

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

Department of the Navy

Record of Decision for Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Silver Strand Training Complex,
San Diego, California

AGENCY: Department of the Navy, DoD

ACTION: Record of Decision.

SUMMARY: The U.S. Department of the Navy (Navy), after carefully weighing the strategic, operational, and environmental consequences of the proposed action announces its decision to improve the availability and quality of training opportunities within the Navy's Silver Strand Training Complex (SSTC) by implementing Alternative 1, the Navy's preferred alternative, as described in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the SSTC. Under Alternative 1, the Navy will be able to meet Navy and Department of Defense (DoD) current and near-term operational training requirements by continuing current training and test and evaluation activities conducted within the SSTC training areas, increasing the tempo of training, introducing new platforms and systems into training, conducting existing routine training at additional locations within SSTC training areas, and increasing access to and availability of SSTC training areas.

Under Alternative 1, the tempo of training will be increased to meet 100 percent of Navy tactical task requirements. The baseline training tempo of 3,926 annual activities would increase to approximately 5,543 annual activities. New platforms and equipment to be introduced will include an updated Offshore Petroleum Discharge System, the MH-60S Seahawk multi-mission helicopter, and the replacement for the amphibious assault vehicle. Access to and availability of SSTC training areas will be increased by opening beach lanes Blue 2, Orange 1, and/or Orange 2 for training during the nesting seasons of the federally-listed California least tern (*Sternula antillarum browni*) and western snowy plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus nivosus*), provided either of the following two independent criteria are met: (1) beach lanes Red 1 and 2, Green 1 and 2, and Blue 1 are being used and additional training lane(s) are needed; and, (2) attributes of those lane(s) make them more suitable for meeting training needs than other available training lanes. The Navy will mark and buffer up to 22 concurrent snowy plover nests established at SSTC-North (SSTC-N) and SSTC-South (SSTC-S) beaches plus any additional nests that exceed 22 that

are initiated in beach lanes Orange 1 and Orange 2. In addition, the Navy will allow limited training involving foot traffic, but not vehicle traffic, in some vernal pools occupied by the San Diego fairy shrimp (*Branchinecta sandiegonensis*) when those vernal pool conditions are determined to be dry. Vernal pools and watersheds adjacent to the inland road at SSTC-S (i.e., pools 1 through 7), however, would be avoided to the maximum extent possible consistent with training needs. A vernal pool management and monitoring plan will be prepared by Navy.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Ms. Amy P. Kelley, Naval Facilities Engineering Command Southwest, Code EV21.AK, 1220 Pacific Highway, San Diego, CA 92132. Phone (619) 532-2799. Email: amy.p.kelly@navy.mil. Website: <http://www.silverstrandtrainingcomplexeis.com>.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Pursuant to section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, sections 4321 et seq. of title 42, U.S. Code, Council on Environmental Quality regulations (parts 1500-1508 of title 40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR)), and Department of Navy regulations (part 775 of title 32 CFR), the Navy announces its decision to implement the Navy's preferred alternative, Alternative 1, as described in the FEIS for the SSTC. This decision will enable the Navy to continue current training activities, increase training tempo and types of training, conduct existing routine training at additional locations within SSTC's established training areas, and increase access to and availability of existing beach and inland training areas. New aircraft and equipment will also be introduced into training at SSTC. A detailed description of Alternative 1 is provided in Chapter 2 of the FEIS. This decision will enable the Navy to improve the availability and quality of training opportunities within the SSTC and continuously adapt to meet changing military readiness requirements to achieve the levels of operational readiness required under title 10 of the U.S. Code.

BACKGROUND AND ISSUES: The SSTC is an integrated set of training areas located on and adjacent to the Silver Strand, a narrow, sandy isthmus separating the San Diego Bay from the Pacific Ocean. The SSTC includes SSTC-N and SSTC-S and the adjacent nearshore waters of the Pacific Ocean and the San Diego Bay, and the southern beach and near shore training areas off of Naval Air Station (NAS) North Island from the rocky Zuniga Point and Jetty south to Breaker's Beach. The Silver Strand State Beach geographically separates SSTC-N from SSTC-S. The training areas within the SSTC are subdivided for ease of scheduling and management (see Figure 1-1 of the FEIS). On the ocean side, 14 boat lanes are designated by colors (yellow, red, green, blue, orange, white, and purple) with each color comprising two boat lanes. Training areas on the San Diego bay side are divided into six areas: Alpha, Delta, Charlie, Delta, Echo, and Hotel.

