

**U.S. Department of the Navy
United States Fleet Forces Command**

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI) FOR IMPROVEMENTS TO
TARGETS AT THE NAVY DARE COUNTY BOMBING RANGE, NORTH CAROLINA**

Introduction

Pursuant to Section 102(2) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended; Council on Environmental Quality Regulations (40 C.F.R. §§ 1500-1508) implementing NEPA; U.S. Department of the Navy (Navy) Regulations (32 CFR § 775); and Office of the Chief of Naval Operations Environmental Program Manual (OPNAV M-5090.1); the Navy gives notice that an Environmental Assessment (EA) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) have been prepared for improvements to target areas at the Navy Dare County Bombing Range, North Carolina.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to enhance the long-term sustainability of the Navy Dare County Bombing Range and to improve the quality of training that can be provided. Specifically, the Proposed Action would allow for more realistic training scenarios, allow for maintenance operations to be completed more effectively, enhance range personnel safety, and increase operational range clearance capabilities. The need for this action is to support and provide range capabilities for training forces ready to deploy worldwide.

Description of the Proposed Action

Under the Proposed Action, the Navy would establish a City Target with hardened roadways, establish a maintenance road and three target areas for the existing Runway Target, establish turnarounds at the end of 3500 Foot Road, and utilize the Moving Land Target (MLT) on the range.

The City Target would consist of a network or grid of hardened roadways that would allow for more flexibility in target configurations, enhancing training scenarios. The placement of targets adjacent to and on the roadways around the City Target would simulate city buildings and other structures providing multiple targets for pilots. These targets would be customizable depending on the training scenario and could be utilized for ground troops and the MLT.

A maintenance road would be constructed next to the existing Runway Target. This maintenance road would extend the entire length of the target with several target pads extending beyond the maintenance road to create additional training opportunities for pilots.

MLTs are unmanned half-ton pick-up trucks that operate remotely using Global Positioning System (GPS) mobile position technology to traverse a predetermined route. During training exercises, the MLTs would traverse hardened roadways and target areas within the range. These trucks may be used to tow a target or may be the targets themselves. The types of aircraft, flight paths, and munitions utilized in these training exercises would be the same as those currently used in air-to-ground training exercises conducted at the Navy Dare County Bombing Range.

Cul-de-sac-type turnarounds would be constructed at each end of 3500 Foot Road to enhance the operation of the MLT. The cul-de-sacs would allow the MLT to turn around on 3500 Foot Road for uninterrupted transit. The turnarounds would also enhance range capability by providing an alternate helicopter-landing zone.

Annual maintenance at the target areas is required to ensure sustainability of the Navy Dare County Bombing Range. Prior to conducting required range maintenance, the Navy completes a range clearance effort to remove spent munitions and target debris. Once the range clearance effort is completed, range personnel perform an evaluation of the targets, target areas, and roadways to determine if maintenance needs to be performed in order to repair infrastructure or replace damaged targets. Not all targets, target areas and roadways are repaired each year. Typical maintenance activities occur for less than one week annually. Maintenance activities at the range include grading roadways and fixing potholes created by munitions, repairing routine wear and tear, and replacing destroyed targets annually or as needed.

No Action Alternative

In addition to the Proposed Action, the Navy considered a No Action Alternative. Under the No Action Alternative, training and maintenance would continue to be conducted according to current practice. Efforts to improve/harden target areas would not be completed and target areas would continue to be maintained in a manner consistent with current Navy practice. A City Target would not be constructed; a maintenance road and target areas for the Runway Target would not be constructed; turnarounds for the ends of 3500 Foot Road would not be constructed; and munitions training with the MLTs would not be conducted.

Alternative Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Analysis

The Navy considered seven additional alternatives to the Proposed Action. Each of these alternatives were eliminated because they did not meet the purpose and need for the action or they were not feasible. Each alternative eliminated is briefly discussed below.

Using Alternate Locations Inside the Navy Dare County Bombing Range:
The Navy considered placing the improved/hardened target areas in other locations on the Navy Dare County Bombing Range. Placement of the improved/hardened targets in any other location on the Navy Dare

County Bombing Range would result in the same impacts as those associated with the Proposed Action because the habitat and natural resources are consistent throughout the Navy Dare County Bombing Range.

Relocating Targets near Hardened Surfaces: The Navy considered utilizing the existing road closest to the Runway Target as a maintenance road and repositioning the Runway Target parallel to that existing road. Repositioning the Runway Target would conflict with other training targets and relocation of the Runway Target too far north or south would conflict with the current Surface Danger Zones.

