

**Draft**  
**Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement/  
Overseas Environmental Impact Statement**  
**Atlantic Fleet Training and Testing**

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# 1 PURPOSE AND NEED

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

The United States (U.S.) Department of the Navy (including both the U.S. Navy and the U.S. Marine Corps) and the U.S. Coast Guard as a Joint Lead Agency (hereinafter jointly referred to as the Action Proponents or Naval Services) have prepared this Supplement to the *2018 Final Atlantic Fleet Training and Testing Environmental Impact Statement/Overseas Environmental Impact Statement* (EIS/OEIS) (U.S. Department of the Navy, 2018) (hereinafter referred to as the 2018 Final EIS/OEIS) pursuant to 40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) section 1502.9(d)(2). The Action Proponents propose to conduct training activities and research, development, testing, and evaluation (hereinafter referred to as “testing”) activities in the Atlantic Fleet Training and Testing (AFTT) Study Area (Figure 1.4-1). The Study Area includes areas of the western Atlantic Ocean along the east coast of North America, Gulf of Mexico, and portions of the Caribbean Sea. It also includes 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. Training and testing activities, also referred to as “military readiness activities,” prepare the Action Proponents to fulfill their mission to protect and defend the United States and its allies but have the potential to affect the environment. The Action Proponents prepared this Supplemental EIS/OEIS to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Executive Order 12114, *Environmental Effects Abroad of Major Federal Actions*, by assessing the potential environmental impacts associated with the proposed military readiness activities to be conducted within the Study Area.

This Supplemental EIS/OEIS was prepared to update the Navy’s assessment of the potential environmental impacts associated with proposed military readiness activities to be conducted in the Study Area. This Supplemental EIS/OEIS will analyze some modifications to the Proposed Action as well as to incorporate the continuing maturation of the science. It was prepared, using the best available science, to update the Navy’s assessment of the potential environmental impacts associated with proposed new and changed military readiness activities to be conducted in the Study Area. Additionally, this Supplemental EIS/OEIS analysis of impacts on the marine environment has resulted in different impacts from the previous EIS. Finally, this Supplemental EIS/OEIS also supports the regulatory reauthorization under various environmental statutes, to include the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) and the Endangered Species Act (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 for decades. These military readiness activities include the use of active sonar and other acoustic sources, as well as the use of explosives.

Meanwhile, the world is quickly transitioning into a new age of warfare, one in which the integration of information, technology, and artificial intelligence will promote or degrade deterrence and determine victory in conflict. As the world has seen in recent conflicts, inexpensive dual-use and commercial off-the-shelf products and component parts are being increasingly utilized to destroy far more costly and advanced military systems, while small, armed groups have been able to credibly threaten international maritime shipping and global trade.

In this new era, the United States must always be ready to defend our national interests anywhere, anytime. Combat-ready naval services—forward-deployed and integrated with all elements of national power—remains our nation’s most potent, flexible, and versatile instruments of military influence and deterrence against malign actors. As the United States responds to this changing security environment, our naval forces will forward deploy with a ready, capable, combat-credible fleet. The Action Proponents will conduct military readiness activities to maintain and advance our maritime dominance in the defense of our nation; train our Sailors, Marines, and Coast Guardsmen; and strengthen our strategic partnerships across the globe. “Flanked by two oceans, the United States is and has always been a maritime nation. Our

economy, like the world's economy, flows through the sea. Ninety percent of global trade travels by sea. Ninety-five percent of international communications and roughly 10 trillion dollars in financial transactions each day transit via undersea fiber-optic cables. In the U.S., seaborne trade carries more tonnage and value than any other mode of transportation, generating 5.4 trillion dollars in annual commerce and supporting 31 million American jobs. There is no doubt: the seas are the lifeblood of our economy, our national security, and our way of life.”<sup>1</sup>

## 1.2 THE NAVY'S ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLIANCE AND AT-SEA POLICY

The Navy instituted the “At-Sea Policy” in 2000 to ensure compliance with applicable environmental regulations and policies and preserve the flexibility necessary for the Navy and Marine Corps to train and test at sea. This policy directed, in part, that Fleet Commanders develop a programmatic approach to environmental compliance at sea for ranges and operating areas within their respective geographic areas of responsibility (U.S. Department of the Navy, 2000).

