

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

Department of the Navy

Record of Decision for the Atlantic Fleet Training and Testing Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement/Overseas Environmental Impact Statement

AGENCY: Department of the Navy, Department of Defense

ACTION: Record of Decision

SUMMARY: The United States (U.S.) Department of the Navy (DON), including both the U.S. Navy and the U.S. Marine Corps (the Action Proponents¹), after carefully weighing the strategic, operational, and environmental consequences of the Proposed Action, announces its decision to conduct training and testing (also referred to as military readiness activities) as identified in Alternative 1 in the Atlantic Fleet Training and Testing (AFTT) Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)/Overseas Environmental Impact Statement (OEIS). Implementation of Alternative 1 will enable DON to maintain operational readiness to support national defense requirements under section 8062 of title 10, U.S. Code (U.S.C.). The U.S. Coast Guard is a Joint Lead Agency (Co-Action Proponent) for the AFTT Supplemental EIS/OEIS and its activities are included in the AFTT Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS and all consultation documents. The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is a cooperating agency for the AFTT Supplemental EIS/OEIS because the scope of the Proposed Action and alternatives involve activities that have the potential to affect protected resources under the agency's jurisdiction and about which they have special expertise, including marine mammals, threatened and endangered species, and essential fish habitat.

The Action Proponents have prepared this Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Executive Order 12114, *Environmental Effects Abroad of Major Federal Actions*, and applicable federal NEPA implementing regulations in place at the time the Supplemental EIS/OEIS was initiated. The AFTT Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS also supports the issuance of new Letters of Authorization (LOA) under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) and permits for incidental take under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

FOR FUTURE INFORMATION, CONTACT: AFTT Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS Project Manager, Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command, Atlantic/EV22SG, 6506 Hampton Boulevard, Norfolk, VA 23508, (757) 322-4686, Website: <https://www.nepa.navy.mil/aftteis/>.

A. SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Pursuant to NEPA, 42 U.S.C. section 4321 et seq., and Executive Order 12114, DON announces its decision to implement the Action Proponent's Preferred Alternative, Alternative 1, as

¹ The U.S. Coast Guard will issue a separate Record of Decision (ROD) and will obtain a MMPA LOA their activities. This ROD addresses only DON activities, therefore, except as otherwise stated, "Action Proponents" refers to only the U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps.

described in Chapter 2 (Description of Proposed Action and Alternatives) of the AFTT Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS.

B. BACKGROUND AND ISSUES:

The Action Proponents have conducted military readiness activities in the Study Area for decades. The tempo and types of training and testing activities have fluctuated based on the introduction of new technologies, the evolving nature of international events, advances in warfighting doctrine and procedures, and changes in force structure (organization of ships, weapons, and personnel). The Action Proponents have prepared a Supplement to the 2018 *Final Atlantic Fleet Training and Testing Final Environmental Impact Statement/Overseas Environmental Impact Statement* (hereinafter referred to as the 2018 Final EIS/OEIS) to update the Action Proponents' assessment of the potential environmental impacts associated with proposed military readiness activities to be conducted in the Study Area. The AFTT Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS includes analysis of changes to the types and tempo of training and testing activities deemed necessary to meeting military readiness requirements into the reasonably foreseeable future, incorporates the continuing maturation of the science, and supports the reissuance of regulatory reauthorizations under the MMPA and the ESA. These proposed activities are generally consistent with those analyzed in the 2018 Final EIS/OEIS and are representative of military readiness activities that the Action Proponents have been conducting in the Study Area. These military readiness activities include the use of active sonar and other acoustic sources, as well as the use of explosives.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to ensure the Action Proponents are able to organize, train, and equip service members and personnel to meet their respective Congressionally-mandated national defense missions. These missions are achieved in part by conducting military readiness activities within the Study Area in accordance with established DON military readiness requirements. Section 1.4 of the AFTT Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS discusses the need for the Proposed Action in detail but in general training and testing is needed to ensure Naval forces are prepared to protect U.S. national security interests, prosecute war, and defend the nation. The purpose of NMFS' action is to evaluate the Action Proponents' request for authorizations to take marine mammals, pursuant to section 101(a)(5)(A) of the MMPA (16 U.S.C. 1371) and its implementing regulations administered by NMFS, and decide whether to promulgate regulations and issue LOAs, including any conditions necessary to meet the statutory mandates of the MMPA. The Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS analyzes the environmental impacts associated with issuance of the requested incidental take authorizations for military readiness activities within the Study Area.