The SSTC is critical to Navy west coast naval amphibious, special warfare, and mine countermeasure training activities due to its proximity to the homeport of San Diego and other training ranges in the southwest, its proximity to military families that support flexibility in meeting personnel tempo requirements, and its unique training environment and terrain. Because of these attributes, the SSTC has been in active Navy use for live training for more than 60 years. Live training is the cornerstone of readiness for U.S. military forces in a security environment characterized by uncertainty and surprise. The SSTC, and other Navy training ranges, provide controlled and safe environments that enable U.S. forces to conduct realistic, combat-like training as they undergo all phases of the graduated buildup needed for combat-ready deployment. Such ranges replicate, as closely as possible, the threats and targets that military men and women would face in actual combat. By integrating open-water operating areas with land-based training areas, aircraft landing fields, and amphibious landing beaches, the SSTC allows for real-time practice of complex scenarios.

On August 6, 2001, the Navy published a Notice of Intent to prepare this EIS in the Federal Register (66 FR 41009). However, it was not until January 2010 that the Draft EIS was released for public review and the Final EIS was released a year later, in January 2011. The timeframe for the completion of the NEPA process for this EIS has been extended beyond the usual timeframe due to the combination of complicated and evolving nature of military training needs and schedules and the complexity of the biological, marine, and other natural resources issues present at the SSTC. Specifically, Endangered Species Act Section 7 consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) for the California least Tern and western snowy plover undertaken by the Navy has been lengthy and complex, as have consultations and permitting with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) for sea turtles, Essential Fish Habitat, and marine mammals.

Purpose and Need

The Navy and Marine Corps are continuously adapting to meet changing military readiness requirements. Some changes reflect the increased capabilities requirements imposed by overseas operational commanders and others reflect the nature of the force to be trained in the southern California region. The transforming drivers that directly affect the training requirements that need to be provided at SSTC in the future include the need for units to be ready to deploy much earlier in the pre-deployment training cycle (i.e., have the ability to surge-deploy); special warfare expansion and restructuring; increases in the number of Marines cycling through Expeditionary Warfare Training Group Pacific training programs at SSTC; and, expanded use of Navy training venues in the southwest by explosive ordnance disposal

groups. In addition, it is expected that Navy personnel will begin training on new or upgraded equipment while continuing to train on existing equipment in the future.

The purpose of the proposed action, therefore, is to improve the availability and quality of training opportunities at SSTC to achieve required levels of operational readiness necessitated by the factors identified above. The proposed action is needed to provide a training environment, including training areas and range facilities, with the capacity and capabilities to fully support required training tasks for operational units and military schools in order to meet the operational readiness requirements of title 10 of the U.S. Code. The Navy's proposed action would result in more efficient use of the existing training areas within SSTC, but not expand the beach/sea footprint of SSTC.

Public Involvement

During the development of the EIS, the Navy initiated a mutual exchange of information through early and open communications with interested stakeholders. This mutual exchange began in 2001 with public scoping meetings held on August 28 and 29, 2001 in Coronado and Imperial Beach, respectively. The NOI and scoping meetings were advertised in the San Diego Union-Tribune, the Coronado Eagle, and the Imperial Beach Times. In addition, independent of the public scoping meetings, the Navy conducted additional focused interviews with local city officials, regulatory agencies, and environmental organizations with the intent of gathering further input. The Navy conducted individual meetings with the Audubon Society, California Coastal Commission (CCC), California Department of Fish and Game, California Department of Parks and Recreation, San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board, California State Lands Commission, City of Imperial Beach, National Marine Fisheries Service, San Diego Association of Governments, San Diego Unified Port District, Sierra Club, Southwest Fisheries Science Center, U.S. Coast Guard Marine Safety Office, USFWS, and the YMCA.

