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MARINE FORCES RESERVE
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IN REPLY REFER TO
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13 JAN 15

From: Assistant Chief of Staff Facilities, Marine Forces Reserve

To: Commander, Marine Forces Reserve

Subj: FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI) FOR FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT FOR AMPHIBIOUS ASSAULT VEHICLE TRAINING EXERCISES FOR MARINE CORPS FORCES RESERVE CENTERS: JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA; TAMPA, FLORIDA; GULFPORT, MISSISSIPPI; AND GALVESTON, TEXAS.

Ref: (a) MCO P5090.2A "Environmental Compliance"

Encl: (1) Legal Memorandum, 8 Jan 15

Introduction:

Pursuant to Section 102(2) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended; Council on Environmental Quality regulations (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] §§ 1500-1508) implementing NEPA; U.S. Marine Corps, specifically U.S. Marine Force Reserves (MARFORRES) Regulations (32 CFR § 775); and Office of the Chief of Naval Operations Instruction (OPNAVINST) M-5090.1; MARFORRES gives notice that an Environmental Assessment (EA) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) has been prepared to provide the facilities and functions necessary to augment three Marine Corps Reserve Center (MCRC) locations (Jacksonville, Florida; Tampa, Florida; and Galveston, Texas) and the disestablishment of MCRC Gulfport, MS.

Purpose and Need:

The purpose is to ensure 4th Assault Amphibian Battalion (4th AA BN) operational readiness by optimizing existing amphibious assault vehicle (AAV) training at three Marine Corps Reserve Center (MCRC) locations adjacent to the Gulf of Mexico and along the east coast of the United States. MARFORRES maintains a reserve force that is both equipped and trained to supplement the Fleet Marine Forces and effectively accomplish the mission of which the United States Code Title 10 (Subtitle C, Part I, Section 5063) requires the Marine Corps to be fully combat-capable:

"The Marine Corps, within the Department of the Navy, shall be so organized as to include not less than three combat divisions

and three air wings, and such other land combat, aviation, and other services as may be organic therein. The Marine Corps shall be organized, trained, and equipped to provide fleet marine forces of combined arms, together with the supporting air components, for service with the fleet in the seizure or defense of advance naval bases and for the conduct of such land operations as may be essential to the prosecution of a naval campaign."

Marine Corps reservists need to conduct AAV training in close proximity to the MCRCs to effectively and efficiently meet and sustain a combat-ready force. Access to local training areas allows Marines to complete training requirements and meet qualifications in a realistic setting. Realistic training is designed to meet evolving amphibious readiness requirements as set forth by the United States Marine Corps. The activities analyzed in this EA include nearshore and ground maneuver training.

Description of the Proposed Action:

Under the Proposed Action, MARFORRES would provide facilities and functions necessary to augment three MCRC locations (Jacksonville, Florida; Tampa, Florida; and Galveston, Texas) to company strength as a result of the disestablishment of the Gulfport, Mississippi detachment reserve center as well as scaled back overseas deployment requirements. The Proposed Action includes increasing reservist personnel, total number of AAVs (equipment), and training tempos from established fiscal year (FY) 2013 levels at all three MCRC locations. The additional monthly activities/exercises would also include increased night training.

The Proposed Action at MCRC Jacksonville also includes the use of Sisters Creek as a launch/recovery point to support training requirements and provide opportunities for joint force training. The construction, demolition, and renovation of facilities and infrastructure to support additional reservists and equipment at Jacksonville, Tampa, and Galveston consist of providing necessary canopies, parking areas, and utilities.

No Action Alternative:

As part of the alternatives analysis, MARFORRES considered a No Action Alternative. Under the No Action Alternative, personnel, equipment, and training would remain at current levels. Both on-site land and water training would continue at established scenarios and tempos. Equipment and personnel numbers would remain at FY13 levels and the facilities and functions necessary to accommodate those increases would not occur at the individual

locations. Therefore, the proposed construction, demolition, and renovation of facilities and infrastructure to support additional reservist and equipment at Jacksonville, Tampa, and Galveston would not occur.