Public Involvement

The Action Proponents conducted extensive public involvement during the development of the EIS, including public scoping, release of the Draft Supplemental EIS/OEIS for review and comment, and release of the Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS. Substantive comments received during scoping and the Draft Supplemental EIS/OEIS review were considered during the development of the Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS. Details on the public involvement process are found in Appendix M (Public Involvement and Distribution) of the Final Supplemental

EIS/OEIS. Three letters were received on the AFTT Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS during the 30-day wait period that ended on September 15, 2025.

Alternatives Considered

The identification, consideration, and analysis of alternatives are critical components of the NEPA process and contribute to the goal of informed decision making. The Action Proponents developed the alternatives considered in the AFTT Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS after careful assessment by subject matter experts, including military commands that utilize the ranges, military range management professionals, environmental managers and scientists, and in consultation with NMFS with regard to mitigation measures that are incorporated into each action alternative. The Action Proponents also considered changes in military policy and analyzed historical data to inform alternatives development.

Live training and testing, conducted in an appropriate environment to provide realism, is an irreplaceable aspect of meeting military readiness requirements. Training must be as realistic as possible to provide experience vital to success and survival of forces during military operations. Testing must be conducted in the environment in which platforms and systems are intended to operate to obtain critical performance data to support development. While both training and testing programs leverage simulation to supplement the development of ready forces or capabilities, it is not considered a substitute for live at-sea activities. The need for including live training and testing is discussed in Section 2.3 of the AFTT Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS.

Three alternatives are analyzed in the AFTT Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS:

- **No Action Alternative.** The No Action Alternative considers that the Proposed Action would not take place (i.e., the proposed training and testing would not occur in the AFTT Study Area). Consequently, the No Action Alternative of not conducting the proposed live, at-sea training and testing in the Study Area is inherently unreasonable in that it does not meet the Action Proponents' purpose and need (see Section 1.4 of the AFTT Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS). From NMFS' perspective, pursuant to its obligation to grant or deny requests for authorization to take marine mammals under the MMPA, the No Action Alternative involves NMFS denying the Action Proponents' application for incidental take authorizations under section 101(a)(5)(A) of the MMPA. If NMFS were to deny the Action Proponents' application, Action Proponents would not be authorized to incidentally take marine mammals and would not conduct the training and testing activities proposed in the AFTT Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS.
- **Alternative 1.** Alternative 1, the Preferred Alternative, reflects a representative year of training and testing to account for the natural fluctuations of training cycles, testing programs, and deployment schedules. Under Alternative 1, the Action Proponents propose to conduct training activities into the reasonably foreseeable future, as necessary to meet current and future readiness requirements. These military readiness training activities include new activities as well as activities subject to previous analysis that are currently ongoing and have historically occurred in the Study Area. This alternative has analyzed two to three Composite Training Unit Exercises each year in the Atlantic Ocean, for a maximum number of 17 Composite Training Unit Exercises over any 7-year period. The requirements for the types of activities to be conducted, as well as the intensity at which they need to occur, are based on the requirements of the Navy's Optimized Fleet Response Plan and on changing world

events, advances in technology, and Action Proponents' tactical and strategic priorities. Also, under Alternative 1, the Action Proponents propose an annual level of testing that reflects the fluctuations in testing programs and recognizes that the maximum level of testing would likely not be conducted each year.

