

**UNITED STATES COAST GUARD (COAST GUARD) RECORD OF DECISION FOR ATLANTIC FLEET
TRAINING AND TESTING (AFTT) SUPPLEMENTAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT (EIS)
AND OVERSEAS ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT (OEIS)**

The Coast Guard decision:

The Coast Guard has decided to implement Alternative 1, the preferred Alternative, as described in the Final AFTT Supplemental EIS/OEIS, including the full suite of mitigation measures outlined in Chapter 5 (Mitigation) and associated regulatory documents. Alternative 1 enables the Coast Guard to conduct training and testing activities in the AFTT Study Area to meet current and future readiness requirements for the eleven statutory missions under 14 U.S.C. § 102. Under Alternative 1, the Coast Guard analyzed a representative year of training described in Chapter 2 and Appendix C, to account for natural fluctuations of training cycles, deployment schedules, and the use of synthetic training opportunities. The training conducted in support of the Coast Guard's defense missions is very similar to the training conducted to support the remaining statutory missions. Alternative 1 represents the minimal level of activity necessary to meet the Coast Guard's requirements.

The purpose and need for the action is:

To ensure that Coast Guard personnel are qualified to conduct training and testing, both jointly with the Navy and independently, to support the effective and safe operation of cutters, boats, aircraft, and weapons in realistic scenarios. The need is to maintain readiness to promote national security and prosperity in peacetime, support prompt and sustained combat operations at sea, and meet wartime requirements, consistent with 14 U.S.C. § 102 and 10 U.S.C. § 8062.

The Coast Guard's training supports all eleven statutory missions: marine environmental protection, living marine resources, ports and waterway security, other law enforcement, drug interdiction, migrant interdiction, aids to navigation, ice operations, marine safety, search and rescue, and defense readiness (14 U.S.C. § 102). Because Coast Guard units must be prepared to execute any mission at any time, training is largely standardized across missions. For example, a ship boarding training event conducted for law enforcement has the same limited environmental impact to the environment to the one performed for drug interdiction or defense readiness, ensuring operational consistency across mission requirements. Similarly, Coast Guard training events have the same limited environmental impacts when these events are conducted under an operational scenario. (Appendix C, AFTT SEIS/OEIS).

This ROD and the AFTT Final SEIS/OEIS comprehensively analyze all Coast Guard activities in the Study Area, including training, testing, and operations, and found the impacts to be not significant. As a multi-mission agency, all Coast Guard training conducts in support of national defense also supports the Coast Guard's other statutory missions' requirements.

The SEIS/OEIS provides updated analyses to support authorizations under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), and consultations under ESA, Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA), and other laws, ensuring legal coverage for activities not previously addressed.

Alternatives examined are:

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

1. **No Action Alternative:** No training or testing would occur in the Study Area. This alternative fails to meet the Coast Guard's statutory mandates under 14 U.S.C. § 102, as it would prevent readiness for national defense, law enforcement, and other missions, rendering it unreasonable and not meeting the Coast Guard's purpose and need (see Section 1.4, Purpose and Need).
2. **Alternative 1 (Preferred):** Reflects a representative year of training and testing, accounting for fluctuations in training cycles, deployment schedules, and synthetic training opportunities. It includes ongoing and new activities necessary to meet readiness requirements into the reasonably foreseeable future to meet the Coast Guard's statutory mandates. (Appendix C, AFTT SEIS/OEIS).
3. **Alternative 2:** Reflects the maximum level of training and testing annually over a 7-year period, accommodating potential increases in national security demands. While feasible, it exceeds the minimum necessary to meet current requirements. This would allow for the greatest capacity for the Coast Guard to

maintain readiness when considering potential changes in the national security environment, fluctuations in training and deployment schedules, and potential in-theater demands.

I selected the preferred alternative because it:

Meets Statutory Mandates: Ensures readiness for all eleven missions under 14 U.S.C. § 102, enabling the Coast Guard to respond to emergent situations (e.g., search and rescue, border enforcement) while supporting national defense.

