

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

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI) FOR INFRASTRUCTURE
IMPROVEMENTS AND MAINTENANCE ACTIONS 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) FONSI has been prepared for infrastructure improvements and maintenance actions at the Navy Dare County Bombing Range, North Carolina.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to continue to provide realistic training scenarios and range maintenance operations while enhancing range personnel safety and increasing operational range clearance capabilities.

The need for this action is to provide a sustainable and effective range to ensure naval forces are capable of combat. The Chief of Naval Operations is directed by Title 10 U.S.C. Section 8062 to train all naval forces for combat. That direction is met, in part, by ensuring naval forces have access to ranges and airspace where they can develop and maintain skills for wartime missions. Navy Dare County Bombing Range is the closest range for pilots based out of Naval Air Station Oceana and Naval Station Norfolk. It is a part of the larger Dare County Bombing Range owned by the U.S. Air Force. Only inert munitions are used at the Navy Dare County Bombing Range.

Description of the Proposed Action

The Navy proposes to improve specific target areas over several years at the Navy Dare County Bombing Range. These existing target areas are active target areas that are regularly used by Navy pilots. The Navy developed the single alternative carried forward by considering the operational and support requirements necessary to meet the purpose of and need for the Proposed Action. These considerations included safety enhancements and operational effectiveness. To enhance safety and operational effectiveness for both range personnel and operators, the Proposed Action must improve target areas. Improving existing targets would allow for safe maintenance of these heavily utilized areas, and for collection and removal of a greater number of inert munitions from the range. To further improve operational effectiveness, the Proposed Action must identify new areas to establish a Combat Aircraft Loading

Area site and four Joint Tactical Air Controller observation towers. The Proposed Action would encompass the following:

- Hardening the Military Operations on Urban Terrain target (approximately 12.5 acres);
- Filling existing holes in the City Target to allow for safe operation of the Moving Land Target (MLT) (approximately 1.25 acres);
- Hardening the Convoy Target Pad on 3,500-ft Road (Rd.) (approximately 1.5 acres);
- Widening 3,500-ft Rd. to allow for safe utilization by the MLTs (approximately 9.25 acres);
- Establishing a Combat Aircraft Loading Area site on Navy Shell Rd. (approximately 0.5 acres);
- Hardening three existing Tactical Landing Zones (approximately 2.5 acres);
- Hardening the North Surface-Air Missile Target and the access road leading to the target (approximately 1 acre); and
- Establishing four Joint Tactical Air Controller observation towers (approximately 1.5 acres total).

The size and location of the individual projects are approximate and they may be refined and relocated during design. The construction time to complete each phase will not be known until the design phase of each project is completed. Mitigation measures for these projects will be evaluated and incorporated into each project as it is executed.

No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, targets and target areas would be maintained in a manner consistent with current practice and no further range improvements would be undertaken. Training would continue until such time that the targets proposed for improvement can no longer support training due to lack of ability to safely conduct proper maintenance. The No Action Alternative would not meet the purpose of and need for the Proposed Action but represents the baseline condition against which potential consequences of the Proposed Action can be compared.

Alternative Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Analysis

The Navy considered seven additional alternatives to the Proposed Action. Each of the following alternatives was eliminated because they did not meet the purpose and need for the Proposed Action or because they were not feasible.

- Using alternate locations within the Navy Dare County Bombing Range;
- Removing targets from the range;
- Making targets smaller;

- Using alternate locations outside the Navy Dare County Bombing Range property for air to ground munitions delivery training;
- Use of U.S. Air Force targets on the Air Force side of the Dare County Bombing Range;
- Using prefabricated interlocking metal sections (corrugated galvanized roofing panels) to cover the vegetation; and
- Constructing a bridge or elevated/pile-supported structure over the wetlands.

Environmental Impacts of the Proposed Action

No significant direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental impacts would occur from implementing the Proposed Action at Navy Dare County Bombing Range. Environmental resources, including geology and soils, recreation, socioeconomic, transportation, and land use were omitted from 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 would be expected. Navy 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 minor and temporary. Any dust emissions associated with construction would be temporary and resettle.

Water Resources: No significant impacts on water resources would be expected. The Proposed Action would require filling 30 acres of wetlands. This proposed fill equates to approximately 0.064 percent of the wetlands in the entire Dare County Bombing Range. The impact to wetlands would not be expected to cause impacts outside of the Dare County Bombing Range. The Proposed Action would permanently fill floodplains within Navy Dare County Bombing Range; however, impacts to floodplains outside of the Dare County Bombing Range would not be anticipated to occur.

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 Section 401 Water Quality Certification from the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality. Offsite mitigation would occur within the same watershed as the proposed impacts. Additionally, an erosion and sediment control plan would be implemented and storm water permit application would be submitted to the appropriate regulatory agencies for approval prior to the initiation of construction activities.

Biological Resources: No significant impacts on vegetation, wildlife, wildlife habitat for federally protected species, or migratory birds

would be expected. Minor impacts to vegetation would occur as a result of the permanent fill of approximately 30 acres of wetlands. All impacts to wetlands would be mitigated. The minimal fill of wetlands associated with the Proposed Action 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 or wildlife habitat, including federal and state-listed species, based on the short-term and localized nature of the proposed activities, which would take place within the disturbed and un-forested Navy Dare County Bombing Range impact area.

Federally protected species present at the Navy Dare County Bombing Range include the red-cockaded woodpecker, the northern long-eared bat, and the bald eagle. The Proposed Action would have no effect on the red-cockaded woodpecker or the northern long-eared bat or habitat used by the species. Pursuant to the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, the Proposed Action would not result in the taking of bald eagles and pursuant to the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, no part of the Proposed Action will intentionally take any species, including migratory birds, and no activities would be anticipated to have a measurable negative effect on migratory bird populations. Therefore, the Navy did not consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service under section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, or Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

Historic Resources: No significant effect on any historic resources would be expected. 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 April 29, 2019.

Coastal Zone Management: The Proposed Action would not be expected to 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 reviewed the submitted information pursuant to the management objectives and enforceable policies of Subchapters 7H and 7M of Chapter 7 in Title 15A of the North Carolina Administrative Code and concurred with the Department of the Navy's Negative Determination on 29 April, 2019.

Cumulative Impacts: No significant direct or indirect cumulative impacts would be 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 Navy Dare County Bombing Range, replacement of the Navy Shell Road Bridge at the Navy 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 would result in permanently filling up to approximately 30 acres of wetlands. The Navy would obtain a permit under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act and a state certification under Section 401 prior to beginning construction. The Navy would mitigate wetland impacts via purchase of wetland credits through a mitigation bank located in the same watershed as the Dare County Bombing Range, or as otherwise required.

An approved erosion and sediment control plan and storm water permit application would be adhered to during construction.

The Navy would adhere to all applicable policies described in the current Hazardous Materials Reutilization, Hazardous Waste Minimization Disposal Guide for handling hazardous materials and preventing spills.

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 substantive comments were received. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Air Force did not submit any substantive comments. Additionally, the EA was located on the NAVFAC Mid-Atlantic Environmental Compliance website to provide direct access for interested stakeholders to obtain the EA and no comments were received.

Finding

Based on the analysis presented in 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 or natural environment or generate significant controversy. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared and the Navy will proceed with improvements to the Navy Dare County Bombing Range as described in the EA. Copies of the EA, including this FONSI, can be obtained online via https://www.navy.mil/navfac_worldwide/atlantic/fecs/mid-atlantic/about_us/environmental_norfolk/environmental_planning_and_conservation.html.

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Date

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