- **Alternative 2.** As under Alternative 1, this alternative includes new and ongoing activities but instead models the maximum level of training and testing foreseeable in each of the 7 years. Alternative 2 reflects the maximum number of training activities that could occur within a given year and assumes that the maximum level of activity would occur every year over any 7-year period. Additionally, this alternative has analyzed three Composite Training Unit Exercises each year along with a contingency Composite Training Unit Exercise in the Gulf of America each year, for a maximum number of 28 Composite Training Unit Exercises over any 7-year period. Alternative 2 would include the testing of some new systems using new technologies, taking into account the potential for delayed or accelerated testing schedules, variations in funding availability, and innovations in technology development.

The Navy's standard operating procedures and entire suite of mitigations, including activity-based mitigation measures and geographic mitigation areas, are incorporated into the Preferred Alternative.

The Action Proponents thoroughly considered and then eliminated from further consideration several alternatives that did not meet the purpose of and need for the Proposed Action. See Section 2.3.1 of the AFTT Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS for a description of alternatives considered but not carried forward for detailed analysis.

Environmental Effects

The following table summarizes the potential environmental impacts on each resource area associated with implementing Alternative 1 (Preferred Alternative). Each summary includes activity impact descriptors (negligible, minor, moderate, major) which are defined for each resource area under the applicable sections of Chapter 3 of the AFTT Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS. Resources and issues considered but not carried forward for further consideration include land use, demographics, cultural resources, socioeconomics, public health and safety, and children's health and safety. The Action Proponents' rationale for not including these resources and issues is provided in Section 3.0.3.2 of the AFTT Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS. The discussion below summarizes the effects of the Preferred Alternative on physical resources (air quality, sediment and water quality, and habitats) and biological resources (vegetation, invertebrates, fishes, marine mammals, reptiles, birds and bats). Standard operating procedures and mitigation measures that would reduce the potential for impacts on biological resources are provided in the respective sections of the AFTT Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS. The Action Proponents concluded that adverse impacts would be less than significant for all resource areas analyzed in the AFTT Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS.

Resource	Summary of Impacts
Air Quality	• The effects of military readiness activities on air quality were analyzed in the context of air pollutants emitted within the U.S. territorial sea (assessed under NEPA) and outside the U.S. territorial sea (assessed under Executive Order 12114, <i>Environmental Effects of Major Federal Actions</i>).

Resource	Summary of Impacts
	• Activities would not contribute to an exceedance of any ambient air quality standard or interfere with the attainment of the National Ambient Air Quality Standards at any location within the Study Area. • Emissions from inshore operations would remain below General Conformity <i>de minimis</i> thresholds. • There would be no appreciable increase in the exposure of sensitive receptors to hazardous pollutant emissions or associated cancer or non-cancer health effects.
Sediment and Water Quality	• Stressors with the potential to affect sediment and water quality include explosives and explosives byproducts, metals, chemicals other than explosives, and other miscellaneous materials (e.g., plastics). • The combined impact of all stressors on sediment and water quality would be minor because the chemical and physical changes to sediment and water quality would likely be indistinguishable from baseline conditions.
Habitats	• Stressors with the potential to affect habitats include explosives and physical disturbance and strikes (vessels and in-water devices, military expended materials, seafloor devices, and pile driving). • The combined impact of all stressors on abiotic habitats would be moderate due to the small area affected relative to the total area of these habitats in the Study Area.
Vegetation	• Stressors with the potential to affect marine vegetation include explosives and physical disturbance and strikes (vessels and in-water devices, military expended materials, seafloor devices, and pile driving). • The combined impact of all stressors are considered moderate due to limited potential for damage to vegetation populations overall, with floating <i>Sargassum</i> being the vegetation type most likely exposed to combined stressors.
Invertebrates	• Stressors with the potential to affect invertebrates include acoustic (sonar and other transducers, air guns, pile driving, vessel noise, aircraft noise, and weapons noise); explosives; energy (in-water electromagnetic devices); physical disturbance and strikes (vessels and in-water devices, military expended materials, seafloor devices, and pile driving); entanglement (wires and cables, decelerators/parachutes, and biodegradable polymers); and ingestion (military expended materials – munitions and military expended materials other than munitions). • The combined impact of all stressors are considered moderate due to the limited potential for effects relative to overall population sizes. • Pursuant to the ESA, military readiness activities may affect boulder star coral (<i>Orbicella franksi</i>), elkhorn coral (<i>Acropora palmata</i>), lobed star coral (<i>Orbicella annularis</i>), mountainous star coral (<i>Orbicella faveolata</i>), pillar coral (<i>Dendrogyra cylindrus</i>), rough cactus coral (<i>Mycetophyllia ferox</i>), staghorn coral (<i>Acropora cervicornis</i>), and queen conch (<i>Aliger gigas</i>). Military