The No Action Alternative for the purpose of this analysis at MCRC Gulfport also includes land and water training scenarios and tempos that occurred before AAV training ceased in 2012. Under the No Action Alternative, amphibious and land-based training was conducted at Harrison County public beaches and in the Mississippi Sound on a regular basis prior to 2012 and land-based training was conducted at Camp Shelby when not scheduled for National Guard training. Personnel numbers are set to 2012 levels and the training tempo would be what occurred before relocation of personnel and equipment to other MCRCs to facilitate future training requirements.

Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Analysis:
MARFORRES considered three additional alternatives to the Proposed Action. Each of these alternatives was eliminated because they did not meet the purpose of and need for the action or they were not feasible. The three eliminated alternatives were Camp Lejeune, North Carolina; Camp Blanding, Florida; and Gulfport, Mississippi. A brief discussion is included for each location.

Camp Lejeune, North Carolina:

The Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, located in North Carolina, has previously hosted amphibious events, as it has a suitable beach and is restricted from the public. However, Camp Lejeune was considered but eliminated from further discussion as a permanent MCRC alternative because current DON policy requires the USMC to utilize existing infrastructure to the maximum extent possible prior to constructing new facilities. Home basing personnel and equipment at Camp Lejeune would require a large capital investment by USMC when facilities exist at the three other locations.

Camp Lejeune remains a viable option for specialized joint training exercises coordinated with other services. However, the distance from Camp Lejeune from any of the MCRCs precludes this alternative from consideration as a viable monthly training option. The closest MCRC is Jacksonville, which is 483 miles from Camp Lejeune. Mobilization of personnel and equipment from MCRC Jacksonville to Camp Lejeune for monthly training is cost prohibitive and too time-consuming to effectively train.

Therefore, Camp Lejeune was eliminated from consideration for both home basing and monthly training.

Camp Blanding, Florida:

Lowery Lake Training Area at Camp Blanding, FL has been a site for alternate venue training for MCRC Jacksonville in the past. However, there are drawbacks at Camp Blanding including, but not limited to, the lack of beach for on line landings, no surf zone, or littoral current makes for unrealistic training by substituting a lake environment with an ocean environment. There are also mobilization costs associated with using Camp Blanding, combined with the frequency of in-water training needed by the MCRC, this alternative was considered cost prohibitive. For these reasons, Camp Blanding was not considered a viable location for the purposes of this action and therefore eliminated from further consideration.

Gulfport, Mississippi:

For approximately 10 years a detachment (ALPHA Company (3rd Platoon) of Company A 4th Battalion located at MCRC Norfolk) operated from Gulfport, MS for MARFORRES. This MCRC was co-located with the Navy Reserve Center (N&MRC) on Naval Construction Battalion Center (NCBC) Gulfport, which is located on the western edge of the city of Gulfport, MS and covers approximately 1,100 acres. MARFORRES conducted amphibious operations in the Mississippi Sound and onto Harrison County public beaches approximately one mile south of the base. These beaches provided areas wide enough (100m) for reservists to maneuver several AAVs around and conduct amphibious training, however, the AAVs had to travel down a public road, with police escort, to reach the beach. The county had always accommodated unit requests for beach training, but amphibious training opportunities were limited by the seasonal use of a public beach. Moreover, there were no land agreements in place to facilitate use of a public recreational area for military training.

Land-based training also proved limited in Gulfport. All land training was conducted over 60 miles away at Camp Shelby, which is a National Guard Base, and scheduling the use of the range conflicted with National Guard overseas deployment training. Moreover, the logistics to move several AAVs to Camp Shelby was expensive and time consuming (6-hour travel on flatbed trucks one way) for a two-day exercise 3-4 times per year.