The Navy is currently in the fourth phase of implementing this programmatic approach, which covers similar types of Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard military readiness activities in essentially the same Study Area analyzed in the 2018 Final EIS/OEIS. For further discussion of the first three phases, please see the 2018 Final EIS/OEIS [Section 1.2](#) (The Navy's Environmental Compliance and At-Sea Policy).

## 1.3 PROPOSED ACTION

The Proposed Action is to conduct military readiness activities in the Study Area (Figure 1.4-1). These proposed activities are generally consistent with those analyzed in the 2018 Final EIS/OEIS and are representative of the activities the Action Proponents have been conducting in the Study Area for decades. A detailed description of the Proposed Action is provided in [Chapter 2](#) (Description of Proposed Action and Alternatives).

## 1.4 PURPOSE AND NEED

The Action Proponents and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) (as a cooperating agency under the provisions of NEPA) have coordinated from the outset and have developed this document to meet each agency's separate and distinct obligations and to support the independent decision making of all agencies. 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 national defense missions in accordance with their Congressionally mandated requirements.<sup>2</sup> These missions are achieved in part by conducting military readiness activities within the Study Area in accordance with established Department of the Navy military readiness requirements.

The U.S. Coast Guard's purpose for the Proposed Action is to ensure Coast Guard personnel can qualify and train jointly with, and independently of, the Navy and other services in the effective and safe operational use of Coast Guard vessels, aircraft, and weapons under realistic conditions. These activities help ensure that the Coast Guard can safely protect our nation's maritime safety, security, and natural resources in accordance with its national defense mission under the authority of 14 United States Code (U.S.C.) section 102.

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<sup>1</sup> Admiral Lisa Franchetti, 33rd Chief of Naval Operations on the posture of the U.S. Navy before the House Committee on Appropriations, April 10, 2024

<sup>2</sup> See Title 10, sections 8062 (Navy), 8063 (U.S. Marine Corps), and Title 14, sections 101 and 102 U.S.C. (U.S. Coast Guard)