The Notice of Availability (NOA) for the Draft EIS (DEIS) and Notice of Public Hearings were published in the Federal Register on January 22, 2010 (75 FR 1768) and in the San Diego Union-Tribune, Coronado Eagle, and in the Imperial Beach Times at the same time. The original 45-day public comment period was extended by 30 days to allow the public additional time to review and comment on the DEIS. The DEIS was distributed to individuals, agencies, and associations who asked to be notified during the public scoping period, as well as to members of Congress, the California governor, and local elected officials in the coastal region surrounding the SSTC. Additionally, the DEIS was made available for general review at two information repositories (the Coronado Public Library and Imperial Beach Branch Library) and on the project website (www.silverstrandtrainingcomplexeis.com). The Navy held public hearings on

February 23 and 24, 2010 in Imperial Beach, California and Coronado, California, respectively. A total of 108 individuals and 22 agencies and organizations submitted comments on the DEIS.

The NOA for the FEIS was published in the Federal Register on January 14, 2011 (76 FR 2680) and in the San Diego Union-Tribune, Coronado Eagle, Imperial Beach Times, and La Prensa at the same time. Notices were also mailed to individuals, agencies, and associations who asked to be notified during the public comment period, as well as members of Congress, the California governor, and elected and other public officials. The SSTC FEIS also was made available on the project website and at the same two information repositories used for the DEIS.

Alternatives Considered

The alternatives evaluated in this EIS were developed by the Navy after careful assessment by subject-matter experts (units and commands that utilize SSTC, Navy environmental managers, and scientists) and consideration of public comments received during scoping. Based on this input, the following set of criteria were used in determining whether a possible alternative met the purpose of and need for the proposed action:

- Capability to meet SSTC requirements for individual and unit-level training;
- Availability of sufficient, suitable training space to simultaneously accommodate the training needs of all operational users in order to achieve the training tempo requirements of Fleet deployment schedules;
- Capability to meet future training requirements with year-round, assured access to San Diego Bay, ocean, beach, and inland training areas;
- Availability of a realistic training environment simulating real world littoral combat conditions and free of manmade restrictions or objects that could interfere with preparing servicemen and women for operations in real-world conditions;
- A location that allows for completion of the full range of required training elements; and
- Co-location with commands, equipment, facilities, and infrastructure on Naval Base Coronado that support existing and future training and meet training and personnel tempo requirements.

On the basis of these criteria, the following alternatives were eliminated from analysis in the EIS: alternative training complex locations (Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, San Clemente Island, and Remote Training Site Warner Springs); training relocation to SSTC-S; training reductions; and, simulated training. Three alternatives were carried forward for analysis in the EIS:

- No Action Alternative. This alternative would continue the approximately 3,926 baseline training activities conducted annually at SSTC. The Navy would also continue to operate beach lanes Blue 2, Orange 1, Orange 2, and Delta North and South under existing beach access and training restrictions during the nesting season (April to September), except for designated beach crossing lanes. Restrictions on vehicle and foot traffic in vernal pools at SSTC-S would also continue. In addition, training would not be permitted inside buffer zones established around all western snowy plover nests.
- Alternative 1. Under this alternative, Navy proposes to increase training tempo over baseline conditions, conduct existing routine training at additional locations within established SSTC training areas, introduce new aircraft, ships, and equipment into training, and increase access to and availability of existing beach and inland training areas. In contrast to the No Action Alternative, training would be allowed in beach lanes Blue 2, Orange 1, and/or Orange 2 during the California least tern and western snowy plover nesting seasons provided either of the following two independent criteria are met: (1) beach lands Red 1 and 2, Green 1 and 2, and Blue 1 are being used and the additional training lane(s) are needed; and (2) attributes of those lane(s) make them more suitable for meeting training needs than other available training lanes. Examples of lane attributes which may allow usage of Blue 2, Orange 1, and/or Orange 2 would include, but not necessarily be limited to: nearshore in-water conditions such as the presence of sand bars or holes, beach conditions such as slope and depth of the beach, distance from other training activities occurring on SSTC-North (SSTC-N) oceanside beach and boat lanes, and a need for diversity in training locations. Under Alternative 1, the Navy would also restrict training in buffer zones surrounding up to 22 concurrent snowy plover nests established at SSTC-N and SSTC-S beaches, plus any additional nests that exceed 22 that are initiated in beach lanes Orange 1 and Orange 2. In addition, some dry vernal pools occupied by San Diego fairy shrimp (as determined by Navy) would be used for training involving foot traffic, but not for vehicle traffic or military working dogs, or as designated parachute drop zones. However, vernal pools and watersheds adjacent to the inland road at SSTC-S (i.e., pools 1 through 7) would be avoided to the maximum extent possible consistent with training needs. To support the proposed action, Navy will develop and submit a plan to the USFWS for determining and monitoring baseline and ongoing conditions related to vernal pools and their watersheds.
- Alternative 2. This alternative is identical to Alternative 1, except that the Navy would utilize all 7,000 yards of ocean beaches along SSTC-N and SSTC-S, and all bayside training beaches (not including Delta North or South) for continuous, year-round training. Similar to the No Action Alternative and Alternative 1, the Navy would continue to conduct existing management practices on the beach training lanes, including nest relocation, predator management and control, habitat modification, site preparation for maintenance, nest substrate enhancement, signage and education, recreational use restrictions, and rearing of collected eggs, and injured and sick individuals. Delta North and South would continue to be managed as a California least tern nesting habitat during the 5-6 month breeding season, and used for training during the non-nesting period. Monitoring of the status of the California least tern and western snowy plover at SSTC-N oceanside beaches would be performed for effect and take associated with military training.