Using Alternate Locations Outside of the Navy Dare County Bombing Range Property: The Navy considered utilizing other locations outside of the Navy Dare County Bombing Range. The closest Navy property available is located in Hampton Roads, Virginia. Though the Navy utilizes several locations in the Hampton Roads area for training, none of the locations would be appropriate for use as a bombing range. These locations are utilized for take-off and landing training operations and other flight operations but do not allow for munitions to be dropped.

The Use of Air Force Targets at the Dare County Bombing Range: The Navy considered utilizing the targets located on the Air Force-operated side of the Dare County Bombing Range. The Air Force Range is heavily utilized and though the Navy does conduct training on that range occasionally, the Navy is only able to train on the Air Force range when the range is not being used by the Air Force. As a result, the Navy is not able to schedule the Air Force range often enough to meet its training requirements.

The Use of Prefabricated Interlocking Metal Sections (Corrugated Galvanized Roofing Panels): This alternative would use prefabricated interlocking metal sections (corrugated galvanized roofing panels) to cover the soft marshy vegetation as an alternative to hardening target areas. The Navy has determined the interlocking metal sections are not feasible to use on target areas where bombs or other munitions may be utilized because the prefabricated interlocking metal sections become degraded when munitions strike them making them harder for pilots to see and making it difficult for personnel to perform maintenance. Additionally, the interlocking metal sections are functional for static displays but are not customizable to accommodate different training scenarios for pilots, and the potential use of the City Target by ground forces.

Construct a Bridge or Elevated/Pile-Supported Structure over the Wetlands Instead of a Hardened Surface: This alternative would create a bridge or elevated/pile-supported structure over the wetlands instead of filling the wetlands to create a hardened surface. The structure would be damaged from dropped munitions and would become impassable and unsafe for range maintenance.

Utilizing the Long Shoal Naval Ordnance Area Instead of Creating Target Areas at the Navy Dare County Bombing Range: The Long Shoal Naval Ordnance Area is an overflow target utilized by Navy and Marine Corps aircraft when the nearby Navy Dare County Bombing Range is experiencing heavy use and is used to conduct seamless littoral-to-land battle scenarios. The target located at the Long Shoal Naval Ordnance Area is located entirely in the waters of the Pamlico Sound. It does not offer flexible target configurations or training scenarios that replicate an urban environment and the MLT would be unable to traverse the Long Shoal Naval Ordnance Area.

Environmental Impacts of the Proposed Action

No significant direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental impacts would occur from implementing the Proposed Action at the Navy Dare County Bombing Range. Environmental resources, including geology and soils, recreation, socioeconomics, transportation, and land use were omitted from further detailed analysis in the EA because implementing the Proposed Action would not affect these resources. The potential environmental impacts from the Proposed Action on air quality, water resources, biological resources, and historic resources are summarized in the following paragraphs.

Air Quality: No significant impacts on air quality are expected. Dare County Bombing Range is located within a designated attainment area for all National Ambient Air Quality Standard criteria pollutants and is therefore exempt from the general conformity analysis. Air emissions, including greenhouse gas emissions, associated with construction are anticipated to be minor and temporary. Air emissions associated with the MLTs are expected for the reasonably foreseeable future since this would be an ongoing activity, but are also expected to be minor. It is anticipated that any dust emissions associated with construction would be temporary and would resettle.

Water Resources: No significant impacts on water resources are expected. The Proposed Action would require filling 4.29 acres of wetlands, and 0.15 acres of wetlands would be secondarily impacted due to habitat fragmentation. This proposed fill equates to approximately 0.009 percent of the wetlands in the entire Dare County Bombing Range. The impact to wetlands would not be anticipated to cause impacts outside of the Dare County Bombing Range. The Proposed Action would permanently fill floodplains within the Navy Dare County Bombing Range; however, impacts to floodplains outside of the Dare County Bombing Range are not anticipated to occur. Various management and administrative actions will be utilized to minimize the potential for a fluid release from the MLTs during training exercises. In the event a release occurs as a result of an MLT being impacted by a munition, site-specific spill response plans are in place and would be implemented to minimize potential environmental consequences.

Impacts to wetlands and floodplains would be mitigated as required by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in the Section 404 wetlands permit by purchasing wetland bank credits at an offsite wetland mitigation bank

and obtaining a 401 Water Quality Certification from the North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources. Offsite mitigation would occur within the same watershed as the proposed impacts. Additionally, a Sediment and Erosion Control Plan will be implemented and Stormwater permit will be submitted to the appropriate regulatory agencies for approval prior to the initiation of construction activities.