The logistical drawbacks of using non-Department of Defense (DoD) land for military training purposes listed above combined

with the need to obtain land use agreements to train on public recreational (beaches) areas led MARFORRES to determine that utilizing DoD owned facilities at the other MCRCs (Jacksonville, Tampa, and Galveston) would provide more effective and readily available training areas. Therefore, in 2012, MARFORRES decided to terminate AAV training at Gulfport and move reservists and equipment to the other locations, as a preferred Alternative.

Environmental Impacts of the Proposed Action:

No significant direct, indirect, or cumulative environmental impacts would occur from implementing the Proposed Action at the MCRC sites. Environmental resources, including geology and soils, transportation, and land use were omitted from further detailed analysis in the EA because implementing the Proposed Action would not impact these resources. No significant impacts on noise; bathymetry, sediment, topology, and soils; socioeconomics; environmental justice; hazardous materials; or public health and safety would be expected from the Proposed Action. A detailed analysis of these resource areas can be obtained in the EA. Additional environmental resources, air quality, hydrogeology and water quality, biological resources, federally protected species, and historic resources are summarized in the following paragraphs.

Air Quality:

No significant impact on air quality would be expected at any of the MCRC locations as a result implementing the Proposed Action. Air Emissions generated from AAV training at the proposed training level increases represent slight increases over the existing training activities and tempos. AAV training would continue to occur on a periodic basis (drill weekends), up to 4 days per month as it has historically. This allows pollutants of concern to dilute in the atmosphere between training activities. In addition, a typical annual training schedule would consist of approximately half the number of transits; thus further reducing the total emissions produced as a result of the Proposed Action. Therefore, no significant impact on air quality from training activities is anticipated as a result of implementing the Proposed Action given the relatively temporary and small-scale nature of the increases over the existing training activities and tempos.

In Gulfport, training activities would cease as a result of this action and therefore, no significant impact on air quality is anticipated at MCRC Gulfport.

Construction activities at MCRCs Jacksonville, Tampa, and Galveston will temporarily generate additional emissions until all the construction activities are completed, which are projected to last for approximately six months. Once the proposed construction is completed, the remaining emissions increases will be from training increases as described in the EA. Those increases are relatively small in nature over the existing levels (No Action). Therefore, the level of pollutant emissions from the Proposed Action is not expected to have a significant impact on the overall air quality at any of the MCRC locations.

Greenhouse gases would be emitted by the diesel-powered AAVs during training. Emissions from construction equipment would also be included at MCRCs Jacksonville, Tampa and Galveston. However, none of these construction or operational activities would generate close to the 25,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide (CO₂) annually to initiate the reporting requirement under the Clean Air Act.

Hydrogeology and Water Quality:

No significant impact on water resources would be expected as a result of the proposed increases in personnel, equipment, and training tempos at these MCRC locations. AAV training occurs at these locations currently, both on land and in-water. The potential to impact water resources from increased AAV training at the proposed level represents a slight increase over the existing training tempos. AAV training would continue to occur on a periodic basis (drill weekends), up to 4 days per month as it has historically. This allows pollutants of concern to dilute in the water column between training activities. In addition, a typical annual training schedule would consist of approximately half the number of transits; thus further reducing the total potential to impact this resource a result of the Proposed Action. In addition, MARFORRES has established procedures to prevent releases and installed spill prevention kits on each vehicle in the event a release occurs during training or nearshore preparing to train.

The disestablishment of Gulfport as a MCRC training area and discontinuing AAV training would eliminate any potential to impact hydrogeology and water quality. Therefore, no significant impact to hydrology and water quality would occur as a result of discontinuing AAV training in this location.

The proposed AAV canopy and supporting facilities construction would impact approximately 0.6 acres of wetlands and

approximately 0.4 acres of forested land at MCRC Jacksonville. The storm water runoff from the site should change very little with construction of the bio-retention swale. Impacts to wetlands and floodplains would be mitigated as required by the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) through the Section 404 wetlands permitting process.

At MCRC Tampa the existing 'dry retention pond' would be expanded to capture a minimum of 1" of runoff from the new hardstand improvements. Excavated spoil may be placed in the AAV off-road training area to the east of the pond and blended into the natural existing features.

