



# United States Department of the Interior

## FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Texas Coastal and Central Plains Ecological Services Field Office

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Mr. Robert Morrow, PMP  
Department of the Army  
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Galveston District  
Chief, Environmental Branch  
Regional Planning and Environmental Center  
2000 Fort Point Rd  
Galveston, Texas 77550

Dear Mr. Morrow:

We received your revised Biological Assessment on November 25, 2025, on the Raymondville Drain Improvement project on federally listed species in Hidalgo and Willacy Counties, Texas. Additionally, this action was evaluated for impacts to wetlands and other federal trust fish and wildlife resources.

Hidalgo County Drainage District No. 1 (HCDD1) is developing a proposed project to improve the existing regional stormwater drainage system in Hidalgo and Willacy Counties, Texas. The proposed drainage system improvement project, known as the Raymondville Drain Project (RDP), would expand the existing Raymondville Drain, in length and width, and potentially construct new drainage system elements (i.e., detention pond, alternative conveyance channels, etc.) to provide flood mitigation benefits within low-lying areas of Hidalgo and Willacy Counties.

This Biological Assessment (BA) has been prepared by RRP Consulting Engineers, LLC, (RRP) consultant to HCDD1, to fulfill the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) requirements as outlined in Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (ESA). Section 7 assures that, through consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), Federal actions do not jeopardize the continued existence of any species listed or proposed as threatened or endangered or result in the destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat. Section 7(a)(2) of the ESA specifically requires Federal agencies to evaluate the effects of their proposed

actions on species that are listed, or proposed for listing, as threatened or endangered under the ESA, as well as designated critical habitat for such species.

The existing drainage system is comprised of the Raymondville Drain, the HCDD1 North Main Drain system, and the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC) Floodway (IBWC Main Floodway and IBWC North Floodway). The existing Raymondville Drain system, including outfalls, was designed in the late 1960s and was originally intended to convey agricultural runoff (from the generally northern portions of the study area) from a 9.5-year storm event through the Laguna Madre to the Gulf of Mexico. The North Main Drain was constructed with the intent to convey stormwater runoff from the developed portions of Hidalgo County (generally southern portions of the study area) through the Laguna Madre to the Gulf of Mexico. The primary purpose of the IBWC Floodway (conveying runoff from areas south of the study area) is to provide an additional way to convey flows towards the Gulf of Mexico (via the Laguna Madre), therefore reducing flooding along the Rio Grande. The IBWC infrastructure requires pumps to convey water into the floodway during storm events.

The proposed action consists of the construction of approximately 13.8 miles of new diversion drains in Hidalgo County, approximately 43 miles of drain improvements in Hidalgo and Willacy Counties, a 272-acre detention pond near the South Texas International Airport in Edinburg, and five control structures located at the junction of the Raymondville Drain with other existing drains and at the detention pond. The limits of the RDP originate at a point east of Edinburg Lake in Hidalgo County (western project terminus) and extend eastward to a point approximately 2 miles upstream of State Highway (SH) 186 in Willacy County near Port Mansfield (eastern project terminus). Approximately 50 miles of the proposed RDP would be constructed within a ROW from 350 to 450 feet wide consisting of 10-foot vegetative buffers and 20-foot access roads on both sides, in channel maintenance benches, and a pilot channel 60 feet wide and 5 feet deep. West of the El Sauz Ranch property, a 100-foot-wide spoil bank would be sited on the right bank of the drain in specific locations; the spoil bank would be comprised of soil excavated during the expansion of the existing Raymondville Drain or the construction of the new drain channel. The spoil bank would be sited and constructed to avoid environmentally sensitive areas (e.g., wetlands); the gaps in the spoil bank would allow overland sheet flow to flow into the drain. The remaining 6.8 miles of the proposed RDP, from the western boundary of the El Sauz Ranch property to the eastern project terminus, would be constructed within a 350-footwide ROW as the spoil bank would not be constructed in this location. The proposed 272-acre detention pond would be constructed approximately 1.3 miles east of IH 69C/US 281, east of and adjacent to the Lopez State Jail-Segovia Unit. An outlet structure would allow water to flow from the basin of the detention pond into the diversion channel.

The proposed diversion would transfer water flows from the North Main Drain to a new extension of the Raymondville Drain at a new control structure near Edinburg Lake. The

transferred North Main Drain flow comes from areas generally north and west of Edinburg. Reducing flow upstream in the North Main Drain would improve regional stormwater capacity, significantly reducing damages in the vicinity of the proposed action and would additionally reduce flooding downstream in the watershed. The Tentatively Selected Plan (TSP) would provide relief in Hidalgo and Willacy Counties simultaneously by providing increased in-line storage throughout the system, increased flow through capacity in the Raymondville Drain, and controlled flow from Hidalgo County to Willacy County. The TSP would significantly reduce flood damages and flood risk in the region, benefiting more than 38,000 residential and commercial structures.