Biological Resources: No significant impacts on vegetation, wildlife, federally protected species, or migratory birds are expected. Minor impacts to vegetation would occur as a result of the permanent fill of 4.29 acres of wetlands. All impacts to wetlands will be mitigated. Various management and administrative actions will be utilized to minimize the potential for a fluid release from the MLTs during training exercises, and in the event of a release, the fluids would be contained per the spill response plans in place to minimize potential environmental consequences. The minimal fill of wetlands associated with the Proposed Action and the potential for a release of fluids from MLTs would not have a long-term or significant effect on the ability of wildlife species to perform normal biological functions. The Proposed Action would not have a significant impact on wildlife, including the red wolf, the American alligator and North Carolina state-listed species, based on the mostly short-term and localized nature of the proposed activities.

Several federally protected species are present on the Navy Dare County Bombing Range. These species include the red-cockaded woodpecker and the bald eagle. The Proposed Action would have no effect on the Red-cockaded woodpecker. No impacts to bald eagles, as listed under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, would occur as a result of the Proposed Action. There will be no significant adverse effect to any population of migratory bird species as listed under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (16 U.S.C. §§ 703-712).

Historic Resources: There will be no significant effect on any historic resources. No historic buildings or archaeological sites exist in the project area. In accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, the Navy consulted with the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office. The North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources concurred with the Navy's determination of no effect on historic and archaeological resources on May 13, 2014.

Coastal Zone Management: The Proposed Action would not affect any coastal resources or uses. The Navy submitted a Coastal Consistency Negative Determination under the Coastal Zone Management Act. The North Carolina Department of Coastal Management did not respond to the Navy's determination, and as a result, Navy assumed concurrence.

Cumulative Impacts: No significant, direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts are expected with respect to any of the resources analyzed in the EA. The analysis of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable cumulative impacts from the following projects - the Alligator River

National Wildlife Refuge fire management plan, the Bonner Bridge replacement, improvements to the target pads and support areas of the Navy Dare County Bombing Range, replacement of the Navy Shell Road Bridge at the Dare County Bombing Range and improvements to U.S. 64 for Tyrell and Dare Counties, in combination with the Proposed Action indicates that the combined impacts would result in minor incremental cumulative impacts.

Mitigation

The Proposed Action will result in permanently filling 4.29 acres of wetlands and secondarily impacting 0.15 acres of wetlands, due to habitat fragmentation, to create new target areas. The Navy will obtain a permit under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act and a state certification under Section 401 prior to beginning construction. The Navy will mitigate wetland impacts via purchase of wetland credits through a mitigation bank located in the same watershed as the Dare County Bombing Range.

An approved erosion and sediment control plan and stormwater permit will be submitted to regulatory agencies for approval prior to the start of construction. The Navy will implement all appropriate erosion and sediment control measures for the duration of construction activities.

The Navy 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.

The Navy will implement various management and administrative measures to reduce the potential of a release of vehicular fluids during utilization of MLTs. Based on the training scenario being conducted, these measures could include but are not limited to: utilizing specific types of inert munitions, modifying attack profiles to reduce the potential for vehicular damage, utilizing towed trailers as targets instead of the MLTs themselves, conducting training exercises in specific areas, and utilizing minimal amounts of fuel and fluids to complete training events. In the event a MLT is struck by a munition causing a release of fluids, a site-specific spill response plan is in place and would be implemented to minimize impacts to the environment.

Public Outreach

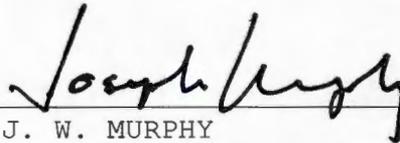
The Navy coordinated with various federal and state agencies during the NEPA process. The Navy submitted the EA for review and comment to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Air Force, and the State of North Carolina. Multiple North Carolina state agencies reviewed the EA via the North Carolina State Environmental Review Clearinghouse and no substantial comments were received. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Air Force did not submit any substantive comments during their 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.

Finding

After a review of the EA, which has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of NEPA and Navy regulations for implementing NEPA (32 CFR § 775), the Navy finds that the Proposed Action will not significantly affect the quality of the 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 EV22 (Dare County Bombing Range Project Manager), 6506 Hampton Blvd., Norfolk, Virginia 23508; or by phone at (757) 322-4686. A limited number of copies of the EA are available to fill single copy requests.

8/18/2014

Date



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