Resource	Summary of Impacts
	readiness activities may affect designated critical habitat for all ESA-listed coral species.
Fishes	• Stressors with the potential to affect fishes include acoustic (sonar and other transducers, air guns, pile driving, vessel noise, aircraft noise, and weapons noise); explosives (explosions in water and in air); energy (in-water electromagnetic devices); physical disturbance and strikes (vessels and in-water devices, military expended materials, seafloor devices, and pile driving); entanglement (wires and cables, decelerators/parachutes, and biodegradable polymers); and ingestion (military expended materials – munitions and military expended materials other than munitions). • The combined impact of all stressors are considered minor to moderate because most exposures to individual stressors are non-lethal, and the number of fishes impacted is expected to be small relative to overall population sizes. • Pursuant to the ESA, military readiness activities may affect the Atlantic salmon (<i>Salmo salar</i>), Atlantic sturgeon (<i>Acipenser oxyrinchus oxyrinchus</i>), shortnose sturgeon (<i>Acipenser brevirostrum</i>), Gulf sturgeon (<i>Acipenser oxyrinchus desotoi</i>), smalltooth sawfish (<i>Pristis pectinata</i>), giant manta ray (<i>Mobula birostris</i>), Nassau grouper (<i>Epinephelus striatus</i>), oceanic whitetip shark (<i>Carcharhinus longimanus</i>), and scalloped hammerhead shark (<i>Sphyrna lewini</i>). Military readiness activities will have no effect on Atlantic salmon designated critical habitat, but may affect designated critical habitat for Atlantic sturgeon, Gulf sturgeon, and Nassau grouper. Activities were found to not overlap with smalltooth sawfish designated critical habitat.
Marine Mammals	• Stressors with the potential to affect marine mammals include acoustic (sonar and other transducers, air guns, pile driving, vessel noise, aircraft noise, and weapons noise); explosives (explosions in water and in air); energy (in-water electromagnetic devices and high-energy lasers); physical disturbance and strikes (vessels and in-water devices, military expended materials, and seafloor devices); entanglement (wires and cables, decelerators/parachutes, and biodegradable polymers); and ingestion (military expended materials – munitions and military expended materials other than munitions). • The combined impact of all stressors is considered moderate due to limited potential for injury/mortality. • Pursuant to the ESA, military readiness activities may affect the North Atlantic right whale (<i>Eubalaena glacialis</i>), blue whale (<i>Balaenoptera musculus</i>), fin whale (<i>Balaenoptera edeni</i>), Rice's whale (<i>Balaenoptera ricei</i>), sei whale (<i>Balaenoptera borealis</i>), sperm whale (<i>Physeter macrocephalus</i>), and West Indian manatee (<i>Trichechus manatus latirostris</i>). Military readiness activities may affect designated North Atlantic right whale critical habitat and proposed Rice's whale critical habitat, and would have no effect on designated West Indian manatee critical habitat. • The Action Proponents are seeking LOAs in accordance with the MMPA for the use of sonar and other transducers (Level A and Level B harassment),