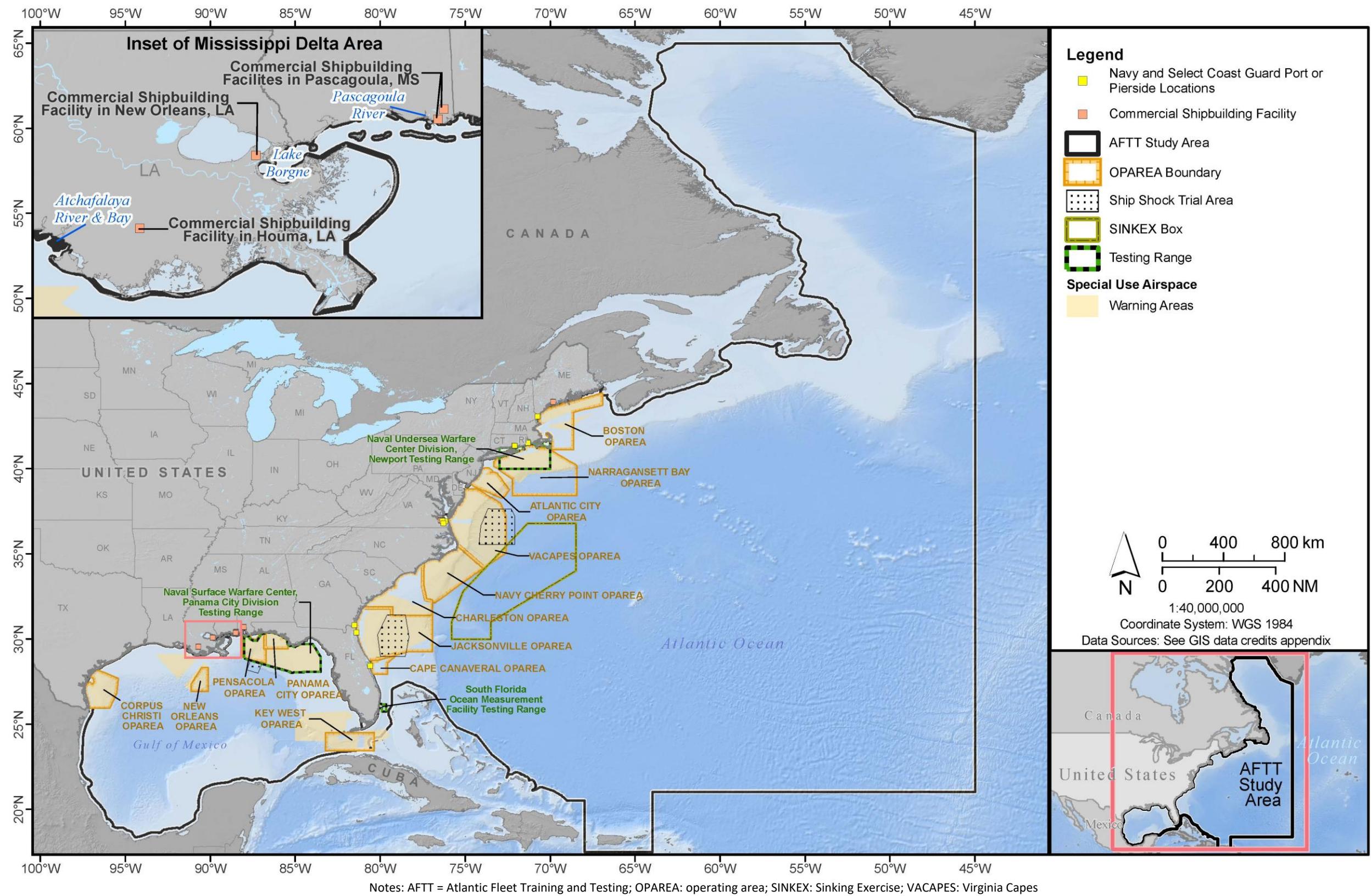


Figure 1.4-1: Atlantic Fleet Training and Testing Study Area

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The Action Proponents will request authorization to “take” marine mammals incidental to conducting military readiness activities in the Study Area. Take under the MMPA is defined in 16 U.S.C. section 1362 as “to harass, hunt, capture, or kill, or attempt to harass, hunt, capture, or kill any marine mammal.” For military readiness activities, harassment is defined under this section as “(i) any act that injures or has the significant potential to injure a marine mammal or marine mammal stock in the wild [Level A harassment] or (ii) any act that disturbs or is likely to disturb a marine mammal or marine mammal stock in the wild by causing disruption of natural behavioral patterns, including, but not limited to, migration, surfacing, nursing, breeding, feeding, or sheltering, to a point where such behavioral patterns are abandoned or significantly altered [Level B harassment].”

Incidental take authorizations provide an exception to the take prohibition in the MMPA and ensure that the Proposed Action complies with the MMPA and implementing regulations. Incidental take authorizations may be issued as regulations and associated Letters of Authorization under section 101(a)(5)(A) of the MMPA. The Action Proponents are requesting a rulemaking and the issuance of Letters of Authorization for the Proposed Action.

