HAWAII-CALIFORNIA TRAINING AND TESTING

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT/ OVERSEAS ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

www.nepa.navy.mil/hctteis/
December 2023

Introduction

Military personnel must be ready to respond to any situation that may arise, ranging from large-scale conflict to maritime security operations to humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. Their success is contingent upon realistic training that prepares them to respond to an emergency situation or an act of aggression at a moment's notice. Maintaining rigorous, comprehensive training regimens ensures ships and Sailors are ready to deploy on schedule and prepares military personnel to carry out their duties as required.

Military research, development, testing, and evaluation activities are also critical for maintaining readiness. The Department of Defense continually researches and develops new technologies to ensure the U.S. military remains the most capable in the world. These technologies must be tested and evaluated before military personnel can rely on them in combat or an emergency.

To meet training and testing requirements, the U.S. Department of the Navy (Navy) is preparing an Environmental Impact Statement/Overseas Environmental Impact Statement (EIS/OEIS) to assess the potential environmental effects associated with the Proposed Action to conduct at-sea military readiness activities within the Hawaii-California Training and Testing (HCTT) Study Area, referred to as the "Study Area" (Figure 1). The Navy also proposes to modernize and sustain its ranges in a manner necessary to support these readiness activities.

Proposed Action

At-sea military readiness activities, which were last analyzed in the 2018 Hawaii-Southern California Training and Testing (HSTT) EIS/OEIS and the 2022 Point Mugu Sea Range (PMSR) EIS/OEIS, include training and research, development, testing, and evaluation activities (referred to as "training and testing"). Proposed training and testing activities may include the use of active sonar, explosives, and other sources of underwater sound. The Navy would continue to employ appropriate marine species protective mitigation measures when conducting these activities.

Modernization and sustainment proposals include new special use airspace in Southern California, an expansion of an underwater training range near San Clemente Island, and installation and maintenance of mine training areas off Hawaii and Southern California.

Proposed training and testing activities are similar to those analyzed in previous environmental impact analyses and are representative of activities that have been conducted off Hawaii and California for more than 80 years.

The Proposed Action is needed to ensure U.S. military services are able to organize, train, and equip service members and personnel to meet their respective national defense missions in accordance with their Congressionally mandated requirements.

The development of the EIS/OEIS will help sustain the readiness of the Navy and other participating U.S. military services by:

- Supporting current and future training and testing requirements
- Increasing flexibility in conducting training and testing activities
- Modernizing and sustaining range capabilities
- Updating environmental impact analyses using the best available science and analytical methods
- Supporting Marine Mammal Protection Act and Endangered Species Act consultations for the reissuance of federal regulatory permits and authorizations within the Study Area

Realistic training and testing are crucial for military readiness, personnel safety, and national defense.

Importance of At-Sea Training

Seventy percent of the earth is covered in water, 80 percent of the planet's population lives in proximity to coastal areas, and 90 percent of global commerce is conducted by sea. The Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard are required by law to be ready at all times to defend the United States by conducting operations at sea, which is essential to protecting and defending the United States, its territories, allies, and national interests.

Importance of Navy Testing

The Navy's research, acquisition, and testing community includes research organizations, laboratory facilities, and testing centers. This community researches, develops, acquires, and evaluates weapons, systems, manned and unmanned aircraft, surface ships, submarines, unmanned underwater vehicles, and other specialized technologies which give the U.S. military services a technological advantage over potential adversaries.

Navy training and testing includes the use of active sonar and explosives to prepare military personnel to successfully counter hostile threats. Active sonar is the most effective method of detecting modern, quieter submarines and underwater mines.

Hawaii-California Training and Testing Study Area

The HCTT Study Area consists primarily of the Hawaii Operating Area (OPAREA) and Temporary OPAREA, the California OPAREA, and the transit corridor connecting the two (Figure 1). The Study Area includes only the at-sea components of the range complexes, Navy pierside 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. For this EIS/OEIS, "at-sea components" include the marine environment around San Nicolas Island where marine mammals haul out on the shoreline. Missile and target firings from San Nicolas Island that could disturb the marine mammals are included in this analysis. Aside from this one exception, no other terrestrial impacts will be covered in the EIS/OEIS.