Resource	Summary of Impacts
	explosives (Level A harassment, Level B harassment, and mortality), air guns and pile driving (Level B harassment), and vessels (mortality). Other stressors associated with military readiness activities are not expected to result in Level A or Level B harassment of any marine mammals.
Reptiles	• Stressors with the potential to affect reptiles include acoustic (sonar and other transducers, air guns, pile driving, vessel noise, aircraft noise, and weapons noise); explosives (explosions in water and in air); energy (in-water electromagnetic devices and high-energy lasers); physical disturbance and strikes (vessels and in-water devices, military expended materials, and seafloor devices); entanglement (wires and cables, decelerators/parachutes, and biodegradable polymers); and ingestion (military expended materials – munitions and military expended materials other than munitions). • The combined impact of all stressors is considered moderate because military readiness activities are generally separated in space and time such that it would be unlikely that any individual reptile would be exposed to stressors from multiple activities within a short time. • Pursuant to the ESA, military readiness activities may affect the green sea turtle (<i>Chelonia mydas</i>), hawksbill sea turtle (<i>Eretmochelys imbricata</i>), Kemp's ridley sea turtle (<i>Lepidochelys kempii</i>), loggerhead sea turtle (<i>Caretta caretta</i>), and leatherback sea turtle (<i>Dermochelys coriacea</i>). Military readiness activities may affect designated loggerhead sea turtle critical habitat and proposed green sea turtle critical habitat. Military readiness activities would have no effect on green, hawksbill, and leatherback sea turtle designated critical habitat. Military readiness activities may affect the American crocodile (<i>Crocodylus acutus</i>) but would have no effect on its critical habitat.
Birds and Bats	• Stressors with the potential to affect birds and bats include acoustic (sonar and other transducers, air guns, pile driving, vessel noise, aircraft noise, and weapons noise); explosives (explosions in water and in air); energy (in-water electromagnetic devices, in-air electromagnetic devices, and high-energy lasers); physical disturbance and strikes (vessels and in-water devices, aircraft and aerial targets, and military expended materials); entanglement (wires and cables and decelerators/parachutes); and ingestion (military expended materials other than munitions). • The combined impact of all stressors is considered moderate because the number of individuals impacted is expected to be small relative to overall population sizes. • Pursuant to the ESA, military readiness activities may affect the piping plover (<i>Charadrius melodus</i>), red knot (<i>Calidris canutus rufa</i>), roseate tern (<i>Sterna dougallii dougallii</i>), Bermuda petrel (<i>Pterodroma cahow</i>), black-capped petrel (<i>Pterodroma hasitata</i>), Indiana bat (<i>Myotis sodalis</i>), northern long-eared bat (<i>Myotis septentrionalis</i>), and tricolored bat (<i>Perimyotis subflavus</i>). Military readiness activities would have no effect on designated critical habitat for the piping plover or proposed critical habitat for the red knot.

Resource	Summary of Impacts
	• The Proposed Action may result in “take” of migratory birds; however, the proposed military readiness activities would not result in significant adverse effects on any population of a migratory species, and therefore this type of “take” is in compliance with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act implementing regulations, 50 C.F.R. § 21.42.

Recent Scientific Information

The AFTT Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS was prepared using the best available science to update the Action Proponents’ assessment of the potential environmental impacts associated with proposed new and changed military readiness activities to be conducted in the Study Area. The Action Proponents have reviewed science published since the preparation of the AFTT Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS and have identified no emergent best available science that would significantly change the analyses or conclusions in the AFTT Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS.

Since the release of the AFTT Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS, the Navy revised the technical report *Criteria and Thresholds for U.S. Navy Acoustic and Explosive Effects Analysis (Phase 4)* available on the project website. The revisions clarify certain data used in the analysis but do not change the criteria and thresholds applied in the acoustic impact analysis.