Minimizes Environmental Impacts: The Coast Guard's activities listed in Chapter 2 and Appendix C (e.g., gunnery exercises, maritime security operations) have less than significant impacts to the environment. Mitigation measures, such as lookouts trained in wildlife detection and geographic restrictions, further reduce risks to marine mammals, and all prudent measures are taken to avoid significant impacts to marine life (Chapter 5, AFTT SEIS/OEIS).

Incorporates Best Available Science: The SEIS/OEIS uses updated marine mammal density data and acoustic effects models, ensuring accurate impact assessments (Chapter 3, AFTT SEIS/OEIS).

The following are the economic, technical, Coast Guard statutory mission, national policy considerations (as applicable) that were weighed in reaching my decision: [Explain how these considerations, as applicable, entered the decision-making.]

The Final Supplemental AFTT EIS/OEIS evaluated the expected social, economic, and environmental effects resulting from implementing the action alternatives and the No Action Alternative. The Supplemental EIS/OEIS analyzed the proposed changes to the types and tempo of training and testing activities, accounting for the introduction of new technologies, the evolving nature of international events, advances in warfighting doctrine and procedures, and changes in the organization and quantities of vessels, aircraft, weapons systems, and personnel.

The Study Area includes areas of the western Atlantic Ocean along the east coast of North America, Gulf of America, and portions of the Caribbean Sea. It also includes Navy and Coast Guard pier-side locations and port transit channels, bays, harbors, inshore waterways, and civilian ports where training and testing activities occur as well as transits between homeports and operating areas. Coast Guard proposed activities are consistent with those analyzed in the 2018 Final AFTT EIS/OEIS and are representative of training and testing activities the Coast Guard has been conducting in the Study Area for decades.

The Coast Guard has broad, multifaceted, jurisdictional authority for management of activities over all waters subject to the jurisdiction of the United States. The Coast Guard is required to, "maintain a readiness to assist in the defense of the United States, including when functioning as a specialized service in the Navy pursuant to section 103."

Considerations in Decision-Making:

- **Economic:** Training in the Study Area leverages existing infrastructure, reducing costs compared to developing new training areas.
- **Technical:** Standardized training across missions enhances operational efficiency and safety.
- **Statutory Missions:** Alternative 1 supports the Coast Guard's role as an armed force (14 U.S.C. § 1) and its multifaceted responsibilities, including environmental protection and law enforcement.
- **National Policy:** Aligns with national security objectives and environmental stewardship, as mandated by NEPA, the MMPA, ESA, and other laws.

All practicable means of avoiding or minimizing environmental harm from the selected alternative were adopted because:

Pursuant to Section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, Sections 4321 et seq. of Title 42 U.S.C., the Coast Guard is following current Coast Guard NEPA policy (Commandant Instruction 5090.1). The Coast Guard assessed the environmental impact of, and alternatives to, the Proposed Action as described in the Final AFTT Supplemental EIS/OEIS and concluded that the Proposed Action will have no significant effect on the environment with the incorporation of mitigation measures. The Coast Guard assessed the effects of Alternative 1 in accordance with E.O. 12114 and concluded that there would be no significant harm to the environment in areas

outside the United States, its territories, and possessions. With implementation of the mitigation measures identified in the AFTT Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS and associated regulatory documents developed in consultations with National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), states, and territories adjacent to the AFTT Study Area, and adherence to management plans and monitoring requirements described herein, environmental impacts associated with implementing Alternative 1 will be minimized.

The following mitigation, monitoring, and enforcement actions have been adopted (if applicable):

The terms “mitigation” and “mitigation measures” mean actions taken to completely avoid, partially reduce, or minimize the potential for a stressor to impact a resource. The Coast Guard 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. Mitigation measures may influence the way the Coast Guard trains. The Coast Guard is willing to accept a certain level of impact on their defense / military readiness activities, such as avoiding training in biologically important areas, to implement mitigation that is expected to be sufficiently beneficial (i.e., effective) at avoiding specific impacts from the Proposed Action. In coordination with the appropriate regulatory agencies, the Coast Guard developed mitigation measures to avoid or reduce potential impacts under whichever action alternative is selected. Chapter 5 (Mitigation) 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.