Alternative 1 is the environmentally preferable alternative because it implements the mitigation and management measures needed to protect the environment while allowing Navy and DoD to meet current and near-term training and test and evaluation requirements.

Environmental Impacts

The Navy's environmental analysis addressed the potential environmental impacts of implementing Alternative 1 and found that there would be no significant impacts on the following resource areas: geology and soils, hazardous materials and wastes, water resources, cultural resources, transportation and circulation, socioeconomics, environmental justice, and protection of children, public health and safety. The discussion below summarizes those environmental impacts associated with implementing Alternative 1 that are considered to be potentially significant. However, with implementation of management practices and mitigation measures, there would be no significant impacts resulting from implementation of the preferred alternative (Alternative 1).

- Land Use and Recreation. Proposed training and testing activities would be consistent with long-established military land uses. The public will have ample access to public beaches adjacent to active training areas.
- Air Quality. Air emission increases would be less than the de minimis thresholds under the General Conformity Rule. No conformity determination is required. There would be no significant impacts to air quality from the proposed use of aircraft, surface ships, ordnance, ground vehicles, or military equipment.
- Acoustic Environment (Terrestrial). Sound levels generated by training would remain the same but the tempo of training events producing sound would increase. However, there would be no significant impact to noise receptors from traffic, aircraft, or military activities, including breacher training, amphibious training, munitions, or foot traffic.
- Marine Biological Resources. Vehicle use, boat landings, helicopter landings, and foot traffic associated with a range of activities could cause temporary localized disturbances of infaunal invertebrates in the sand on the beach. There would be minimal disturbance of in-water sandy bottom habitat and increased turbidity from amphibious landings and underwater demolitions. A total of 1.13 acres of eelgrass habitat may be affected in the designated training lane within the Bravo training area, which will be mitigated for at an established Navy Eelgrass Mitigation Site.
- Fish. Small numbers of fish would be killed by shock waves from underwater detonations associated with training on the SSTC. These underwater detonations would primarily occur in ocean training lanes habitats dominated by physically dynamic sandy/cobble bottom that is both expansive and limited in habitat value. Noise associated with pile driving and underwater detonation activities would have some lethal and sublethal effects to fish, but these impacts would be localized, affecting fish species but not fish assemblages; therefore, there would be no significant impact to fish populations from training or testing activities at SSTC.
- Marine Mammals. Modeling estimates indicate that without implementation of current mitigation measures, an increased tempo of underwater detonations and pile driving could result in increased exposures of marine mammals to behavioral and temporary threshold shift (Level B) harassment under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA). However, marine mammals would not be exposed to sound levels expected to result in injury, severe injury, or mortality.

