------|
| Alligator River | Alligator River | 30-16-(7) | SC;Sw,ORW | - | 3 | 15 |
| Alligator River | Alligator River | 30-16-(21.5) | SC;Sw | - | 3 | 15 |

| Table 4. | Streams | in th | e studv | area |
|----------|---------|---------|---------|-------|
| | Sucams | 111 111 | c study | ui cu |

The Alligator River has been designated as an Outstanding Resource Water (ORW) from the mouth of Northwest Fork to U.S. Highway 64, south of the existing bridge. There are no designated water supply watersheds (WS-I or WS-II) within or within 1.0 mile downstream of the study area. The North Carolina 2018 Final and 2020 draft 303(d) lists of impaired waters identify the Alligator River 30-16-(7) as an impaired water for Legacy Category 5 Total Metals Assessment.

Twelve surface waters were identified in the study area (Table 5). The location of each surface water is shown in Figure 3.

| Surface Water | Jurisdictional | Map ID of Connection | Area (ac) in Study Area |
|---------------|----------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| PA | Yes | Alligator River | 0.16 |
| PB | Yes | Alligator River | 0.18 |
| PC | Yes | Alligator River | 0.02 |
| PD | Yes | Alligator River | < 0.01 |
| PE | Yes | Alligator River | 0.18 |
| PF | Yes | Alligator River | 0.09 |
| ТА | Yes | Alligator River | 0.65 |
| ТВ | Yes | Alligator River | 2.39 |
| TC | Yes | Alligator River | 0.4 |
| TD | Yes | Alligator River | 1.44 |
| TE | Yes | Alligator River | < 0.01 |
| TF | Yes | Alligator River | 1.68 |

Table 5. Surface waters in the study area

6.0 REGULATORY CONSIDERATIONS

6.1 Clean Water Act Waters of the U.S.

One jurisdictional stream was identified in the study area (Table 6). The location of this stream is shown on Figure 3. The Alligator River has been designated as a warm water stream for the purposes of stream mitigation.

| Map ID | Length (ft.) | Classification | Compensatory Mitigation Required | River Basin Buffer |
|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Alligator River | 1,091 | Perennial | Yes | Not Subject |
| Total | 1,091 | | | |

 Table 6. Characteristics of jurisdictional streams in the study area

Seventeen jurisdictional wetlands were identified within the study area (Table 7). The location of these wetlands is shown on Figure 3. All wetlands in the study area are located within the Pasquotank River basin [USGS Hydrologic Unit 03010205]. USACE wetland determination forms and NCWAM forms for each site are included in a separate Preliminary Jurisdictional Determination Package.

| Man ID | NCWAM | NCWAM | Hydrologic | Area (ac.) in |
|--------|---|--------|----------------|---------------|
| Map ID | Classification | Rating | Classification | Study Area |
| WA | Riverine Swamp Forest | High | Riparian | 23.10 |
| WB | Riverine Swamp Forest | High | Riparian | 18.20 |
| WC | Tidal Freshwater Marsh | High | Riparian | 9.15 |
| WD | Riverine Swamp Forest / Tidal Freshwater Marsh | High | Riparian | 2.67 |
| WE | Riverine Swamp Forest | High | Riparian | 1.95 |
| WF | Riverine Swamp Forest | High | Riparian | 0.21 |
| WG | Riverine Swamp Forest | High | Riparian | 2.96 |
| WH | Riverine Swamp Forest | High | Riparian | 19.56 |
| WI | Riverine Swamp Forest | High | Riparian | 0.07 |
| WJ | Tidal Freshwater Marsh | High | Riparian | 1.40 |
| WK | Riverine Swamp Forest | High | Riparian | 0.74 |
| WL | Riverine Swamp Forest | High | Riparian | 0.09 |
| WM | Tidal Freshwater Marsh | High | Riparian | 0.04 |
| WN | Tidal Freshwater Marsh | High | Riparian | 6.19 |
| WO | Tidal Freshwater Marsh | High | Riparian | 0.99 |
| WP | Tidal Freshwater Marsh | High | Riparian | 0.39 |
| WQ | Tidal Freshwater Marsh | High | Riparian | 0.09 |
| | | | Total | 87.80 |

 Table 7. Characteristics of jurisdictional wetlands in the study area

6.2 Construction Moratoria

Anadromous Fish Habitat has been identified within the study area. The Alligator River north of the existing US 64 bridge (30-16-(21.5) is classified as coastal Anadromous Fish Spawning Area (AFSA) under Marine Fisheries Commission (MFC) jurisdiction. The Alligator River south of the existing US 64 bridge (30-16-7) is classified as joint AFSA waters under the jurisdiction of MFC and the North Carolina Wildlife Resource Commission (WRC). No Primary Nursery Areas have been identified within the study area. A construction moratorium from February 15 to June 30 is likely to apply to this project.

6.3 N.C. River Basin Buffer Rules

The Pasquotank River Basin does not have stream buffer rules administered by NCDWR.

6.4 Rivers and Harbors Act Section 10 Navigable Waters

Alligator River has been designated by the USACE as a Navigable Water under Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act.

6.5 Coastal Area Management Act Areas of Environmental Concern

The study area is located within the Estuarine and Ocean System Area of Environmental Concern (AEC). The Alligator River, as well as portions of TA, TB, and TD are designated as Estuarine Waters and Public Trust Waters. Coastal Shorelines include all lands within 75 feet of the normal high water level of estuarine waters and within 30 feet of the normal high water level of public trust waters. Additionally, CAMA coastal wetland is present at wetland sites WC, WN, WO, WP, and WQ (Figure 3).

6.6 Coastal Barrier Resources System

The study area is not located on a coastal barrier island.

7.0 REFERENCES

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Appendix A

Figures



























Appendix B

Qualifications of Contributors

| Principal | |
|-------------------|---|
| Investigator: | Rob Crowther |
| Education: | B.S. Environmental Resources Management, 2014 |
| Experience: | Environmental Scientist, Carolina Ecosystems, Inc., 2015-Present Field Assistant, Virginia Tech, 2014 |
| Responsibilities: | Wetland and stream delineation, GPS data collection, natural communities assessment, T&E species assessment, document review |
| Investigator: | Preston Butler |
| Education: | B.A. Environmental Studies, 2017 |
| Experience: | Environmental Scientist, Carolina Ecosystem Inc., 2018-present Environmental Surveyor, Axiom Environmental, 2017-2018 Intern, EI Group, 2015-2017 |
| Responsibilities: | Wetland and stream delineation, GPS data collection, natural communities assessment, T&E species assessment, document preparation |
| Investigator: | Matt Harrell |
| Education: | B.S. Environmental Science, (Water Science and Quality) 2018 |
| Experience: | Environmental Scientist, Carolina Ecosystems, Inc., 2018-Present Lab Intern, Virginia Tech 2017 |
| Responsibilities: | Wetland and stream delineation, GPS data collection, natural communities assessment, T/E species assessment |
| Investigator: | Phil May |
| Education: | B.S. Biology, 1992 |
| Experience: | Senior Scientist, Carolina Ecosystems, Inc., 2006-Present |
| | Senior Scientist, HDR Engineering, Inc., 2001-2006 |
| | Staff Scientist, GN Richardson & Assoc., 1995-2001 |
| Responsibilities: | Document review |