

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
Department of the Navy

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT FOR FLIGHT TRAINING ACTIVITIES IN THE
BOURBON MILITARY OPERATIONS AREA OFFSHORE FROM NAVAL AIR STATION JOINT
RESERVE BASE NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA**

Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Department of the Navy (Navy) NEPA Regulations (32 Code of Federal Regulations part 775), and the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations Instruction 5090.1E, the Navy gives notice that an Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared and based on this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), an Environmental Impact Statement is not required for flight training activities in the Bourbon Military Operations Area (MOA) offshore from Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base New Orleans (NAS JRB NOLA), Louisiana. The EA is incorporated by reference and has also been prepared in accordance with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) airspace and NEPA policy and procedures contained in FAA Joint Order 7400.2P and FAA Order 1050.1F. The FAA is a cooperating agency for this action.

For purposes of this EA, the Department of the Navy (DON) has voluntarily elected to generally follow those Council of Environmental Quality regulations at 40 C.F.R. Parts 1500- 1508 that were in place at the outset of this EA, in addition to DON's procedures/regulations implementing NEPA at 32 C.F.R. Part 775, to meet the agency's obligations under NEPA, 42 U.S.C. §§ 4321 et seq.

Executive Order 14172 renamed the Gulf of Mexico to Gulf of America. Since this Executive Order was effective after development and publication of this document the term Gulf of Mexico has been retained in the narrative and figures in the EA. This decision prioritizes the timely implementation of the expanded MOA, a critical aspect of naval readiness, by avoiding further delays associated with document revisions.

Proposed Action: The Navy proposes to request the FAA establish a new MOA and associated Air Traffic Control Assigned Airspace (ATCAA), named the Bourbon MOA/ATCAA, east of NAS JRB NOLA and adjacent to the existing Snake MOA/ATCAA to accommodate required flight training activities for squadrons stationed at the base.

Purpose and Need: The purpose of the Proposed Action is to more efficiently accomplish training requirements for squadrons based at NAS JRB NOLA. Efficiencies are achieved when pilots can train in Special Use Airspace (SUA) of sufficient size and proximity to the base.

The Proposed Action is needed because existing SUA is located a considerable distance from NAS JRB NOLA, resulting in prolonged transit times and reduced training time.

Alternatives Analyzed: In developing the proposed range of alternatives, the Navy considered the following reasonable alternative screening factors:

- Flight training should occur in SUA that provides a closer entry point for pilots based at NAS JRB NOLA than existing SUA for gains in training efficiency.
- SUA must be large enough to accommodate flight profile requirements of the training mission to include supersonic flight.
- SUA must connect to other existing SUA to provide the expanded space to support existing large-scale exercises with multiple aircraft.
- SUA must offer Navy squadrons prioritized access to training space to alleviate existing scheduling conflicts.
- SUA must maintain aviation safety and reduce impacts to civil users to the extent practicable while supporting the military mission needs.
- SUA must be acceptable to the FAA and FAA action must comply with FAA Order 1050.1F.

Based on the evaluation of reasonable alternative screening factors, the Navy identified one action alternative as best meeting the purpose of and need for the Proposed Action and is analyzed within the EA. The EA also evaluated the No Action Alternative under which the Proposed Action would not occur, a description of each follows.

No Action Alternative. Under the No Action Alternative, the Proposed Action would not occur. Squadrons located at NAS JRB NOLA would continue to have longer transits to existing SUA (e.g., Snake Low MOA, Snake High MOA, and Snake ATCAA) which causes inefficient use of training time and fuel resources and does not resolve airspace scheduling conflicts. The No Action Alternative would not meet the purpose of and need for the Proposed Action.

Proposed Action. Under the Proposed Action, the Navy will request the FAA establish a new MOA/ATCAA east of NAS JRB NOLA to accommodate required flight training activities. The new MOA and associated ATCAA will be directly adjacent to the existing Snake High MOA, Snake Low MOA, and Snake ATCAA east of NAS JRB NOLA. The new MOA/ATCAA will be named the Bourbon MOA/ATCAA. The MOA will be established from 4,000 feet mean sea level (MSL) up to, but not including Flight Level (FL) 180. The ATCAA will exist from FL180 up to FL320. The Proposed Action will not change the existing types or quantities of military flight activities originating from NAS JRB NOLA or occurring in the region. The entry point for the new Bourbon MOA/ATCAA will be less than 25

nautical miles, offering closer airspace for squadrons to conduct training activities safely and more efficiently. Defensive countermeasure devices will be used (chaff and flares); however, no weapons testing, or ordnance expenditure will occur within the new MOA/ATCAA.