The AFTT SEIS/OEIS analyzed impacts to biological resources (e.g., marine mammals, sea turtles), water quality, air quality, noise, cultural resources, socioeconomic resources, and public safety. Coast Guard activities, primarily involving vessel movements, gunnery exercises, and maritime security operations, have minimal impacts (Appendix C, AFTT SEIS/OEIS).

Mitigation measures for the Coast Guard within the AFTT Study Area fall into three categories: standard; activity-based; or geography based. There are many activities and associated mitigations discussed in Chapter 5 of the AFTT SEIS/OEIS, the MMPA Letter of Authorization, and the ESA Biological Opinion that do not apply to the Coast Guard due to differences in mission requirements from the Navy. The Coast Guard will incorporate (if not already incorporated) the applicable mitigation based on activity, geography, and time of year through use of the Protective Measures Assessment Protocol (PMAP) system. The Coast Guard is implementing PMAP as a mitigation measure for the AFTT SEIS/OEIS.

Mitigation Measures: The Coast Guard incorporates all mitigation measures from Chapter 5 of the AFTT SEIS/OEIS, including:

- **Standard Mitigation:** Lookouts trained in wildlife detection, night vision use, and safe navigation speeds to avoid collisions and whale strikes (Section 5.2, AFTT SEIS/OEIS).
- **Activity-Based Mitigation:** The Coast Guard activities that have mitigation identified include those that apply to manned surface vessels; weapons firing noise; explosive gunnery (medium caliber and large caliber); non-explosive gunnery (small, medium, and large caliber); and unmanned vehicles (including underwater vehicles). The requirements that the Coast Guard will follow are listed Section 5.3, AFTT SEIS/OEIS.
- **Geographic Mitigation:** Those identified are: shallow water reef mitigation areas; artificial reefs; live hard-bottom areas; submerged aquatic vegetation areas; shipwreck mitigation areas; Key West Range Complex Seafloor; South Florida Ocean Measurement Facility Seafloor; Nearshore North Carolina Sandbar Shark and Sea Turtle; Northeast North Atlantic Right Whale (NARW); Gulf of Maine NARW; Jacksonville Operational Area NARW; Southeast NARW; Dynamic NARW; and the Rice’s Whale mitigation area. (Section 5.4, AFTT SEIS/OEIS).
- **Protective Measures Assessment Protocol (PMAP):** A system to ensure compliance with mitigation requirements.

These measures, developed in consultation with NMFS and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, ensure negligible impacts on marine mammal populations and no jeopardy to ESA-listed species, as confirmed by NMFS’s Biological Opinion (scheduled for September 8, 2025). The Coast Guard’s MMPA application (submitted May 21, 2024) and anticipated Letters of Authorization further specify take limits and monitoring requirements.

Monitoring and Reporting: The Coast Guard will participate in NMFS's marine species monitoring meetings, report observed injuries or mortalities of ESA-listed species and engage in adaptive management to incorporate new science (Section 5.5, AFTT SEIS/OEIS).

The Coast Guard has been mitigating impacts from military readiness activities on environmental and cultural resources throughout areas where it trains and tests for decades. In coordination with the appropriate regulatory agencies, the Coast Guard developed mitigation measures to avoid or reduce potential impacts under whichever action alternative is selected. Chapter 5 (Mitigation) 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.

The Navy and Coast Guard are some of the nation's largest sponsors of scientific research on, and monitoring of, protected marine species. Many of the Coast Guard missions provide a direct and measurable positive impact on the marine environment, to include marine mammals, birds, coral reefs, and fishes.