Although acoustic impacts to marine mammals would potentially increase over no action conditions, mitigation measures in the form of mitigation zones with pre-, during, and after-training event visual monitoring, as well as other programmatic monitoring would minimize or avoid potential environmental impacts.

- Sea Turtles. There would be no significant impact to sea turtles from underwater detonations, vessel strikes, and noise associated with marine vessels or pile driving. Mitigation measures implemented for marine mammals would also be applied to sea turtles such that any potential impacts would be minimized or avoided.
- Terrestrial Biological Resources. Increased foot traffic could cause temporary behavioral impacts to surrounding wildlife. Impacts to individual San Diego fairy shrimp inhabiting vernal pools would be minimized by limiting training to when the vernal pools are dry with the proviso that pools 1 through 7 would be avoided to the maximum extent possible consistent with training needs. Increased training on SSTC-North beach training lanes Blue 2, Orange 1, and Orange 2 could increase impacts to special status plants and invertebrates in these areas, while decreasing impacts at other locations. Some trampling of vegetation would be expected, though the overall effect would be short-term and of moderate intensity due to the potential overlap of concentrated activities in the dunes and upper beach areas. The proposed activities would not pose long-term impacts as effects are expected to be temporary and cease at the termination of an activity.
- Birds. Habitat for nesting and foraging of migratory land birds, as well as for shorebirds and seabirds, may be degraded due to the presence of foot traffic and noise from pyrotechnics. Although impacts to nesting habitats would increase, existing infrastructure, training requirements, scheduling needs, and mitigation measures would minimize or avoid potential environmental impacts. None of the temporary effects from training are expected to have an adverse effect on migratory birds at the population level.

Mitigation Measures

As part of Alternative 1, the Navy will implement all mitigation and protective measures identified in the FEIS, the 7 July 2010 USFWS Biological Opinion (FWS-SDG-08B0503-09F0517), and the NMFS Incidental Harassment Authorization (IHA) issued under the MMPA on July 17, 2012 (see the section on Agency Consultation and Coordination of this Record of Decision for further detail). Mitigation and protective measures to be implemented will affect Navy activities that involve the following resources:

- Essential Fish Habitat and Other Marine Biological Resources. Surveys will be conducted of eelgrass and bottom habitat. Also, grunion surveys will be conducted prior to conducting Causeway Pier Insertion and Retraction and Elevated Causeway (ELCAS) training. The extent and quantity of any fish mortality (or lack of mortality) during the use of explosives will be documented. The latter information will be included in the Navy's annual monitoring report to NMFS required by the MMPA IHA for SSTC training activities.
- Marine Mammals and Sea Turtles. Mitigation measures and annual reporting of impacts to marine mammals and sea turtles are identified in the FEIS and the MMPA IHA issued for SSTC training that employs in-water use of explosives and for in-water pile driving activities (including the Shock Wave Generator).

- Terrestrial Biological Resources. Current natural resource protection measures being implemented by the Navy will continue under Alternative 1, such as those required by Navy instructions, ecosystem-based planning in associated Integrated Natural Resources Management Plans, and the employment of best management practices and standard operating procedures to avoid and minimize environmental impacts. Existing measures include invasive species control, erosion control, inventory, monitoring, and habitat enhancement. In addition, the Navy will avoid vernal pools occupied by San Diego fairy shrimp (and their watersheds) when conditions are wet and avoid vernal pools 1 through 7 to the maximum extent possible consistent with training needs. A vernal pool monitoring and management plan will be developed and submitted annually to USFWS.
- Birds. All listed species management measures identified in USFWS Biological Opinion FWS-SDG-08B0503-09F0517 will be implemented. Training would be allowed in beach lanes Blue 2, Orange 1, and/or Orange 2 during the California least tern and western snowy plover nesting seasons provided either of the following two independent criteria are met: (1) beach lands Red 1 and 2, Green 1 and 2, and Blue 1 are being used and the additional training lane(s) are needed; and (2) attributes of those lane(s) make them more suitable for meeting training needs than other available training lanes. In addition, the buffer zones established for underwater detonation activities for marine mammals and turtles will also be applied for the protection of birds. Annual reports will be submitted to the USFWS (and the CCC).
- Training Activity Restrictions. Vehicle patrolling and Lighter, Amphibious, Resupply, Cargo 5-ton (LARC) vehicle operator training will not occur in Red, Blue, or Orange beach lanes.

