

# United States Department of the Interior

## FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Mississippi Field Office  
6578 Dogwood View Parkway, Suite A  
Jackson, Mississippi 39213

November 5, 2007

Dr. Sam A. Damico  
Enercon Services, Incorporated  
1700 West Loop South, Suite 825  
Houston, Texas

Dear Dr. Damico:

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has received your facsimile dated November 5, 2007, requesting information regarding federally listed species in Hinds, Warren, Claiborne, Madison, and Copiah Counties, Mississippi. Our comments are submitted in accordance with the Endangered Species Act (87 Stat. 884, as amended; 16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.).

The following species or their habitats could be found in these counties:

### Claiborne, Copiah, Hinds, Madison, and Warren Counties

The federally listed threatened Louisiana black bear (*Ursus a. luteolus*) occurs primarily in bottomland hardwood and floodplain forests along the Mississippi River and the southern part of the state. Although the bear is capable of surviving under a range of habitat types, some necessary habitat requirements include hard mast, soft mast, escape cover, denning sites, forested corridors, and limited human access. Forest management practices, agricultural, commercial and industrial development, and highways can cause adverse impacts to bear habitat by increasing human disturbance, fragmenting forests, and removing den trees.

### Warren County

The endangered plant pondberry (*Lindera melissifolia*) is a member of the Lauraceae family and is a deciduous aromatic shrub that averages 0.5 to 2 meters tall. It occurs in seasonally flooded wetlands, sandy sinks, pond margins, and swampy depressions.

### Claiborne and Warren Counties

The endangered interior least tern (*Sterna antillarum*) migrates up the Mississippi River and

lays its eggs directly on the sandbars associated with the river. Hundreds of these birds may nest together to form a colony.

In addition, the endangered pallid sturgeon (*Scaphirhynchus albus*) is found in the lower Mississippi River, although it is rare throughout its range. These fish require large, turbid, free-flowing riverine habitats, and feed mainly on other fish. They are usually found near the bottom of streams or lakes in sand flats or gravel bars. Little information is known on spawning or migration habits of these fish, although spawning likely occurs in the spring and summer months.

The breeding/spawning season for terns and sturgeons is approximately May through July. Avoidance of these areas during the above time would prevent adverse impacts to either species. Both species can change nesting/spawning areas from year to year, so an onsite survey for both species just before start of construction is recommended.

#### Claiborne, Covich, and Hinds Counties

The threatened Bayou darter (*Etheostoma rubrum*) is found only in Bayou Pierre and its tributaries: White Oak Creek, Foster Creek, and Turkey Creek. The darter prefers stable gravel riffles or sandstone exposures with large sized gravel or rock. Habitat loss or degradation has been a major contributor to the reduction in bayou darter numbers.

#### Covich, Hinds, and Madison Counties

The threatened ringed map turtle (*Graptemys oculifera*) is found in the Pearl River. It prefers river stretches with moderate currents, abundant basking sites, and sand bars for nesting. Stream modification in the Pearl River, such as flood control and urban development, has significantly contributed to the decline of the species. Also, water quality degradation has posed a serious problem for the turtle.

#### Covich and Hinds Counties

The threatened Gulf sturgeon (*Acipenser oxyrinchus desotoi*) is found in the Pearl, Leaf, and Pascagoula Rivers. Gulf sturgeons are primitive, anadromous fish that annually migrate from the Gulf of Mexico into freshwater streams. Subadults and adults spend eight to nine months each year in rivers. Although Gulf sturgeon activity is not well documented, the species has been found in the river as far north as the Jackson metropolitan area. The decline of the Gulf sturgeon is primarily due to limited access to migration routes and historic spawning areas, habitat modification, and water quality degradation.

All of the above listed species are very sensitive to human disturbance. Therefore, before the use or transportation of any heavy construction equipment, or the removal of any vegetation **within potential habitats**, the Service recommends a qualified biologist conduct a visual survey for these species. Areas surveyed should also include ingress and egress areas, equipment storage areas, and staging areas. If any of these species or their habitats is identified, further consultation with the Service will be necessary.

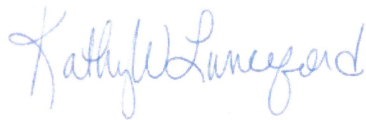
Statewide

The threatened bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) is the only species of sea eagle regularly occurring on the North American continent. The bald eagle is predominantly a winter migrant in the southeast; however, increasing occurrences of nesting have been observed. The bald eagle nests in the transitional area between forest and water. They construct their nests in dominant living pines or bald cypress trees. Eagles often use alternate nests in different years with nesting activity beginning between September and January of each year. Young are usually fledged by midsummer.

Although the bald eagle was officially removed from the List of Endangered and Threatened Species as of August 8, 2007, it continues to be protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. Should any of the proposed work activities be located near an active bald eagle nest, we recommend that construction activities be conducted in accordance with the Service's National Bald Eagle Management Guidelines ([www.fw.gov](http://www.fw.gov)).

Please be advised that this information covers only counties in Mississippi. If you have any additional questions, please feel free to contact this office, telephone: (601) 321-1132.

Sincerely,



Kathy W. Lunceford  
Fish and Wildlife Biologist