Through the Marine Environmental Protection program, the Coast Guard develops and enforces regulations to avert the introduction of invasive species into the maritime environment, stop unauthorized ocean dumping, and prevent oil and chemical spills. The Coast Guard serves as the Federal On-Scene Coordinator for oil spills and hazardous waste incidents in the marine environment. In this capacity, the Coast Guard oversees the clean-up of the marine environment, including authorizing wildlife operations to do reconnaissance and recovery of marine mammals (and other animals impacted). In a time of conflict, the Coast Guard would perform this function as a defense mission if there were oil spill, whether it be a result of the conflict or intentionally done by an adversary. The Coast Guard spends tens of millions of dollars annually protecting living marine resources, to include an estimated \$65 million in fiscal year 2021 enforcing the ESA. The Coast Guard is also a member of the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) marine mammal stranding network and, in this capacity, assists NMFS and stranding response partners in aiding marine mammals in distress. Coast Guard assets have also been used to transport marine mammals to be taken in for rehabilitation or release.

To safely perform these statutory missions that provide direct benefits to the environment, the Coast Guard must provide its people realistic training. Defense training involving aircraft and surface craft, and all the missions that relate to the usage of these assets, directly correlate to the training necessary for the Coast Guard to perform all their missions. The training utilized in support of defense readiness directly overlaps with many of the other Coast Guard missions that rely on ship and aircraft operations. Coast Guard personnel not only may perform these missions supporting the Navy and the Defense Readiness mission, but they also require the same skills for their law enforcement, marine protection, and other related missions.

The Coast Guard will report in accordance with the MMPA authorizations granted by NMFS. The Coast Guard will continue to report all observed injury or mortality of any ESA-listed species resulting from the proposed training and testing activities within the action area.

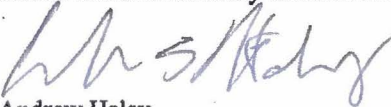
Public Involvement and Consultations

The Navy and Coast Guard conducted extensive public outreach, including:

- **Scoping:** Notice of Intent published November 17, 2023 (88 Fed. Reg. 80286), with 15 comments received.
- **Draft SEIS/OEIS:** Notice of Availability published September 20, 2024, with three in-person and two virtual public meetings held in October 2024.
- **Consultations:** Completed or ongoing under the ESA, MMPA, CZMA, National Historic Preservation Act, and Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, as detailed in the AFTT SEIS/OEIS (Appendix N).

Conclusion

The Coast Guard's selection of Alternative 1 ensures readiness for its statutory missions while minimizing environmental impacts through robust mitigation. The AFTT SEIS/OEIS demonstrates that Coast Guard activities have de minimis effects, and provides legal compliance with NEPA, MMPA, ESA, and other laws.

I reviewed the environmental impact statement (EIS)/Record of Decision (ROD) and submitted my written comments to the Proponent.		
09 SEP 2025	 Jessica Hogan Environmental Reviewer ¹	Natural Resources Program Manager <u>Level II</u>
I reviewed the EIS/ROD and submitted my written comments to the Proponent.		
09 SEP 2025	 Andrew Haley Senior Environmental Professional ¹	Chief, Office of Environmental Management <u>Level III</u>
I have reviewed the EIS/ROD and submitted my written comments to the Proponent.		
09 SEP 2025	 Maryam Khan Legal Reviewer ¹	NEPA Attorney Environmental Law Division
In reaching my decision/recommendation on the Coast Guard's proposed action, I considered the information contained in this EIS/ROD and considered and acknowledge the written comments submitted to me from the Environmental and Legal Reviewers.		
GRABLE.AMY B.1011787408 Proponent ¹		Digitally signed by GRABLE.AMY.B.1011787408 Date: 2025.09.23 12:50:54 -04'00' <u>Assistant Commandant for Capability</u>

¹ A Coast Guard attorney in District Legal, Legal Services Command, or Commandant (CG-LMI-E) must sign as Legal Reviewer. The individual that signs as the Proponent cannot also sign as Environmental Reviewer or Senior Environmental Professional. All signatories must be Coast Guard military or federal employees. Contractors must not sign Coast Guard environmental planning documents.