Agency Consultation and Coordination

NMFS served as a cooperating agency throughout the AFTT Supplemental EIS/OEIS process because of its expertise and regulatory authority over certain marine resources. Additionally, NMFS has adopted the AFTT Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS as its NEPA documentation in support of its rule-making process under the MMPA. The Action Proponents also consulted and coordinated with other federal and state agencies, including the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), State Historic Preservation Officers (SHPO), and Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA) administrators within the Study Area concurrently with development of the AFTT Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS. Agency correspondence received after filing the AFTT Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency on August 6, 2025, included an ESA letter of concurrence from USFWS and concurrence letters from the South Carolina CZMA administrator, the North Carolina SHPO, and the Delaware SHPO. This correspondence is included in the AFTT Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS available on the project website.

A summary of the results from each consultation and coordination process is included below:

- **MMPA:** The Action Proponents submitted an application for 7-year incidental take authorizations to NMFS for stressors associated with certain training and testing activities as described under the Preferred Alternative (Alternative 1), including the use of sonar and other transducers, explosives, and vessel movement. NMFS expects to issue a final rule on October 13, 2025 and two LOAs, one for training activities and one for testing activities, by November 12, 2025.

- **ESA (NMFS):** The Action Proponents requested initiation of formal consultation with NMFS on 28 ESA-listed species and 16 designated critical habitats, as well as conferenced on proposed critical habitat for 2 species. NMFS issued their Biological and Conference Opinion on September 2, 2025, concluding that any adverse effects to ESA-listed species are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the species, and that military readiness activities are not likely to adversely affect proposed or designated critical habitat. NMFS is expected to issue an Incidental Take Statement for Action Proponent military readiness activities.
- **ESA (USFWS):** The Action Proponents requested informal consultation with the USFWS, and received concurrence from the USFWS on August 6, 2025, that military readiness activities under Alternative 1 may affect, but are not likely to adversely affect, 10 ESA-listed species. USFWS agreed there was no effect to designated and proposed critical habitats.
- **Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act:** The Action Proponents submitted an Essential Fish Habitat Assessment to initiate consultation with NMFS for potential adverse effects to essential fish habitat. NMFS provided conservation recommendations to avoid, minimize, or offset impacts to essential fish habitat during the consultation completed on April 14, 2025.
- **National Marine Sanctuaries Act:** The Action Proponents submitted a Sanctuary Resource Statement to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Office of National Marine Sanctuaries initiating consultation in accordance with section 304(d) of the National Marine Sanctuaries Act on the Preferred Alternative (Alternative 1), which may incidentally expose sanctuary resources that reside within the designated Stellwagen Bank, Gray's Reef, Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuaries and the proposed Hudson Canyon National Marine Sanctuary to sound and other environmental stressors associated with training and testing activities. The Office of National Marine Sanctuaries concurred on March 14, 2025 with the analysis in the Sanctuary Resource Statement and no additional recommended alternatives were given. The Office of National Marine Sanctuaries also acknowledged the preliminary analysis that was conducted for the proposed Hudson Canyon sanctuary and stated that the Action Proponents can rely on that analysis for a formal section 304(d) consultation should Hudson Canyon be designated as a National Marine Sanctuary.
- **Coastal Zone Management Act:** The Action Proponents submitted consistency determinations to 18 states adjacent to the Study Area. Correspondence indicating concurrence was received from 13 states; concurrence was presumed for the remaining five states. The Action Proponents determined that no activities were proposed within or in proximity to the coastal zones of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands and was not required to consult under the Coastal Zone Management Act with the coastal zone managers of those territories.
- **National Historic Preservation Act:** The Action Proponents initiated consultation under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act for activities occurring within state waters of 18 states. The Action Proponents either received concurrence with the finding of "no historic properties affected," "no adverse effect to historic properties," or assumed concurrence due to lack of response, in accordance with 36 Code of Federal Regulations 800.3(c)(4)] from all 18 states. The Action Proponents determined that proposed activities potentially occurring within or in proximity to the coastal zones of Puerto Rico and the U.S.