DECISION

Based on the environmental impacts analyzed in the EIS, comments from regulatory agencies as well as those received from members of the public, mitigation, and other factors discussed above, I select Alternative 1, the preferred alternative, to implement the proposed action. The most critical considerations in the Navy's decision-making process concerned the potential environmental impacts associated with the action. In all cases, there would be no significant impacts resulting from implementation of Alternative 1 with implementation of management practices and mitigation measures. Specifically, there are no environmental impacts associated with implementing the preferred alternative, Alternative 1, that cannot be appropriately addressed or mitigated, including impacts to threatened and endangered species such as the California least tern, western snowy plover, San Diego fairy shrimp, and green sea turtles.

Agency Consultation and Coordination

NMFS served as a cooperating agency throughout the EIS process. NMFS was requested by the Navy to participate in the NEPA process because of its special expertise, involvement in the consultation processes, and jurisdiction over permit activities required for the proposed action. The early participation of NMFS in the EIS process aided the Navy's analysis of potential environmental impacts to marine

biological resources. In addition, the Navy consulted and coordinated with other federal and state agencies, including USFWS and CCC in conjunction with actions addressed in the SSTC EIS. A summary of the results from each consultation and coordination process is included below:

- Marine Mammal Protection Act. As previously identified, the Navy requested an MMPA IHA from NMFS on February 16, 2010. In its IHA request, the Navy identified four species of marine mammals potentially present within SSTC (gray whales, bottlenose dolphins, California sea lions, and harbor seals) that may be exposed to sound and pressure from Navy underwater detonation and Elevated Causeway system training. On March 4, 2011, during an underwater detonation training exercise, a pod of long-beaked common dolphins were observed at SSTC. Because this species is not normally expected in the SSTC area, it had not been included in the Navy's October 2010 IHA request. Based on this new information and in coordination with NMFS, the Navy revised its IHA application on October 12, 2011 to include exposures of long-beaked common dolphins as well as three other species not normally expected to be present in the area, but that could potentially occur (short-beaked common dolphin, Pacific white-sided dolphin, and Risso's dolphin). In addition, new mitigations were proposed specific to time-delayed firing devices.

A Notice of Proposed Incidental Harassment Authorization and Request for Comments was published by NMFS in the Federal Register on October 19, 2010 (75 FR 64276). NMFS published a second Federal Register Notice on March 20, 2012 (77 FR 19231) reflecting the Navy's additional species inclusion and time-delayed firing device mitigations. On July 17, 2012, NMFS issued the final annual IHA for SSTC addressing the incidental take of marine mammals associated with SSTC in-water training activities.

- Endangered Species Act (ESA). The Navy has a long history in ESA compliance at SSTC. In 1983, Navy initiated an ESA Section 7 consultation with the USFWS in support of a proposal to construct helicopter support facilities, potentially affecting about 68 nests of the federally-listed California least tern. As a result of that consultation, 75 acres of Navy training beach at Delta North and South were fenced and set aside as California least tern nesting areas. In 1984, the Delta beaches were formally designated as a least tern preserve (note: the Delta beaches are not included in the training activities that are the subject of this Record of Decision). Since the 1983 Section 7 consultation, the California least tern population on SSTC increased tenfold, to over 1,400 nests, and nesting has expanded outside the boundaries of Delta North and South into and throughout SSTC-N's ocean side beach training lanes (beach lanes 1 through 10). Consequently, the Navy has engaged in recurring ESA Section 7 consultations over the years with the USFWS, and varying strategies have been implemented by the Navy to adapt to the growing California least tern nesting population in order to meet evolving training needs at SSTC. In addition to expanded Delta North and South areas, previous USFWS Biological Opinions require the Navy set aside three beach training lanes (beach lanes 8, 9, and 10) for California least tern nesting for a 6 month period beginning in April and ending in September that resulted in restrictions on training on these three Navy training beaches for six months out of the year.