NMFS’s purpose is to evaluate the Action Proponents’ Proposed Action pursuant to its authority under the MMPA, and to make a determination whether to issue incidental take authorizations and Letters of Authorization, including any conditions necessary to meet the statutory mandates of the MMPA. To issue an incidental take authorization, NMFS must evaluate the best available scientific information and find that the take will have a negligible impact on the affected marine mammal species or stocks and will not have an unmitigable impact on their availability for taking for subsistence uses (the latter finding is not relevant for this Proposed Action). NMFS cannot issue an incidental take authorization unless it can make the required findings. NMFS must also prescribe permissible methods of taking, other “means of affecting the least practicable adverse impact” on the affected species or stocks and their habitat, and monitoring and reporting requirements. The need for NMFS’s action is to consider the impacts of the Proposed Action on marine mammals and meet NMFS’s obligations under the MMPA. This Supplemental EIS/OEIS analyzes the environmental impacts associated with issuance of the requested incidental take authorizations for military readiness activities within the Study Area. The analysis of mitigation measures considers benefits to species or stocks and their habitat and also analyzes the practicability and efficacy of each measure. This analysis of mitigation measures was used to support requirements pertaining to mitigation, monitoring, and reporting that would be specified in final MMPA regulations and subsequent Letters of Authorization.

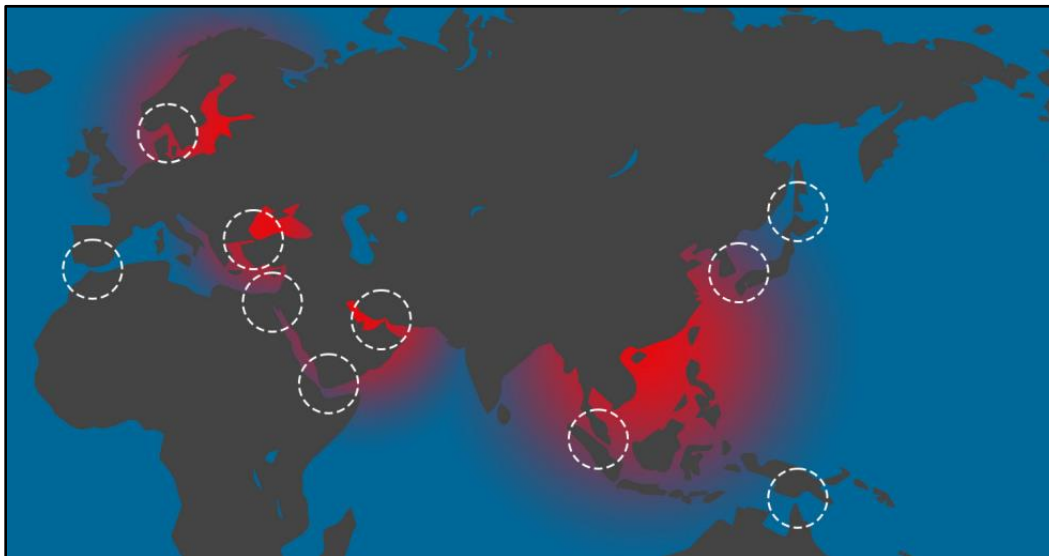
### **1.4.1 WHY THE NAVY TRAINS**

As stated in the Chief of Naval Operations Navigation Plan (U.S. Department of the Navy, 2022), “America remains a global leader with global interests. Households and businesses throughout the United States benefit from the steady flow of resources and goods across the oceans. Our modern economy depends on access to the internet, which rides upon undersea fiber-optic cables. As we look to the future, our economic and national security will continue to rely upon unrestricted seaborne trade, unimpeded access to markets, and a free and open rules-based order.” The Navy is statutorily mandated to promote the national security interests and prosperity of the United States and be prepared for prompt and sustained combat incident to operations at sea. These operations are critical in protecting U.S. national interests as 70 percent of Earth is covered in water, 80 percent of the planet’s population lives within close proximity to coastal areas, and 90 percent of global commerce is conducted by sea.

