



24 April 2017

## Screening Opinion for Proposed Spine Road, Little Cayman

Originating Entity - Ministry of PLAHI

Prepared by the Department of Environment for the National Conservation Council

The **National Conservation Council's (NCC) Directive for Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA)** issued under section 3(12)(j) and which has effect under section 43(2)(c) of the National Conservation Law (NCL), notes that all activities listed in Schedule 1 will be considered against the screening criteria outlined in sections 1 to 3 of Schedule 1 of the Directive to determine whether an EIA may be required. These screening criteria are: the type and characteristics of development, the location of the development and the characteristics of the potential impacts.

The **proposed project** is for a 30 ft wide public road proposed for gazettal under Section 3 of the Roads Law. The corridor would run approximately 2,872 ft (0.54 mile) west from gazetted road BP558 (June 2013) at Block 89A Parcel 8 REM 1 to the western boundary of Block 87A Parcel 19 - see Figure 1 below. A turning circle or hammerhead is intended at the terminus. The proposed road represents a portion of a larger previously proposed route, which extended westward from this terminus a further 5,534 ft (1 mile) to Block 88A Parcel 32, and was the subject of a Department of Environment (DoE) review in August 2015. The Ministry of PLAHI submits that "[t]he purpose of the road is to provide a potential means of access to several landlocked parcels. The proposal has the support of District Administration. Although the Roads Law makes no distinction between the 3 islands, the practical reality is that District Administration is responsible for public roads on the Sister Islands, not the NRA."

International best practice carried out in other jurisdictions requires that new road corridors be *firstly* informed by a strategic level overview – commonly known as a **Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)**. SEAs ensure the **integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of policies, plans and programmes** and enable consultation on the potential effects with a wide range of stakeholders in order to inform the decision-making process at a strategic level.

It is unclear from the materials provided by the Ministry of PLAHI (email dated 5 April 2017) what level of strategic assessment has been undertaken for the proposed road to ensure that the proposed road represents the least environmentally damaging alternative for meeting the stated purpose of the road. Additionally, it is unlikely that the proposed road corridor has been evaluated against a **formal development plan or strategy** as one does not exist for Little Cayman despite past strategic planning efforts. The arbitrary selection of a road corridor without an SEA or any form of

strategic consideration against a long-term development strategy is not an approach supported by the DoE.

Having considered the proposal against the screening criteria outlined in the EIA Directive, the DoE is of the opinion that **the proposed road requires an EIA** to inform the review process **prior to consideration of its gazettal** predominantly based on the following factors:

1. **Screening Criteria:** The proposal falls within Section 5(ii) of Schedule 1 of the EIA Directive, i.e. *Transportation infrastructure, including planning or construction of new roads, and of road extensions*. The activity triggers other screening criteria, in particular:
  - a. The characteristics of the development in terms of the use of natural resources and cumulative effects of incremental development after gazettal (screening criteria 1);
  - b. The location of development within pristine primary habitat (screening criteria 2(c)(i) and (iii)); and
  - c. The extent of impact in terms of geographical area affected (7 parcels totalling 218 acres either side of the road), the magnitude of change and probability of the long-term impact having both sub-national and national implications, and likely irreversibility of impact from future development (screening criteria 3(a)-(d)).
2. **Environmental Sensitivity:** The proposed roadway will traverse areas of high ecological and biodiversity value within the central dry shrubland habitat which supports numerous critically endangered **NCL Part 1 listed Sister Islands endemic plant species** such as *Encyclia kingsii* (Banana Orchid) and *Banara caymanensis*, and **Little Cayman endemics** such as the *Dendropemon caymanensis*, as well as Part 2 listed plant species such as *Turnera triglandulosa*. The western portion of the road (at block 87A parcel 19) also bisects seasonally flooded mangrove shrubland – see Figure 2 below. The transitional vegetation will become fragmented and will likely be adversely affected by the presence of the road.
3. **Impact Evaluation:** The scope and characteristics of the potential significant effects of the proposed road scheme on these natural resources will require assessment of the direct, indirect and cumulative impacts including but not limited to:
  - a. An assessment of the ecological functions and value of the specific natural resources that will be affected by the construction and use of the road. In particular an ecological assessment of the area is required to assess the presence of the protected species noted above and other critically endangered flora and fauna;
  - b. An assessment of the impacts associated with changes to the hydrology and drainage patterns of wetland areas in particular as a result of the road construction;
  - c. Detailed geotechnical investigations along the entire proposed road in order to identify any potential constraints on the proposed alignment and/or construction methodology, due to its current route through varied terrain including wetlands; and
  - d. An assessment of the aggregate quantity required to construct the proposed road, including significant cost implications and impacts to off-site natural resources associated with the extraction and/or quarrying of material sourced on Little Cayman.
4. **Project Need:** The need for a public east-west interior road along this route does not appear to have been objectively evaluated nor adequately demonstrated. No rationale has been provided for the revised proposal which, although reduced in scale from the originally

proposed corridor, still opens up over 200 acres of pristine primary habitat to potential development.