The HCTT Study Area (for the "Phase IV" analysis) differs from the 2018 HSTT Study Area (for the "Phase III" analysis) in that it includes (Figure 2):

- An extended Southern California Range Complex
- Special use airspace corresponding to the new extensions in California (the proposed W-293 and the proposed W-294)
- Two existing training and testing at-sea ranges, the PMSR and the Northern California (NOCAL) Range Complex
- Areas along the Southern California coastline from approximately Dana Point to Port Hueneme
- Four amphibious approach lanes providing land access from the NOCAL Range Complex and PMSR

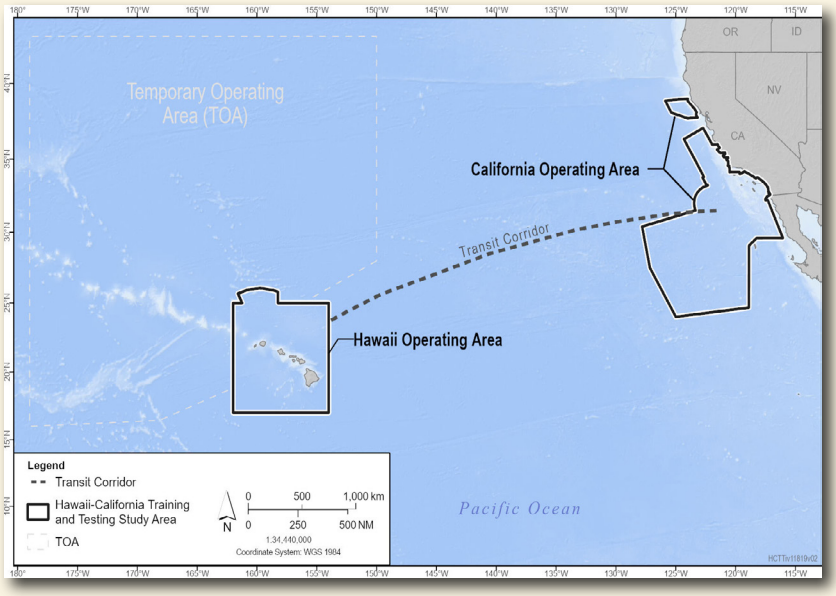

Figure 1. The Hawaii-California Training and Testing Study Area.

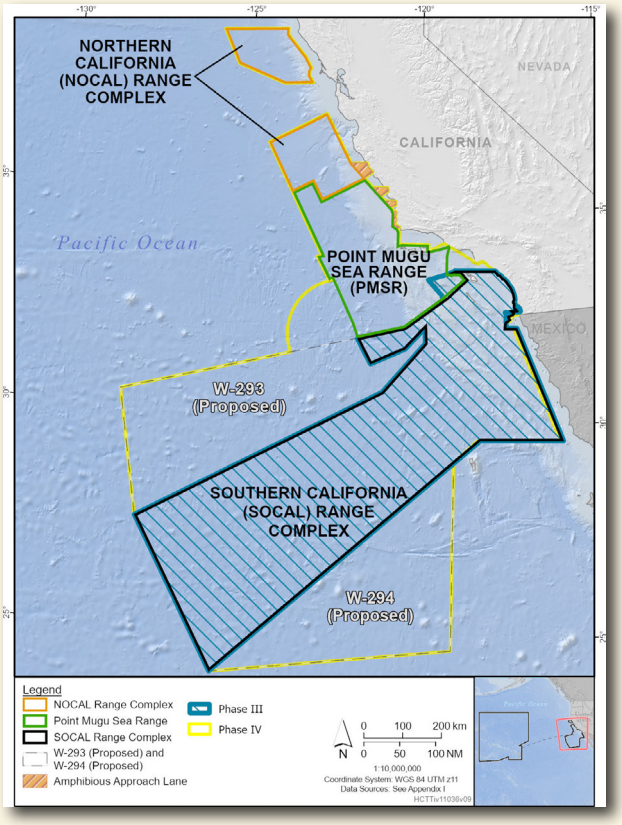

Figure 2. Areas outlined in yellow show the changes to the California OPAREA from the 2018 HSTT Study Area (Phase III analysis) to the new HCTT Study Area (Phase IV analysis).

National Environmental Policy Act Process

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is a U.S. law that requires federal agencies to identify and analyze the potential environmental impacts of a proposed action before deciding whether to proceed with that action. The law encourages and facilitates public involvement to inform decision makers on actions that may affect the community or the environment.

Resources to Be Evaluated

The Navy will analyze the direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts the Proposed Action may have on the human, natural, and cultural environments, including:

- Marine mammals
- Reptiles
- Fishes
- Vegetation
- Invertebrates
- Habitats
- Birds
- Sediments and water quality
- Air quality
- Cultural resources
- Socioeconomic resources
- Public health and safety

The Navy invited the National Marine Fisheries Service and the Federal Aviation Administration to be cooperating agencies in the preparation of the EIS/OEIS.