The Navy’s continuous presence on the world’s oceans allows it to respond to a wide variety of situations. On any given day, over one-third of the Navy’s ships, submarines, and aircraft are deployed to overseas locations such as those illustrated in Figure 1.4-2. Before deploying, Sailors and Marines train to develop an extensive range of capabilities to respond to threats, from full-scale armed conflict in



a variety of different geographic areas and environmental conditions to humanitarian assistance and disaster relief efforts. Training prepares Sailors and Marines to be proficient in operating and maintaining the equipment, weapons, and systems they will use to accomplish their assigned missions. Further, the Marine Corps is undergoing a sweeping transformation to fulfill its role as the nation's expeditionary force-in-readiness that can meet current and future threats while simultaneously modernizing to ensure it can respond to any crisis, anywhere in accordance with the operating environment described in the National Defense Strategy (U.S. Department of Defense, 2022) and the tri-Service maritime strategy (U.S. Department of the Navy, 2020). Refer to 2018 Final EIS/OEIS [Chapter 1, Section 1.4.1](#) (Why the Navy Trains) and [Section 1.4.2](#) (Optimized Fleet Response Plan) for additional information on Navy training.



Source: (U.S. Department of Defense, 2022)

**Figure 1.4-2: Key Maritime Regions and Geographic Choke Points under Increased Threat**

## 1.4.2 WHY THE NAVY TESTS

The Navy's research and acquisition community, including research organizations, laboratory facilities, and systems commands, provides weapons, systems, and platforms to the Action Proponents to support its missions and give it a technological advantage over the United States' potential adversaries. This community is at the forefront of researching, developing, testing, evaluating, acquiring, and delivering modern platforms, combat systems, and related equipment to meet Fleet capability and readiness requirements. The Navy's research organizations and laboratories concentrate primarily on the development of new science and technology to conduct the initial testing of concepts that are relevant to the Navy of the future. As a result, systems commands develop ship, aircraft, and weapons systems that support all Naval platforms throughout their life cycles, from acquisition through sustainment to end of life. Refer to 2018 Final EIS/OEIS [Chapter 1, Section 1.4.3](#) (Why the Navy Tests) for additional information on Navy testing.

The Action Proponents' research, acquisition, and testing community includes the following:

- Naval Air Systems Command, which develops, acquires, delivers, and sustains manned and unmanned naval aviation aircraft, weapons, and systems with proven capability and reliability to ensure Sailors and Marines achieve mission success.



- Naval Sea Systems Command, which develops, acquires, delivers, and maintains surface ships, submarines, unmanned vehicles, and weapon systems platforms to ensure Sailors and Marines achieve mission success.
- Office of Naval Research, which plans, fosters, encourages, and conducts a broad program of scientific research (at universities, industry, small businesses, etc.) that promotes future naval sea power, enhances national security, and meets the complex technological challenges of today's world. The Office of Naval Research is also a parent command for the Naval Research Laboratory, which operates as the Navy's corporate research laboratory and conducts a multidisciplinary program of scientific research.

The Navy's acquisition community also tests ships and systems that will be added to the Coast Guard's inventory. The U.S. Coast Guard uses the same systems and weapons as the Navy.

### **1.4.3 WHY THE UNITED STATES COAST GUARD TRAINS**

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's law enforcement and national defense mission authority is based in 14 U.S.C. section 102 (7), requiring the Coast Guard 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." The Coast Guard successfully achieves its missions in part by conducting training within the Study Area to develop, sharpen, and maintain tactics, coordination, and personnel readiness. This Supplemental EIS/OEIS studies the potential impacts caused by Coast Guard training activities in support of their various Department of Defense statutory mission requirements. The Coast Guard activities are discussed in detail in [Appendix C](#) (U.S. Coast Guard Supporting Information).

## **1.5 OVERVIEW AND STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF EXISTING RANGE COMPLEXES AND TESTING RANGES**

The range complexes and testing ranges analyzed in this Supplemental EIS/OEIS have existed for decades, many dating back to the 1940s. Range use and infrastructure have evolved over time as military readiness requirements in support of modern warfare have evolved. The Study Area for this Supplemental EIS/OEIS is nearly the same as that covered in the 2018 Final EIS/OEIS with the addition of some inshore waters and pierside testing locations adjacent to the Gulf of Mexico.