At MCRC Galveston, storm water from the parking areas and the facilities are directed to a storm water retention area around the facility that consists of a turf covered swale buffer area between the facilities and the surrounding area that assists in storm water filtration. The AAV parking and maintenance area has an operable oil water separator to reduce the chance of an oil spill into the Bay, which would remain in place after AAV canopy and expanded parking area construction is completed. Any clearing or grubbing materials and other debris would be removed from these sites and sent to an approved landfill or disposal facility. At all these locations, approved Erosion and Sediment Control and Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plans would be followed and best management practices (BMPs) implemented to minimize the potential for erosion and sedimentation issues during construction.

Biological Resources:

No significant impact on bird populations, marine invertebrates, vegetation or unregulated fish species would be expected as a result of this action. AAV usage would continue to be short term and intermittent, giving species ample time to recover between weekend events. The increased number of AAVs in the water and on the land training course is also not expected to raise the biological resource impacts to significant because the relatively benign nature of the slow-moving AAVs.

Federally Protected Species: No significant impact on protected species would be expected based on the limited potential for vessel strikes and disturbing noise impacts given the periodic basis (drill weekends) of AAV training of up to 4 days per month. Other applicable stressors (e.g., air/water pollution and physical habitat) were determined to have no significant impact on biological resources, which includes protected species; one-time construction activities are planned on MARFORRES installations and primarily on already developed federal lands

using best management practices that minimize off-site water pollution. In addition, the lack of significant impacts to nature resources such as air and water quality supports the no significant impact on Critical Habitat for ESA species.

The relatively infrequent occurrence and benign nature of the AAVs (slow moving, jet-propelled, engine only noise, etc.), along with typical transit formation (i.e., single file column), standard operating procedures, and protective measures also support the finding of no significant impact on any federally protected biological resources. USFWS and NMFS concurred with this determination in January 2015 correspondence (provided in the Final EA). However, in accordance with previous and concurrent consultations, MARFORRES will implement the following protection measures to minimize and avoid any effects on right whales, manatees, and nesting sea turtles:

The following protective measures will be applied during NAVSTA Mayport training only during the Right Whale Season:

- Navy Marine Species Awareness training will be conducted for all participants in advance of each in-water event and a watch will be assigned for each vehicle during in-water movement and will use binoculars to scan for NRW activity;
- Prior to each in-water event, Fleet Area Control and Surveillance Facility (FACSFAC) Jacksonville would be contacted for current NRW locations and if in the immediate area, the event would be postponed until the NRW had cleared the area;
- The Proposed Action will only be conducted during the period from 2 hours after official sunrise to 1 hour before official sunset;
- AAV operators shall be alert at all times, use extreme caution, and proceed at no more than a 5 knot (5.75 mph) speed so that the AAV can take proper and effective action, as appropriate to the prevailing circumstances and conditions, to avoid a collision with a right whale, other marine mammal, or other listed species.

The following protective measures will be implemented to minimize and avoid effects on manatees and sea turtles:

- All personnel shall be instructed on the presence of manatees and manatee speed zones, and the need to avoid collisions with and injury to manatees.

- Nighttime training shall be limited in the St. Johns River, FL. from December to February when the manatee presence within northeast Florida is at a minimum.
- All in-water nighttime operations from MCRC Tampa shall be limited to maneuvers that do not require AAVs to exceed slow speed, minimum wake.
- All vessels will follow routes of deep water whenever possible.
- All on-site project personnel are responsible for observing water-related activities for the presence of manatees. All in-water operations, including vessels, must be shut down if a manatee comes within 50 feet of the operation. Activities will not resume until the manatee has moved beyond the 50-foot radius of the project operation, or until 30 minutes elapses if the manatee has not reappeared within 50 feet of the operation. Animals must not be herded away or harassed into leaving.
- No training shall occur at NAVSTA Mayport during turtle nesting season (March 15 - September 1). This eliminates potential impacts to nesting sea turtles and migratory/shorebirds.