Amy Kennedy, NOAA Fisheries Service

Environmental Protection at Sea

It is important to the Navy and Coast Guard to avoid or minimize impacts on marine species from at-sea activities. The Navy and Coast Guard follow strict guidelines and employ measures that reduce potential effects on marine species while training or testing, such as:

- Observing the area prior to activities
- Posting qualified Lookouts to observe for marine species
- Establishing activity-based mitigation zones
- Implementing seasonal and geographic mitigations
- Maneuvering vessels to maintain distance from observed marine species

The Navy is a world leader in marine species research, investing over $20 million in research each year, and is dedicated to protecting the marine and coastal environments as it trains and tests.

NEPA SCHEDULE

Notice of Intent to Prepare an EIS/OEIS Dec. 15, 2023
Scoping and Section 106 Comment Period Dec. 15, 2023 – Jan. 29, 2024
Notice of Availability of the Draft EIS/OEIS Fall 2024
Draft EIS/OEIS and Section 106 Public Review and Comment Period Fall 2024
Notice of Availability of the Final EIS/OEIS Fall 2025
30-Day Wait Period Fall 2025
Record of Decision Late 2025

Opportunity for Public Review and Comment Under NEPA and NHPA Section 106

Opportunity for Public Review Under NEPA

Public Involvement

Public involvement is a fundamental aspect of the NEPA process, and there are opportunities for the public to participate in the development of the EIS/OEIS. The Navy welcomes and appreciates the public's participation.

Public and agency input allows decision makers to consider community concerns and benefit from local knowledge. The public participates in the NEPA process during the following stages:

- **Scoping Period:** Help to identify the scope of the analysis, including potential environmental issues and viable alternatives.
- **Draft EIS/OEIS Public Review and Comment Period:** Evaluate and provide substantive comments on the draft analysis.
- **Final EIS/OEIS 30-Day Wait Period:** Review the Final EIS/OEIS and Navy responses to substantive comments received on the Draft EIS/OEIS.

National Historic Preservation Act Section 106

The National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) is a law that requires federal agencies to consider the potential effects of their actions on historic properties and look for ways to avoid, minimize, or mitigate them. This public scoping effort will support consultation under Section 106 of the NHPA and its implementing regulations at 36 Code of Federal Regulations part 800, as members of the public are invited to participate, provide comments, or raise concerns.

Public involvement is an important part of the NHPA Section 106 process. The Navy encourages the public to share information and concerns regarding historic properties by providing a written comment. Historic properties may include archaeological sites, sacred and religious sites, submerged historic resources, traditional cultural properties, or historic buildings, structures, or objects. You may submit a comment, or a request for information on the NHPA Section 106 consultation process and how you may participate, via the project website or to the address provided in the Submitting Comments section.

Please share this information to help inform your community.

NOAA/NMFS

Public involvement is a fundamental aspect of the NEPA and NHPA Section 106 processes. The Navy welcomes and appreciates the public's participation.

Submitting Comments

The Navy invites the public to comment on the scope of the EIS/OEIS including identification of potential alternatives and environmental concerns, information and analyses relevant to the Proposed Action, issues that should be addressed in the NEPA analysis, and the project's potential to affect historic properties pursuant to Section 106 of the NHPA. Comments submitted via the project website or by mail will be considered under NEPA and pursuant to Section 106 of the NHPA.

The public is encouraged to submit comments during the scoping period. Comments must be postmarked or received online no later than 11:59 p.m. PST on **Jan. 29, 2024**, for consideration in the Draft EIS/OEIS. Comments may be submitted via the project website at **www.nepa.navy.mil/hctteis/** or by mail to:

Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command Pacific
Attention: HCTT EIS/OEIS Project Manager
258 Makalapa Drive, Suite 100
Pearl Harbor, HI 96860-3134

Ralph Pace, NOAA Fisheries Service

VIRTUAL OPEN HOUSE PRESENTATION

The Navy is hosting a virtual open house presentation on the project website to provide the public with information related to the Proposed Action, its purpose and need, environmental resource areas to be analyzed in the EIS/OEIS, the NEPA process, the NHPA Section 106 process, and public involvement opportunities.

The public can view the virtual open house presentation at **www.nepa.navy.mil/hctteis/** anytime during the scoping period from **Dec. 15, 2023, to Jan. 29, 2024**.