Proximity of the AFTT range complexes to Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard homeports and air stations creates efficiencies in the utilization of government resources as well as safe conditions in which forces may train and test. Action Proponents' homeports and air stations are equipped with robust search and rescue capabilities, medical facilities, and alternate airfields, all of which are necessary components of safety for military readiness activities. Proximity of ranges to homeports provides fuel savings, exposes equipment to less wear and tear, and ensures that Sailors, Marines, and Coast Guardsmen do not spend unnecessary time away from their families during the training cycle. Less time away from home is an important factor in military readiness, morale, and retention. The proximate availability of the AFTT range complexes is critical to the Action Proponents' efforts in these areas.

Systems commands and the Office of Naval Research also require access to realistic environments to conduct testing. The systems commands frequently conduct tests on Fleet range complexes and use Fleet assets to support the testing. The Study Area must provide the flexibility to meet diverse testing requirements, given the wide range of advanced platforms, systems, and capabilities that the Fleet and systems commands must demonstrate before certification for utilization by the Fleet. This is

important because testing in controlled conditions similar to those in which technology could be employed enhances combat readiness.

## 1.6 THE ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING PROCESS

NEPA and Executive Order 12114 require federal agencies to examine the applicable environmental impacts of their proposed actions within and outside the United States and its territories. An EIS/OEIS is a detailed public document that assesses the potential effects that a major federal action might have on the environment (including the natural and biological environment). The Navy undertakes environmental planning for Navy military readiness activities in accordance with applicable laws, regulations, and Executive Orders, including Executive Order 12114.

A Supplemental EIS is prepared when the agency makes substantial changes to the proposed action that are relevant to environmental concerns (40 CFR section 1502.9(d)(1)(i)), or there are substantial new circumstances or information about the significance of adverse effects that bear on the analysis (40 CFR section 1502.9(d)(1)(ii)). An agency may also supplement a Final EIS when the agency determines that the purpose of NEPA will be furthered by doing so (40 CFR section 1502.9(d)(2)).

New information specifically addressed in this Supplemental EIS/OEIS includes updates to military readiness activities and current best available science to include an updated Navy Acoustic Effects Model; updated marine mammal density estimates developed by the Navy in cooperation with NMFS; updated Criteria and Thresholds for Acoustic and Explosive Effects Analysis developed by the Navy in cooperation with NMFS; and changes to the Study Area. Using this updated information, the Action Proponents requested the reissuance of federal regulatory permits and authorizations under the MMPA and ESA as well as other environmental compliance documents to support military readiness activity requirements within the Study Area after the current authorizations and consultations expire in 2025.

The Action Proponents must comply with all applicable federal environmental laws, regulations, and Executive Orders as discussed in the 2018 Final EIS/OEIS. Further information can be found in [Chapter 6](#) (Regulatory Considerations) of this Supplemental EIS/OEIS.

## 1.7 SCOPE AND CONTENT

In this Supplemental EIS/OEIS, the Action Proponents have analyzed military readiness activities that could potentially affect human and natural resources, especially marine mammals, sea turtles, and other marine resources. Since the completion of the 2018 Final EIS/OEIS, the best available science has been updated, the regulatory environment has changed, the Study Area has been slightly modified, and what we know about our impacts has been refined. All of this has been incorporated into this Supplemental EIS/OEIS analysis. The range of alternatives includes the No Action Alternative and two action alternatives to the Proposed Action that are considered in this Supplemental EIS/OEIS. This Supplemental EIS/OEIS updates the 2018 analysis of direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts that may result from the Proposed Action. The U.S. Department of the Navy, in cooperation with the U.S. Coast Guard as Joint Lead Agency, is responsible for the scope and content of this Supplemental EIS/OEIS.

NMFS is a cooperating agency 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 for which they have special expertise, including marine mammals, threatened and endangered species, and essential fish habitat. NMFS' special expertise and authorities are based on statutory responsibilities under the MMPA, as amended (16 U.S.C. section 1361 et seq.), the ESA (16 U.S.C. section 1531 et seq.), and the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (16 U.S.C. section 1801 et seq.).

## 1.8 ORGANIZATION OF THIS SUPPLEMENTAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT/OVERSEAS ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

The organization of this Supplemental EIS/OEIS is shown in Table 1.8-1.