The Proposed Action would have no impact to Bald Eagles, as listed under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. There will be no significant adverse effect to any population of migratory bird species as listed under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. AAV training activities may cause a minor disruption to normal behavior patterns (such as foraging and nesting) of species in the area. However, these disruptions are limited to a few days per month and are located in an area of high disturbance and therefore, additional disturbances to birds from AAV movements and noise would be temporary and short-term. No MBTA permit is required for the proposed construction, which is non-military readiness activities, as minor impacts to populations would occur on a temporary, short-term basis.

The proposed construction at the MCRC Jacksonville would occur on forested and wetland areas. However, there are enough suitable habitats on and adjacent to MCRC Jacksonville for species to relocate without having to cross a major road or other man-made barriers. Moreover, given the mobility characteristics of migratory/shore birds that occur on and adjacent to the installation, no significant impacts to

protected species are expected from increase personnel, equipment, and training tempos.

At NAVSTA Mayport, potential impacts to migratory/shorebirds are further eliminated by the March 15 to September 1 training restriction in place for sea turtle nesting season.

Cultural Resources:

There will be no significant effect on any cultural resources. No historic buildings or archaeological sites exist in the project area. In accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, MARFORRES consulted with the Florida and Texas State Historic Preservation Offices. The Florida Department of Cultural Resources concurred with MARFORRES determination of no effect on historic and archaeological resources on 14 July 2014. The Texas SHPO also concurred with the "No Effect" determination for the construction activities. However, the Texas SHPO had concerns with the proximity of the on-site land course at MCRC Galveston to the World War II-era remains of Fort San Jacinto (coastal artillery installation) archeology site. MARFORRES responded to this concern in correspondence dated 9 September 2014 proposing to avoid that portion of the installation, in lieu of conducting further cultural resources evaluations. Given this avoidance, MARFORRES has determined that this undertaking will have no effect on historic properties. Texas SHPO concurred in correspondence dated 7 October 2014.

Coastal Zone Management:

MARFORRES submitted a Coastal Consistency Determination under the Coastal Zone Management Act to Florida and Texas. Texas concurred that this project will likely not have adverse impacts on coastal natural areas in the coastal zone (CNRAs).

The Florida State Clearinghouse coordinated a review of the EA and Coastal Consistency determination and offered several comments for consideration as the project goes forward. MARFORRES removed Bartram Island as a proposed training site after the consultation package was submitted to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) for review; therefore, comments received regarding Bartram Island were not addressed in this EA. Florida Wildlife Commission (FWC) reiterated the need to implement protection measures outlined above to minimize affects on manatees particularly with respect to training at Sister's Creek and night training when detection of manatees is extremely difficult. MARFORRES addressed additional FWC concerns by implementing a seasonal restriction on training at Mayport, thereby eliminating potential impacts to nesting sea turtles and

migratory/shorebirds. MARFORRES will coordinate with all appropriate Florida agencies and obtain required permits prior to beginning construction.

Cumulative Impacts:

No significant, direct, or indirect, cumulative impacts are anticipated to any of the affected resources analyzed in the EA. That determination is supported by the relatively infrequent occurrence and benign nature of the AAVs (slow moving, jet-propelled, engine only noise, etc.), along with typical transit formation (i.e., single file column), standard operating procedures, and proposed protective measures. In addition, the one-time construction activities on MARFORRES installations in developed/industrial landscapes, and primarily on developed federal lands using best management practices that minimize off-site water pollution is also not expected to significantly impact resources at any of the MCRC locations.

Similarly, relevant past, present, and foreseeable future activities at MCRC Jacksonville, Tampa, and Galveston may generate short-term, localized impacts on resources in study areas. The additional training activities would generate short-term and minimal impacts given the likelihood that wildlife in the area is habituated to the noise and human activities and to the extent the additional noise and activity creates minor and temporary additional behavior disturbances, but there are no long-term impacts or habitat loss or species-level consequences. Of the activities analyzed as part of this action, only marine vessel traffic could add cumulatively to strike and noise impacts. The other non-federal activities including, but not limited to, navigation infrastructure projects in the same watershed as the MCRC locations would not result in long-term impacts.