The proposed action would construct a diversion drain to connect the existing North Main Drain and the Raymondville Drain, improvements along the Raymondville Drain, a detention pond located in Hidalgo County, and five control structures to regulate the flow of water. The diversion channel would start approximately 0.4 mile east of Edinburg Lake with a control structure along the North Main Drain and proceed generally north before crossing I-69C/US 281 approximately 0.7 miles north of El Cibolo Road. From there, the drain would proceed generally eastward toward Brushline Road, with the proposed detention pond and control structure located in line with the pilot channel. From Brushline Road, the drain would proceed north to a point 0.4 mile north of FM 490 where it would turn east and connect to the existing Raymondville Drain (locally known as West Hargill Drain Lateral 5); a second control structure is proposed south of 12th Street before FM 490 to divert water toward Delta Lake for the irrigation purposes (Delta Lake Irrigation District). The proposed new drain, from the start to this point, would be approximately 13.8 miles long, with an approximately 270-acre detention pond.

The proposed action continues with drain widening to match the proposed diversion drain's cross section and continues from the start of the Raymondville Drain (West Hargill Lateral 5) approximately 2.7 miles north; and then proceeds west along the Raymondville Drain (West Hargill Drain) approximately 7.8 miles, and then flows into the Raymondville Drain (North Hargill Drain), with a control structure located at the Hidalgo and Willacy County line. The drain improvements continue along the existing Raymondville Drain in a northeasterly, then east, direction past I-69E/US 77 approximately 30.2 miles to an unnamed private bridge, approximately 2.0 miles north of where the Raymondville Drain flows underneath SH 186. An existing control structure between the drain and its connection to La Sal Vieja, north of SH 186, would be replaced due to the channel widening. The length of the channel improvements is 43.0 miles, and the overall length of the proposed action is 56.8 miles. The construction of the RDP is anticipated to be conducted over a period of 10 years following final environmental clearance and approvals. Construction would be completed in 11 segments (7 segments in Hidalgo County and 4 segments in Willacy County); upstream segments would only be constructed and operated once downstream segments are capable of conveying the resulting flow.

## **Section 6 Conservation measures:**

Conservation measures proposed for the proposed action consist of best management practices (BMPs) primarily based on published TPWD guidance, as well as recommendations provided by TPWD during agency coordination. Best Management Practices under 6.1 (General Conservation Measures in the BA) will be implemented as a part of these actions to avoid and/or minimize impacts to the Federally listed Ocelot and Jaguarundi, as well as other species considered in this BA.

To avoid or minimize impacts to birds protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, the Service recommends conducting bird surveys no more than five days prior to ground disturbing activities or mechanical clearing of brush and trees that occur between March 15 and September 15. Surveys should include searches for birds, nests, and eggs. The Service recommends leaving a buffer of vegetation  $\geq 100$  feet around songbird nests detected until young have fledged or the nest is abandoned. Other species such as water birds or raptors require larger buffer distances of 0.5 miles.

RRP has determined the proposed project “may affect, not likely to adversely affect” the northern aplomado falcon (*Falco femoralis septentrionalis*), ocelot (*Leopardus =Felis pardalis*), jaguarundi (*Herpailurus yagouaroundi cacomitli*), and cactus ferruginous pygmy-owl (*Glaucidium brasilianum catorum*). The Service concurs with the determination based on the information provided and conservation measures that will be implemented to minimize impacts to these federally listed species and will be insignificant and discountable. RRP has made a “no effect” determination for the Starr cactus (*Astrophytum asterias*), Texas ayenia (*Ayenia limitaris*), Walker’s manioc (*Manihot walkerae*), piping plover, (*Charadrius melodus*), and Rufa red knot (*Calidris canutus rufa*). Additionally, RRP determined that the proposed project would not jeopardize the proposed endangered tricolored bat (*Perimyotis subflavus*). Please note, the Service does not provide concurrence for “no effect” determinations but acknowledges our receipt of your correspondence. Our acknowledgement does not provide incidental take of listed species for your project, and if the impacts of your project change such that adverse effects or incidental take may occur, you should contact the Service to initiate consultation.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide pre-planning information. If we can be of further assistance, please contact Ernesto Reyes at 956-307-5132 or 361-533-6057.

Sincerely,

Catrina Martin  
Assistant Field Supervisor