



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

East Lansing Field Office (ES)
2651 Coolidge Road, Suite 101
East Lansing, Michigan 48823-6316

IN REPLY REFER TO:

November 7, 2013

Ms. Melanie Burdick
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Wetlands and Watersheds Branch (WW-16J)
77 West Jackson Boulevard
Chicago, Illinois 60604-3507

Re: State of Michigan File No. 13-03-0079-P, applicant Singapore Dunes LLC

Dear Ms. Burdick:

We have reviewed the Public Notice for the above referenced file, concerning an application for a Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) permit. We submit these comments under the authority of section 404(j) of the Clean Water Act and in accordance with the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (Act) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Mitigation Policy.

According to the information provided in the Public Notice, the applicant proposes to build paved roads, approximately 20 feet wide and 10,000 feet long through coastal dune areas adjacent Lake Michigan and the Saugatuck Dunes State Park. The proposed road is to serve future residential development and crosses an area of interdunal wetland. The applicant also plans to create a 1,230 foot gabion wall along the road to hold back the natural progression of the dunes. The road will pass through 2 wetlands for a total impact of 0.02 acres. Mitigation is proposed. The proposed project would occur in T3N, R16E, Section 3 and 4, Saugatuck Township, Allegan County, Michigan.

Wetlands Comments

The applicant proposes to develop roads to serve future residential housing. A total of 0.02 acres of unique interdunal wetlands will be impacted. Although the total area directly impacted by the proposed roadway is relatively small, the applicant fails to fully assess the potential indirect effects caused by the bisection of the linear wetland area.

Mitigation in the form of creation is proposed at 4:1 ratio. Given the unique nature of interdunal wetlands impacted by the project, we are concerned that mitigation in the form of creation in an upland area will fail to provide similar wetland functions and values. Based on the limited information provided in the application, the proposed wetland creation may not adequately mitigate for the wetland losses.

In addition, wetland impacts that may result from future residential development are not described and do not allow for an assessment of the cumulative impacts to wetlands from the entire project. The plans for the residential development should be included with this proposed road permit to fully assess total impacts to wetlands in this area.

Endangered Species Comments

Our records indicate the presence of Pitcher's thistle (*Cirsium pitcheri*), a federally listed threatened species, is found in Allegan County, Michigan, and previous surveys have documented the species within the general project area. Results of surveys conducted in support of the permit did not identify the presence of the species. Survey reports were not provided, however, and it remains unclear if the surveys were for just along the road under consideration or if they were broader, more comprehensive surveys for the entire property. Any potential effects of future actions associated with residential development should be included in the assessment of potential effects on federally listed plant species.

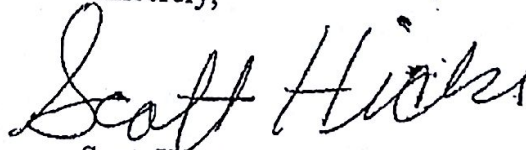
The endangered Great Lakes Piping plover (*Charadrius melodus*) are known to use the area during early summer as well as spring and fall migration periods. The eventual residential development supported by the proposed road construction will increase human and possibly pet use of the beach where the piping plovers have been observed and could cause disturbance during the migrations to the summer-breeding and winter-foraging grounds. If the proposed residential development proceeds, we recommend the applicant coordinate with the Service on potential measures that can be implemented to reduce the potential for disturbance to piping plover that may utilize the project site in the future.

Summary Comments

The applicant's proposal to build roads in wetlands should include a clearly identified plan for mitigation through restoration, creation or preservation of wetlands that are of equivalent function and value of the interdunal wetlands that are found along the shoreline. In addition, the applicant should provide the impacts of the complete developmental of residential housing in this plan to provide the total future, cumulative impacts to the interdunal wetlands that are unique to coastal areas along Lake Michigan. The Service recommends denial of the permit until these two main topics are addressed by the applicant.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide our resource protection recommendations. For further discussion, please contact Jamie Bettaso of this office at james_bettaso@fws.gov or 517-351-5293.

Sincerely,



Scott Hicks
Field Supervisor

cc: MDEQ, Water Resources Division, Lansing, MI (Attn: Colleen O'Keefe)
MDEQ, Water Resources Division, Kalamazoo, MI (Attn: Ben Zimont)
MDNR, Wildlife Division, Lansing, MI (Attn: Lori Sargent)