The addition of past, present, and foreseeable future activities to the impacts resulting from the Proposed Action, in terms of additive stressors (e.g., air emissions, strike potential), suggests there is no significant cumulative impact on any affected resources within the study areas. Thus, the Proposed Action would not result in significant cumulative impacts.

Mitigation:

The Proposed Action will result in permanently filling 0.6 acres of wetlands and approximately 0.4 acres of forested land at MCRC Jacksonville. The storm water runoff from the site should change very little with construction of a bio-retention swale. Impacts to wetlands and floodplains will be mitigated as required by the

United States Army Corps of Engineers through the Section 404 wetlands permitting process.

MARFORRES will obtain a permit from the USACE under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act and a state certification under Section 401 prior to beginning construction. Mitigation requirements on the impacted site as well as mitigation actions taken at another site may be required through the permitting process. Offsite mitigation options can include donation of funds to offsite regional mitigation areas as well as the purchase of mitigation credits from mitigation banks. This issue will be addressed through the permit application process with the USACE. An erosion and sediment control plan will be submitted to regulatory agencies for approval prior to the start of construction. MARFORRES will implement all appropriate erosion and sediment control measures for the duration of construction activities.

MARFORRES will adhere to all applicable policies described in the 2013 Hazardous Materials Reutilization, Hazardous Waste Minimization Disposal Guide for handling hazardous materials and preventing spills.

MARFORRES will implement various management and administrative measures to reduce the potential of a release of vehicular fluids during training events. In the event a release of fluids occurs, MARFORRES Environmental Compliance and Protection SOP contains a written Spill Response Instruction (WI-SR-01) would be followed to minimize impacts to the environment.

Public Outreach:

MARFORRES provided the public a 15-day review and comment period on this EA; no public comments were received. A Notice of Availability (NOA) was published in four newspapers in the MCRC study area. The NOA advertisement ran in the Florida Times Union (Jacksonville, FL); the Tampa Bay Times (Tampa, FL); the Sun Herald (Gulfport, MS); and Galveston County Daily News (Galveston, TX). An electronic copy of the EA was available to the public in local libraries (Jacksonville Main Library, Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library, Gulfport Public Library, and Rosenberg Public Library) during the 15-day review period. Additionally, the EA was located on the NAVFAC Mid Atlantic Environmental Compliance website to provide direct access for interested stakeholders to obtain the EA.

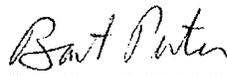
MARFORRES also coordinated with various federal and state agencies during the NEPA process. MARFORRES submitted the EA for

review and comment to the National Marine Fish Service (NMFS), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), and the States of Florida and Texas. Multiple state agencies reviewed the EA via the Florida State Environmental Review Clearinghouse and submitted their comments on the document, which are summarized above.

The Texas Coastal Resources Board found the action "in compliance" with the Texas coastal zone enforceable policies. The NMFS and FWS comments provided are addressed in the Federally Protected Species section.

Finding:

After a review of the EA, which has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of NEPA and Navy and Marine Corp regulations for implementing NEPA (32 CFR § 775), MARFORRES finds that functions and facilities necessary to implement the Proposed Action at all locations will not significantly impact the quality of the natural and human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared. Copies of the EA, including this FONSI, can be obtained from: Naval Facilities Engineering Command Atlantic, Code KJBEV22 (SE AAV EA Project Manager), 6506 Hampton Blvd., Norfolk, Virginia 23508; by phone at (757) 322-8473; or on the NAVFAC Mid-Atlantic public website via www.navfac.navy.mil/navfac_worldwide/atlantic/fecs/mid-atlantic/about_us/environmental_norfolk/environmental_compliance.html.


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