Alternatives Considered but Eliminated. The Navy considered three other alternatives but did not carry them forward for detailed analysis since they did not meet the purpose and need or satisfy the reasonable alternative screening factors. (1) A new block of SUA to the southwest of NAS JRB NOLA would have offered a closer entry point from NAS JRB NOLA, but it would not connect to existing offshore SUA. (2) Use of existing SUA offshore from NAS Key West would require pilots to travel to NAS Key West to conduct their training from that location rather than from their home air station. Traveling to NAS Key West would increase transit time, increase fuel costs, and not offer a long-term training solution. (3) Flight simulators can provide training efficiencies without having to travel long distances; however, the complete substitution of simulator training for live flight training is not a viable solution. Simulators lack the external environment realism, and the necessary level of fidelity or interoperability that provides pilots with airmanship, critical thinking, and seasoning under real-world flight conditions.

Environmental Effects: No significant direct, indirect, or cumulative environmental impacts will occur from implementing the Proposed Action. Certain environmental resources to include air quality and greenhouse gases, land use, farmlands, geology, topography and soils, hazardous materials, solid waste and pollution prevention, natural resources and energy supply, public health and safety, socioeconomics, and water resources were not analyzed in detail in this EA because potential environmental impacts were considered negligible or non-existent. Potential impacts on airspace management, noise, biological resources, coastal zone, visual effects, cultural resources, and environmental justice were analyzed in detail and are summarized below.

Airspace Management. Potential impacts to civil aircraft traffic could occur during the five hours when the MOA is active daily. During a representative month of flight data in 2023, 251 aircraft transited the proposed Bourbon MOA (105 flights) and ATCAA (146 flights). The most common aircraft transiting through the MOA and ATCAA were commercial air carriers. Impacts to rerouting traffic around the active MOA could result in no more than approximately four minutes of added travel time. Rerouting around the proposed ATCAA could add one minute or less of travel time. Thus, no significant impact to airspace management will occur.

Noise. Subsonic noise levels in the proposed Bourbon MOA/ATCAA will be 52 decibel (dB) A-weighted Day-Night Average Sound Level (DNL), a level that is compatible with all land uses. This level will not exceed significance thresholds defined by FAA; however, the 17 dB DNL increase is "reportable." The maximum sound level (i.e., loudest) during a single event that could occur in the proposed MOA is 105 dB. This will result from an F-35 traveling at 4,000 feet mean sea level (MSL) using highest power. This will last only a few seconds and will occur infrequently. Supersonic noise will range between 34-42 dB C-weighted Day-Night Average Sound Level (CDNL), a level that is compatible with all land use types. No significant impacts to the noise environment will occur.

Biological Resources. Chronic noise exposure and exposure to high noise levels will not occur and there will be no hearing loss in any species. Birds and bats, including special status species, migratory birds, and Bald Eagles, could experience minor effects from aircraft noise including temporary changes in behavior, but these are not likely to cause long-term effects or population-level impacts; therefore, these impacts are not significant. Chaff and flare residual materials could pose a minor impact to fish and sea turtles who may inadvertently ingest these materials during normal feeding activities. Existing safety procedures will continue to reduce Bird/Wildlife Aircraft Strike Hazard. No significant impacts to biological resources will occur.

The Navy analyzed potential impacts of the Proposed Action using the best scientific data available, as required under section 7(c) of the Endangered Species Act. The Navy determined that the Proposed Action may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect, the following species:

- Rufa red knot (*Calidris cantus rufa*)-Threatened;
- Piping plover (*Charadrius melodus*)-Threatened;
- Eastern black rail (*Laterallus jamaicensis ssp. Jamaicensis*)-Threatened;
- Tricolored bat (*Perimyotis subflavus*)-Proposed Endangered; and
- West Indian manatee (*Trichechus manatus*)-Threatened.

The Navy conducted informal consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Louisiana Ecological Services for potential effects to the aforementioned species. In a letter dated October 21, 2024, the USFWS concurred with the Navy's determination.

Moreover, the Navy determined that the Proposed Action may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect, the following species under National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries jurisdiction:

- Green sea turtle (*Chelonia mydas*), North Atlantic DPS-Threatened;
- Kemp's ridley sea turtle (*Lepidochelys kempii*)-Endangered;
- Leatherback sea turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*)-Endangered;
- Loggerhead sea turtle (*Caretta caretta*), North Atlantic DPS-Threatened;
- Hawksbill sea turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*)-Endangered; and,
- Gulf sturgeon (*Acipenser oxyrinchus desotoi*)-Threatened; and,
- Giant manta ray (*Mobula Birostris*)-Threatened.

The Navy conducted informal consultation with NOAA Fisheries for potential effects to the aforementioned species. In a letter dated February 27, 2025, NOAA Fisheries concurred with the Navy's determination.

Coastal Zone. Negligible impacts to coastal resources could result from use of chaff and flares. Annual usage is low, the area within which they will be used is large, and the materials that remain are small, making the potential for impacts negligible. The Navy determined that the Proposed Action is consistent to the maximum extent practicable with the enforceable policies of the Louisiana Coastal Resource Program. In a letter dated August 22, 2024, the Louisiana Department of Energy and Natural Resources, Office of Coastal Management concurred that the Proposed Action is consistent with the Louisiana Coastal Resource Program.