In connection with this EIS, the Navy entered into formal ESA Section 7 consultation with the USFWS on September 22, 2008. Of concern were three species: the federally threatened western snowy plover and federally endangered California least tern and San Diego Fairy Shrimp. On July 7, 2010, a Biological Opinion issued by the USFWS concluded that the level of incidental take resulting from implementation of Alternative 1 is not likely to jeopardize the existence of any of the three species.

There are no threatened or endangered marine mammals in the SSTC region of influence so Section 7 consultation was not required with NMFS for these species. However, the Navy did conduct informal consultation with NMFS for the green sea turtle. On November 17, 2010, NMFS submitted a letter of concurrence to the Navy that its proposed action may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect, the green sea turtle. As a result of the consultation, the Navy agreed to collaborate with NMFS to analyze movements of turtles equipped with sonic tags, if any are known, in the immediate area during pile driving and provide recalculations of buffer zones as they are available.

- Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. Navy determined that the proposed action could result in adverse effects to Essential Fish Habitat and initiated consultation with NMFS by submitting an Essential Fish Habitat Assessment on March 22, 2010. In response to comments provided by NMFS, Navy submitted a revised Essential Fish Habitat Assessment on September 27, 2010. The following mitigation and reporting requirements were addressed: updated benthic habitat mapping, pre-event beach survey, eelgrass mitigation, and underwater detonation reporting. On October 13, 2010, NMFS provided Navy with Essential Fish Habitat Conservation Recommendations. The consultation was completed on November 10, 2011 with the submission of a letter by Navy outlining its approach to implementing NMFS' conservation recommendations.
- Coastal Zone Management Act. On May 26, 2010, Navy submitted a Consistency Determination to the CCC in which Navy determined that its proposed action was consistent to the maximum extent practicable with the enforceable policies of the California Coastal Management Program. The CCC issued a conditional concurrence on August 17, 2010. Navy notified the CCC on August 20, 2010 that it did not agree the conditions of concurrence. After attempting to resolve differences, Navy completed the federal coastal consistency process by sending the CCC a final Consistency Determination Notification letter (dated November 23, 2010) reaffirming its determination that the conditions of concurrence proposed by the CCC are not necessary for the proposed activities to be consistent to the maximum extent practicable with the applicable enforceable policies of the California Coastal Management Program and that such conditions, if enacted, would severely and negatively impact the expanded training requirements, which are a fundamental need for the proposed activities.

Responses to Comments Received on the FEIS

The Navy reviewed and considered all comments received during the 30-day wait period following the issuance of the NOA for the FEIS. The comments summarized herein represent the major substantive comments received. A total of 14 comment letters or emails totaling 28 comments were received on the FEIS. All but seven of the comments were similar or identical to comments received on the DEIS that were previously considered and addressed in the FEIS. The majority of the comments received concerned helicopter and weapons noise related to Navy training (29 percent). The next most significant number of comments challenged the traffic analysis (14 percent) or concerned the process for remediating oil and hazardous spills (11 percent). The remaining comments addressed airport development in San Diego Bay, use of explosives in training, notification of the public when live firing may occur, and ownership rights of Public Trust real property at the Silver Strand. Comments warranting specific responses are provided below.

Comment 1: Navy should provide for characterization of SSTC sediment and include a mitigation measure, if necessary, to minimize resuspension of contaminated sediment during training activities within San Diego Bay.

Response: All underwater detonation training activities and most activities on the beaches occur on the oceanside of SSTC within the designated boat lanes, not within San Diego Bay. The only activity within San Diego Bay with the potential to result in resuspension of bottom sediments would involve some boat-related beaching or nearshore activities. All beaching or nearshore activities that occur in the San Diego Bay are restricted to a 50-meter wide training lane in the Bravo training area. The minimal size of this potential resuspension zone and the low number of annual operations would minimize the potential for these activities to be a significant source of suspended contaminants. Although detonation training in the bay would involve the Shock Wave Action Generator (SWAG), no portion of this activity occurs on or near the bottom where resuspension would be likely.

Comment 2: Navy should assess the potential to reduce the use of explosive charges in meeting training needs as a mitigation measure.