Virgin Islands have previously been reviewed by Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands Historic Preservation Offices and the potential effects on historic properties would not be significantly altered from those previously reviewed.

Mitigation Measures

The Action Proponents, including the U.S. Coast Guard, work collaboratively with the appropriate regulatory agencies through the consultation and permitting processes to develop and finalize mitigation measures, which are actions taken to completely avoid, partially reduce, or minimize the potential for a stressor to impact a resource. These measures are designed to be practical to implement in accordance with the purpose and need for the proposed action, and implemented under either action alternative. Through this process, the Action Proponents, including the U.S. Coast Guard, agreed to adopt several additional mitigation measures suggested by the regulators, beyond those identified in the 2018 Final EIS/OEIS. Chapter 5 of the AFTT Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS presents full descriptions of the activity-based and geographic mitigation requirements, descriptions of the development and assessment processes, and discussions of measures considered but eliminated. Changes to mitigations subsequent to publication of the AFTT Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS that resulted from consultation with regulatory agencies include:

- **Chapter 5 (Mitigation):** When discussing visibility, one use of “poor” and four uses of “reduced” were changed to “restricted.”
- **Section 5.6.1.2 (Additional Details for Explosives) and Section 5.6.1.3 (Additional Details for Non-Explosive Ordnance):** Updated to clarify that listed exemptions apply to activity-based mitigations.
- **Table 5.7-18 (Dynamic North Atlantic Right Whale Mitigation Area Requirements):** The mitigation requirement “During propulsion testing in the mitigation area, to the maximum extent practical, Lookouts will be provided recent whalemap.org sightings data to help inform visual observations” was changed to “To the maximum extent practical, sightings data must be used when planning propulsion testing event details (e.g., timing, location, duration) and during propulsion testing. To the maximum extent practical, Lookouts will be provided recent whalemap.org sightings data to help inform visual observations.”
- **Table 5.7-19 (Rice’s Whale Mitigation Area Requirements):** The mitigation requirement “The Action Proponents will issue an annual awareness message to Navy and Coast Guard vessels that routinely train or test in the vicinity of the Rice’s Whale Critical Habitat” was changed to “The Action Proponents will issue an annual awareness message to Navy vessels that routinely train or test in the vicinity of the Rice’s Whale Proposed Critical Habitat and Coast Guard vessels that routinely train anywhere in the Gulf of America.”

The Action Proponents analyzed potential mitigation measures individually and then collectively as a holistic mitigation package to determine if mitigation would meet the appropriate balance between being environmentally beneficial and practical to implement. Operational communities from each Action Proponent conducted a comprehensive assessment to determine how and to what degree each individual mitigation measure and the iterative and cumulative impact of all potential mitigation measures would be compatible with planning, scheduling, and conducting military readiness activities under the Proposed Action. Through the mitigation development and

assessment processes, the Action Proponents have committed to the maximum level of mitigation that is both beneficial and practical to implement under the Proposed Action. The mitigation measures are organized into two categories, as described below.

- **Activity-Based Mitigation:** Activity-based mitigation was referred to as “Procedural Mitigation” in the 2018 Final EIS/OEIS and “Visual Observations” in the 2024 Draft Supplemental EIS/OEIS. Activity-based mitigations are fundamentally consistent across stressors; however, there are activity-specific variations to account for differences in platform configurations, event characteristics, and stressor types. Activity-based mitigations are designed to limit the potential for activities to be conducted when marine mammals and sea turtles are nearby. Section 5.6 of the AFTT Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS provides more information on activity-based mitigation.
- **Geographic Mitigation:** Designated portions of the Study Area where the Action Proponents will implement geographic mitigation for physical habitats, marine species habitats, or cultural resources are referred to as “mitigation areas.” In each geographic mitigation area, the Action Proponents have agreed to activity limits, mitigation procedures, or special reporting requirements. Mitigation areas pertain to a stressor or mitigation type such as acoustic stressors, explosives, physical disturbance and strike stressors, or special reporting requirements. Mitigation areas apply year-round unless specified otherwise. Section 5.7 of the AFTT Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS provides more information on geographic mitigation.