Visual Effects. The addition of training flights in the Bourbon MOA/ATCAA will result in different flight patterns and an increase in the length of time aircraft will be viewable in this area, as compared to existing conditions. Due to the lateral area and altitude range in which aircraft could operate, and the transient nature of some overflights, effects will be only mildly discernible. Chaff and flare use will result in negligible to minor visual effects. No significant impacts to visual effects will occur.

Cultural Resources. No direct impacts will occur to cultural resources. There are no known above ground archaeological sites or Traditional Cultural Properties¹. The three identified architectural resources located within the area of potential effects will not be impacted by the Proposed Action. Fort Proctor is the only standing architectural resource beneath the proposed SUA. It is located on the

¹The term "Traditional Cultural Properties" was defined in *National Register Bulletin 38: Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Traditional Cultural Properties* (1990). This Bulletin was updated in December 2024 and is now titled *Identifying, Evaluating, and Documenting Traditional Cultural Places*. The 2024 guidance replaces the term "Traditional Cultural Properties" with "Traditional Cultural Places," but the definition remains unchanged. The original term is retained in this Final EA/FONSI because the change occurred after publication of the Draft EA and was used in National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 Tribal and State consultation documents. This decision supports the timely implementation of the expanded MOA, vital to naval readiness, by avoiding delays from non-substantive document revisions.

western boundary of the MOA where supersonic flights will occur above 30,000 feet MSL, which will reduce the number of sonic booms. Subsonic noise is below the level that could cause damage to structures (130 dB). Visual intrusions at the Fort are also expected to be minimal and similar to what is currently experienced. Via correspondence dated August 12, 2024, the Navy received concurrence from the Office of Cultural Development, Division of Historic Preservation that the proposed undertaking will have no adverse effect on historic properties. The Navy requested to consult with the Chitimacha Tribe but received no response from the Tribe. No significant impacts to cultural resources will occur.

Environmental Justice. Pursuant to Executive Orders (EOs) 12898 and 14096 (in effect when this EA began), the Navy analyzed impacts to Environmental Justice. However, recent EOs 14154 and 14173 removed the requirement to consider Environmental Justice in NEPA documents. Accordingly, this FONSI does not make any conclusion related to Environmental Justice impacts.

Mitigation Measures: Based on the analysis in this EA, the Proposed Action will not result in any significant or unavoidable adverse impacts to any resource area. As such, no mitigation actions are required.

Public Involvement: The Navy prepared a Draft EA to inform the public of the Proposed Action alternatives and to allow the opportunity for public review and comment. Input from the public and from regulatory agencies was incorporated into the analysis of potential impacts, as appropriate. A Notice of Availability of the Draft EA, including information about where the Draft EA could be reviewed, and the announcement of a 45-day public comment period, was published in The New Orleans Advocate on August 22, 23, and 24, 2024. As part of the NEPA process, the Navy made the EA available via <https://www.nepa.navy.mil/NOLASUA>. The Navy made copies of the EA available at two local libraries:

- Belle Chasse Branch Library: 8442 LA-23, Belle Chasse, Louisiana 70037
- Plaquemines Parish Library: 35572 Highway 11, Buras, Louisiana 70041

The public was invited to submit comments on the Draft EA by any of the following methods:

- electronically, via the project website:
<https://www.nepa.navy.mil/NOLASUA>
- in writing, by mail to: NOLA SUA Project Manager, Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command Atlantic, Attn: Code EV21JB, 6506 Hampton Blvd, Norfolk, Virginia 23508

No public or other stakeholder comments were received during the Draft EA public review period. As part of FAA's procedures to establish SUA, the aeronautical proposal for the Bourbon MOA/ATCAA was publicly circulated for 45 days concurrent with the Draft EA. No comments were received during that time.

Finding of No Significant Impact: Based on analysis presented in the EA, which has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of NEPA, Navy policies and procedures (32 CFR part 775), FAA airspace and NEPA policy and procedures contained in FAA Joint Order 7400.2P and FAA Order 1050.1F, and in coordination with the USFWS Louisiana Ecological Services, NOAA Fisheries, Louisiana Office of Cultural Development, Division of Historic Preservation, and Louisiana Department of Energy and Natural Resources Office of Coastal Management, the Navy finds that implementation of the Proposed Action will not significantly impact the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared.

The Final EA prepared by the Navy is on file and interested parties may obtain a copy by downloading the EA from the project website: <https://www.nepa.navy.mil/NOLASUA>. Electronic copies of the Final EA and FONSI may also be obtained by written request to: Attention: NOLA SUA Project Manager, Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command Atlantic (ATTENTION: Code EV21JB), 6506 Hampton Blvd, Norfolk, Virginia 23508.

April 3, 2025

JRC

Date

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