The DoE **does not support a decision to gazette** a major road corridor in the absence of a long-term development strategy for Little Cayman or an EIA for the proposed road. Gazetting of this major road without proper development control mechanisms is certain to transform land use on either side of the corridor leading to wider reaching development impacts affecting the character of the island. NCC should bear in mind that the local community holds very strong views regarding the long-term development vision for Little Cayman, with most residents desiring the island remain predominantly undeveloped with low-density residential and boutique tourism. An EIA would ensure that the proposed road project requires consultation with appropriate Government departments and agencies (e.g. National Roads Authority, District Administration, Department of Environment, Planning Department, Water Authority), landowners (direct beneficiaries of the road and adjacent interests) and the wider Little Cayman community. Additionally the EIA would determine if the proposed corridor is the most suitable option and, if so, what can be done to mitigate both on and off-site environmental impacts.

After considering the Screening Opinion detailed above, the NCC is required to issue its decision to the originating entity on the requirement for an EIA pursuant to Section 43(1).



Figure 1 Proposed Spine Road, April 2017

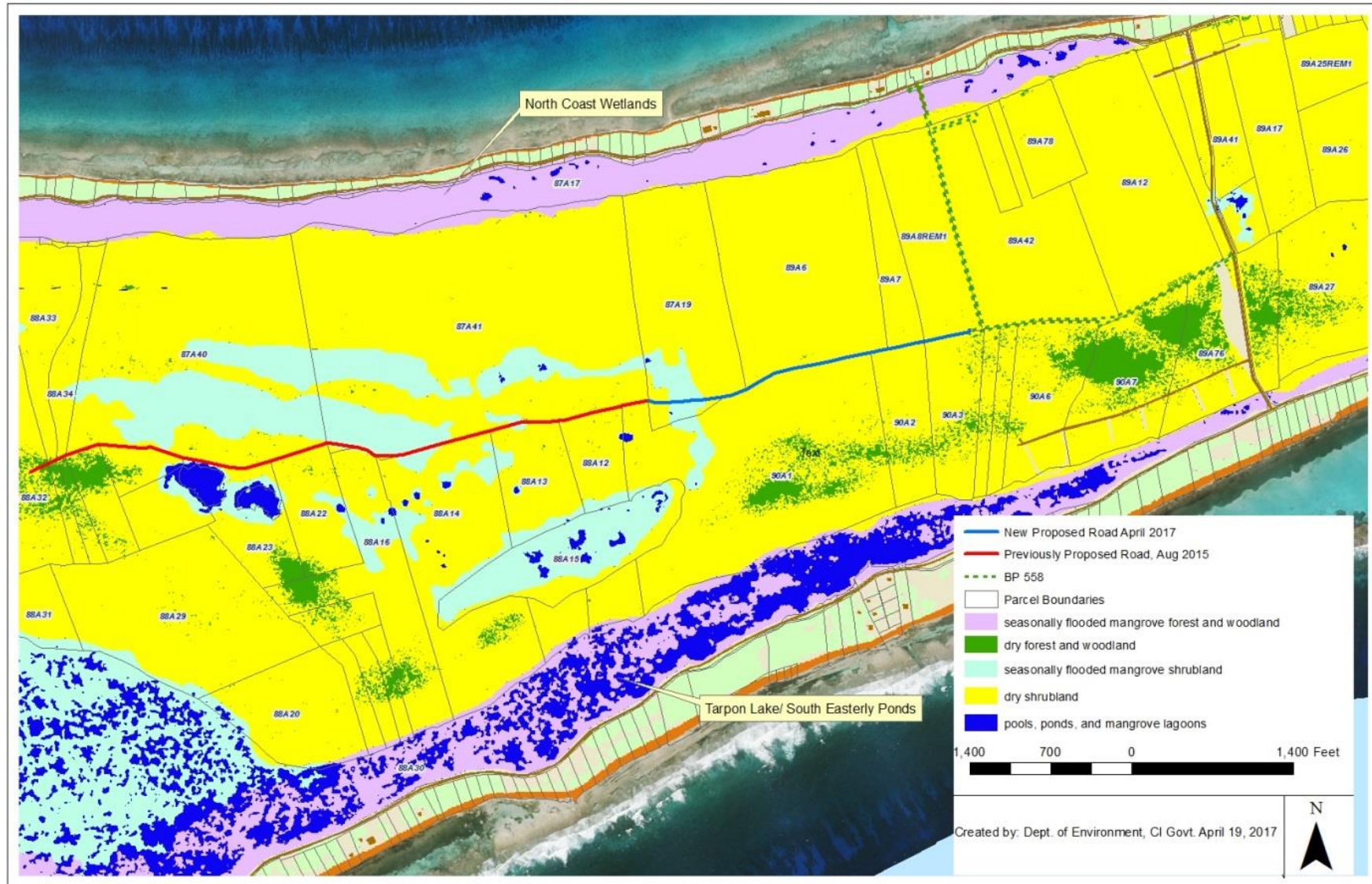


Figure 2 Habitat affected by proposal relative to previously proposed road