



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY

COMMANDER
U.S. FLEET FORCES COMMAND
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NORFOLK, VA 23551-2487

5090
Ser N46/667
May 7, 2012

Mr. Peyton Robertson
Director, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
Chesapeake Bay Office
410 Severn Avenue, Ste. 107A
Annapolis, MD 21403

Dear Mr. Robertson:

SUBJECT: UNITED STATES NAVY'S ATLANTIC FLEET TRAINING AND TESTING
DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT/OVERSEAS ENVIRONMENTAL
IMPACT STATEMENT

This letter is to inform you that the Department of the Navy has prepared a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)/Overseas EIS (OEIS) for U.S. Navy training and testing activities conducted within the Atlantic Fleet Training and Testing (AFTT) Study Area. The U.S. Navy is requesting and welcomes your comments on the Draft EIS/OEIS.

The Study Area is in the western Atlantic Ocean and encompasses the waters off the east coast of North America and the Gulf of Mexico. The Study Area covers approximately 2.6 million square nautical miles of ocean area, and includes designated U.S. Navy operating areas and special use airspace (see enclosure).

The U.S. Navy's mission is to organize, train, equip, and maintain combat-ready Naval Forces capable of winning wars, deterring aggression, and maintaining freedom of the seas as mandated by federal law (Title 10 U.S. Code § 5062). The Chief of Naval Operations is charged with ensuring the readiness of the nation's naval forces and meets that directive, in part, by establishing and executing training programs and ensuring naval forces have access to training ranges, operating areas, and airspace needed to develop and maintain skills for the conduct of operations.

The Navy's proposed action is to conduct training and testing activities, which may include the use of active sonar and explosives, primarily within existing range complexes, operating areas, and testing ranges along the east coast of the U.S., the Gulf of Mexico, pierside locations, port transit channels, and the lower Chesapeake Bay. For more information on the U.S. Navy's proposed action and alternatives currently under consideration, please see the enclosure.

In compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, the U.S. Navy is holding five public meetings to inform and provide an opportunity for the public to comment on the proposed action, alternatives under consideration, and the adequacy and accuracy of the analysis in the Draft EIS/OEIS. All comments (oral or written) submitted during the 60-

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day public review period (May 11, 2012 to July 10, 2012) will become part of the public record on the Draft EIS/OEIS and will be addressed in the Final EIS/OEIS.

U.S. Navy representatives will be available during the open house public meetings to provide information and answer questions. Members of the public can arrive anytime between 4 p.m. and 8 p.m. The public meeting schedule is as follows:

Wednesday, May 30, 2012

Hotel Providence
139 Mathewson Street
Providence, RI 02903

Monday, June 11, 2012

Virginia Beach Convention Center
1000 19th Street
Virginia Beach, VA 23451

Tuesday, June 5, 2012

The Prime F. Osborn III
Convention Center
1000 Water Street
Jacksonville, FL 32204

Tuesday, June 12, 2012

Hampton Inn and Suites Swansboro
215 Old Hammock Road
Swansboro, NC 28584

Wednesday, June 6, 2012

Hilton Garden Inn Panama City
1101 N. Highway 231
Panama City, FL 32405

The Draft EIS/OEIS and additional information are available on the project website at: www.AFTTEIS.com. A CD-ROM of the Draft EIS/OEIS can also be sent on request.

Written comments may be submitted via the website or mailed to the following address:

Naval Facilities Engineering Command Atlantic
Attn Code EV22 (AFTT EIS Project Managers)
6506 Hampton Blvd
Norfolk, VA 23508-1278

Online comments may also be submitted on the project website at: www.AFTTEIS.com. All comments must be postmarked or received online by July 10, 2012, to be considered in the Final EIS/OEIS.

Sincerely,



G. L. EDWARDS
Director
Environmental Readiness Division
By direction

Enclosure (1): U.S. Navy AFTT EIS/OEIS Project Description and Study Area Map

**U.S. NAVY ATLANTIC FLEET TRAINING AND TESTING (AFTT) ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT
STATEMENT/OVERSEAS ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT (EIS/OEIS) PROJECT
DESCRIPTION AND STUDY AREA MAP**

AFTT EIS/OEIS Proposed Action and Alternatives:

The Navy's proposed action is to conduct training and testing activities, which may include the use of active sonar and explosives primarily within existing range complexes, operating areas, and testing ranges along the east coast of the United States, the Gulf of Mexico, U.S. Navy pierside locations, port transit channels and the lower Chesapeake Bay. The proposed action also includes activities such as sonar maintenance and gunnery exercises conducted during ship transits, and which may occur outside U.S. Navy range complexes and testing ranges. The proposed action includes pierside sonar testing conducted as part of construction, overhaul, modernization, maintenance, and repair activities at shipyards and U.S. Navy piers.

The purpose of the proposed action is to conduct training and testing activities to ensure that the U.S. Navy accomplishes its mission to maintain, train, and equip combat-ready Naval Forces capable of winning wars, deterring aggression, and maintaining freedom of the seas.

No Action Alternative - Continues baseline training and testing activities, as defined by existing U.S. Navy environmental planning documents. The baseline testing activities also include those testing events that have historically occurred in the Study Area, and have been subject to previous analysis pursuant to National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Executive Order 12114. The No Action Alternative is required by regulations as a baseline against which the impacts of the proposed action are compared.

Alternative 1 - Consists of the No Action Alternative plus the expansion of the Study Area boundaries and adjustments to the locations and tempos of training and testing activities from the baseline, as necessary to support current and planned U.S. Navy training and testing requirements. This alternative considers activities occurring on the range complexes and the testing ranges, as well as activities occurring within the Study Area outside of the range complexes and testing ranges; and mission requirements associated with force structure changes, including those resulting from the development, testing, and introduction of new platforms (ships and aircraft) and weapons systems into the fleet. Alternative 1 reflects the adjustment to the baseline necessary to support all current and proposed Navy at-sea training and testing activities through 2019.

Alternative 2 - Consists of Alternative 1 plus the establishment of new range capabilities and modifications of existing capabilities, adjustments to types and tempos of training and testing, and the establishment of additional locations to conduct activities within the Study Area.

Environmental Analysis:

Environmental effects that might result from the implementation of the U.S. Navy's proposed action or the alternatives under consideration have been analyzed in the Draft EIS/OEIS. Resources evaluated include sediments and water quality, air quality, marine habitats, marine mammals, sea turtles and other marine reptiles, birds, marine vegetation, marine invertebrates, fish, cultural resources, socioeconomic resources, and public health and safety.

AFTT Study Area:

The Study Area covers approximately 2.6 million square nautical miles and encompasses the at-sea portions of the range complexes and testing ranges shown on the map included here. The Study Area includes only the at-sea components of the range complexes and testing ranges, with the exception of the Narragansett Bay, lower Chesapeake Bay, St. Andrew Bay, and pierside locations. The remaining inland waters and land-based portions of the range complexes are not a part of the Study Area, and will be or already have been addressed under separate NEPA documentation. Navy pierside locations and port transit channels where sonar maintenance and testing occur, and bays and civilian ports where training occurs are also included in the Study Area as indicated on the map.

Figure 1: U.S. Navy Atlantic Fleet Training and Testing EIS/OEIS Study Area