Response: The Navy's training activities are intended to meet operational readiness requirements through realistic training. The number of explosive charges and the explosive charge weights used in underwater detonation training and analyzed in the FEIS represent the lowest charge weights and number of explosive charges possible that enable realistic training, meet the Navy mission, and minimize potential impacts to the surrounding area. The requirements for the number of charges and the explosive weights are periodically reviewed and validated in support of the MMPA permitting process.

Comment 3: Navy should identify existing plans for the cleanup of an oil spill caused by damage to its own or other vessels and identify how Navy would work with local agencies in cleanup of a civilian-caused oil spill.

Response: The Navy has established guidelines for oil and hazardous substance spill preparedness and response, which require that releases of oil and hazardous substances be reported and remediated in accordance with current Navy and non-Navy oil and hazardous substance spill plans. In San Diego, Navy response to oil spills is coordinated through Regional Dispatch for the Commander, Navy Region Southwest. Regional Dispatch coordinates with appropriate agencies (e.g., US Coast Guard, San Diego

Metro first responders, and county and state agencies). The Navy maintains spills response crews to provide immediate response to spills.

Comment 4: The commentor requested a definition of the term “personnel stationed” as well as clarification as to whether on-base or off-base personnel are included in this term. The commentor stated that individuals on temporary duty in the San Diego area and participating in training on the SSTC should be counted by City of Coronado and California Department of Transportation in traffic studies.

Response: The term “personnel stationed” as used in the SSTC FEIS refers to the military personnel who would participate in training activities at SSTC. Increases in overall personnel stationed at Naval Base Coronado (or other installations) are addressed in separate environmental planning documents. The implementation of Alternative 1 will have no direct effect on the number of personnel stationed at Navy installations in San Diego. Rather, Alternative 1 would result in an increase in the number of activities that would be performed at SSTC by personnel already assigned to units in San Diego. Navy will continue to provide information and work with the City of Coronado and the California Department of Transportation.

Comment 5: The traffic analysis in the FEIS does not address the potential use of the north gate at SSTC-S for either entrance or exit from the training center.

Response: Appendix F of the FEIS contains supplemental information regarding the traffic analysis, including the use of the north gate of SSTC-S.

Comment 6: The public, as well as public officials, should be notified when SSTC training activities involve live firing of weapons.

Response: Appendix F of the FEIS addresses public notification methods, indicating that the Navy will continue to investigate alternate means of public notification when training involves live fire.

Comment 7: The commentor inquired about whether Navy conducted water quality monitoring in the coastal waters off SSTC and the availability of water monitoring and spill reports.

Response: Navy does not conduct water quality monitoring offshore of the SSTC. Water quality monitoring for bacteria is performed by the San Diego County Department of Environmental Health at

several locations along the Silver Strand coastline and water quality is monitored by the City of San Diego's Ocean Monitoring Program for pH, clarity, temperature, oxygen, oil, grease, sewage bacteria, salinity, and dissolved oxygen at the Point Loma and South Bay Ocean Outfall. Given regional water circulation, the existing water quality monitor locations are adequate for addressing regional water quality. In regards to spill information, the public can access either the California Emergency Management Agency's Spill or Release database or the National Response Center database for information on discharges.

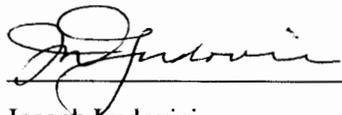
CONCLUSION

Alternative 1, the Navy's preferred alternative, is the alternative that will fully meet Navy and DoD current and near-term training and test and evaluation requirements at the SSTC while also implementing the mitigation and management measures needed to protect the environment. Under Alternative 1, the Navy will increase the tempo of training, introduce new types of training activities, conduct existing routine training at additional locations within SSTC training areas, introduce new platforms and equipment, and increase access to and availability of SSTC training areas. With implementation of the mitigation measures identified in the FEIS and associated regulatory documents developed in consultations with NMFS, USFWS, and the CCC, and adherence to management plans and monitoring requirements described herein, there will be no significant adverse environmental impacts associated with implementing Alternative 1.

In summary, the capability to conduct improved training and testing activities at the SSTC best serves the interests of the Navy and the nation, and can be accomplished in a manner that keeps environmental impacts at a less than significant level.

21 AUG 2012

Date



Joseph Ludovici
Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy
(Energy, Installations and Environment) (Acting)