



Atlantic Fleet Training and Testing Environmental Impact Statement/ Overseas Environmental Impact Statement



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Proposed Action and Alternatives

BACKGROUND

The U.S. Navy is preparing an Environmental Impact Statement/Overseas Environmental Impact Statement (EIS/OEIS) to evaluate the potential environmental effects associated with maintaining military readiness training and research, development, test and evaluation activities ("training and testing") conducted in the Atlantic Fleet Training and Testing (AFTT) study area.

The AFTT study area covers approximately 2.6 million square nautical miles and encompasses the at-sea portions of range complexes and testing ranges located along the east coast of the United States, lower Chesapeake Bay and Gulf of Mexico. While the majority of routine Navy training and testing activities take place primarily within the seaspace and airspace of existing range complexes and testing ranges, some activities conducted concurrently with routine transits occur outside of these areas. With the exception of the lower Chesapeake Bay, inland waters and land-based portions of these ranges will not be analyzed in the AFTT EIS/OEIS.

PROPOSED ACTION

The Navy's proposed action is to conduct military training and testing activities in the waters off the east coast of the United States, lower Chesapeake Bay and Gulf of Mexico. These training and testing activities include the use of active sonar and explosives, primarily within established operating areas (seaspace) and military warning areas (airspace).

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION

The purpose of the proposed action is to achieve and maintain fleet readiness to meet the requirements of Title 10 of the U.S. Code, which requires the Navy to "maintain, train, organize and equip combat-ready naval forces capable of winning wars, deterring aggression, and maintaining freedom of the seas." The proposed action would also allow the Navy to attain compliance with applicable environmental regulations, including those associated with new platforms (ships, unmanned vehicles, aircraft, etc.) and weapons systems.



Atlantic Fleet Training and Testing Study Area

To ensure critical training and testing requirements are met, the Navy's goals in preparing the EIS/OEIS are to:

- Renew and combine current regulatory permits and authorizations;
- Address evolving training and testing requirements; and
- Obtain those permits and authorizations necessary to support force structure changes and emerging and future training and testing requirements, including those associated with the introduction of new ships, aircraft and weapons systems.

Evaluating Alternatives

EVALUATING ALTERNATIVES

Three alternatives are being considered at this time for evaluation in the Draft EIS/OEIS to help determine the appropriate level and types of training and testing activities required to meet the needs outlined on the previous page. The alternatives to be analyzed in the AFTT EIS/OEIS are as follows:

No Action Alternative

Includes continuation of baseline training and testing activities and force structure requirements. These activities and the locations where they are conducted are defined by existing Navy documentation, such as the Records of Decision for the Atlantic Fleet Active Sonar Training, Virginia Capes, Navy Cherry Point, Jacksonville and Naval Surface Warfare Center Panama City Division EISs/OEISs, and the Preferred Alternative for the Gulf of Mexico Draft EIS/OEIS.

Alternative 1

Consists of current training and testing activities with adjustments to the overall study area boundaries defined in the No Action Alternative, and adjustments to the locations and levels of current activities. This alternative also includes changes to training and testing requirements necessary to accommodate force structure changes and the development and introduction of new ships, aircraft and weapons systems.

Alternative 2

Consists of all elements in Alternative 1, plus additional types of training and testing activities and further adjustments to levels of activities. This alternative also allows for additional range enhancements and infrastructure requirements.



Defending the Nation and Protecting the Environment

Defending the United States with a highly skilled, professional military requires rigorous, real-life training in the air, on land and at sea. Conducting realistic training is one of the most important things the Navy does to ensure its service men and women are ready and able to respond to national security challenges. Readiness requires specialized locations where military personnel can learn, through practical hands-on experience, the skills necessary to effectively plan, conduct and succeed in emergencies and national security threats. Military readiness also requires the Navy to test new and existing equipment in environments similar to those encountered during real-world missions.

The ocean and coastal areas of the east coast of the United States, lower Chesapeake Bay and Gulf of Mexico are some of the most ecologically diverse and productive areas in the world and are very important for commerce and recreation. These areas are home to a vast array of wildlife including whales, dolphins, turtles, fish and birds. These areas provide a setting where people can make a living or have fun fishing, sailing, surfing and diving.

The size, location and environment of the AFTT study area also provide unparalleled and essential training opportunities. The training conducted here ensures Navy personnel can successfully protect the United States and keep its interests safe. While training, the Navy is committed to protecting the land, air and marine environments. Recognizing that training and testing activities could affect the environment, the Navy has developed programs and implements protective measures to minimize its effects.