**Table 1.8-1. Organization of this Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement/  
Overseas Environmental Impact Statement**

<i>Chapter/ Appendix</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Description</i>
<a href="#">Chapter 1</a>	Purpose and Need	Purpose of and need for the Proposed Action
<a href="#">Chapter 2</a>	Description of the Proposed Action and Alternatives	Proposed Action, alternatives considered but eliminated in this Supplemental EIS/OEIS, and alternatives to be carried forward for analysis in this Supplemental EIS/OEIS
<a href="#">Chapter 3</a>	Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences	Existing conditions of the affected environment and analysis of the potential impacts of the proposed military readiness activities for each alternative
<a href="#">Chapter 4</a>	Cumulative Impacts	Analysis of cumulative impacts, which are the impacts of the Proposed Action when added to past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions
<a href="#">Chapter 5</a>	Mitigation	Describes the mitigation measures that will be implemented to avoid or reduce potential impacts
<a href="#">Chapter 6</a>	Regulatory Considerations	Considerations required under NEPA and description of how the Action Proponents comply with other federal, state, and local plans, policies, and regulations
<a href="#">Appendix A</a>	Activity Descriptions	A description of the proposed military readiness activities
<a href="#">Appendix B</a>	Activity Stressor Matrices	Relationship between stressors associated with the proposed military readiness activities and the environmental resources analyzed
<a href="#">Appendix C</a>	U.S. Coast Guard Supporting Information	Additional information on U.S. Coast Guard assets and missions
<a href="#">Appendix D</a>	Acoustic and Explosive Impacts Supporting Information	Background information on the acoustic and explosive energy, propagation, and methods used to determine how biological resources may be impacted
<a href="#">Appendix E</a>	Acoustic and Explosives Impacts Analysis	The analysis of how biological resources are potentially impacted by acoustic and explosive energy in the water
<a href="#">Appendix F</a>	Biological Resources Supplemental Information	Background and affected environment information on the biological resources found in the Study Area
<a href="#">Appendix G</a>	Non-Acoustic Impacts Supporting Information	Information and methods used to determine how biological resources may be impacted by non-acoustic stressors
<a href="#">Appendix H</a>	Air Quality Emissions Calculations	Background information, emission factor development, and calculations for the analysis of potential impacts to air quality
<a href="#">Appendix I</a>	Military Expended Materials and Direct Strike Impact Analysis	The methods, calculations, and results for quantifying the impacts to bottom substrate from explosions, the potential for military expended materials to strike a

**Table 1.8-1. Organization of this Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement/  
Overseas Environmental Impact Statement (continued)**

<i>Chapter/ Appendix</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Description</i>
		marine mammal or sea turtle, and the probability of a vessel strike to a marine mammal
<a href="#">Appendix J</a>	Cumulative Impacts Supporting Information	Additional information to support the <a href="#">Chapter 4</a> Cumulative Impacts discussion
<a href="#">Appendix K</a>	Activity Impact Determinations	The methods and significance determinations about activity level impacts to resources
<a href="#">Appendix L</a>	Agency Correspondence	Copies of correspondence between the Action Proponents and federal or state agencies with respect to cooperating agency status and regulatory compliance
<a href="#">Appendix M</a>	Public Involvement and Distribution	The Action Proponents' public scoping process, including copies of public notices, a list of stakeholders who were engaged via letter or email, and comments received by the Navy either via mail or electronic submittal.
<a href="#">Appendix N</a>	Federal Register Notices	Documents (notices, proposed rules, final rules) published to the <i>Federal Register</i> by the Action Proponents
<a href="#">Appendix O</a>	Geographic Information System Data Sources	A list of the Geographic Information System Data Sources used in the analysis by feature/layer
<a href="#">Appendix P</a>	List of Preparers	The key authors and reviewers of this Supplemental EIS/OEIS

Notes: AFTT = Atlantic Fleet Training and Testing; EIS = Environmental Impact Statement; NEPA = National Environmental Policy Act; OEIS = Overseas Environmental Impact Statement

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