Monitoring and Adaptive Management

The Navy maintains a scientific research and monitoring program for protected marine species and works collaboratively with NMFS to determine where monitoring efforts should be focused to comply with the requirements outlined in the AFTT permits and consultations. Through the Navy’s environmental offices and programs, the U.S. Navy Marine Species Monitoring Program, the Living Marine Resources Program, and the Office of Naval Research, the Navy has sponsored research and monitoring for more than 30 years to improve the understanding of environmental effects from military readiness activities.

The Action Proponents will continue submitting annual training and testing activity reports and incident reports as detailed in Chapter 5 of the AFTT Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS to track compliance with MMPA and ESA authorizations. In its annual training and testing activity reports, the Action Proponents will describe the level of training and testing conducted during the reporting period (e.g., the location and total hours and counts of active sonar hours and in-water explosives used). For major training exercises, the reports will include records of individual marine mammal sightings when mitigation was implemented during the events. If they occur, the Action Proponents will report incidents involving biological and cultural resources, such as strikes of protected species, sightings of injured or dead marine mammals and sea turtles, or impacts to submerged historic properties.

The Navy will continue to host marine species monitoring technical review meetings with NMFS, to include researchers and the Marine Mammal Commission. Additionally, Adaptive Management meetings will continue to be held with NMFS as a systematic approach to help account for advancements in science and technology made after issuance of MMPA regulations

and LOAs. Through Adaptive Management, decisions, policies, or actions can be adjusted as the science and outcomes from management actions become better understood over time.

Responses to Comments Received on the AFTT Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS

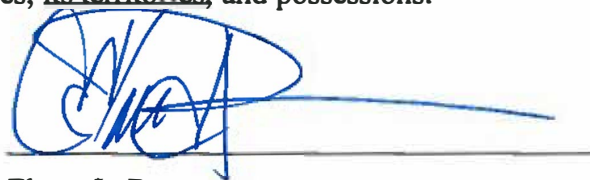
Three letters were received during the AFTT Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS 30-day wait period. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) submitted a letter confirming their review of the responses to their comments and the changes from the AFTT Draft Supplemental EIS/OEIS; EPA had no additional comments. The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality submitted a letter providing comments from their review, and resulted in no changes to the AFTT Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS. A member of the public submitted a letter requesting additional information on Proposed Action activities within Boston Harbor; no changes to the AFTT Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS resulted from this comment, and the requested information was provided to the commenter.

C. CONCLUSION:

After careful consideration of the purpose and need for the Proposed Action, operational and readiness requirements, the analysis of potential environmental effects in the AFTT Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS, relevant strategic and operational policies and guidance, proposed mitigation measures, and public input, DON has decided to proceed with implementation of the Preferred Alternative, Alternative 1. Alternative 1 best meets the current and future training and testing needs of the Action Proponents to meet their respective national defense missions as prescribed by Congress. Under Alternative 1, the Action Proponents analyzed a representative year of training and testing to account for natural fluctuations of training cycles, testing programs, deployment schedules, and the use of synthetic training opportunities. Alternative 1 represents the necessary level of activity to meet the Action Proponents' requirements as currently projected. With implementation of the mitigation measures identified in the AFTT Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS and associated regulatory documents developed in consultations with NMFS, the USFWS, and states adjacent to the AFTT Study Area, and adherence to management plans and monitoring requirements described herein and in the AFTT Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS, environmental impacts associated with implementing Alternative 1 will be minimized. In addition, the DON assessed the effects of Alternative 1 in accordance with Executive Order 12114 and concluded that there would be no significant harm to the environment in areas outside the United States, its territories, and possessions.

9 Oct 2025

Date



Elmer L. Roman
Performing the Duties of the Assistant Secretary
of the Navy
(Energy, Installations and Environment)