

## **APPENDIX M**

# **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND DISTRIBUTION**

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**Draft**

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

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## **M PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND DISTRIBUTION**

This appendix describes the efforts to involve the public in preparing this Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)/Overseas Environmental Impact Statement (OEIS), including distribution of the Draft EIS/OEIS.

### **M.1 PROJECT WEBSITE**

A public website was established for this project: <https://www.nepa.navy.mil/aftteis>. This website address was published in the Notice of Intent to Prepare a Supplement to the 2018 *Final Atlantic Fleet Training and Testing Environmental Impact Statement/Overseas Environmental Impact Statement for Continuation of Navy Atlantic Fleet Training and Testing Activities* ([Appendix N](#), Federal Register Notices). It was subsequently reprinted in newspaper advertisements, agency letters, and emails for the Notice of Intent. The scoping fact sheets, public meeting fact sheets, technical reports, and various other materials are available on the project website and were made available throughout the course of the project.

### **M.2 SCOPING PERIOD**

The public scoping period began with issuance of the Notice of Intent in the *Federal Register* on November 17, 2023. This notice included a project description, website address, and instructions on how to provide comments. The scoping period lasted 30 days, concluding on December 16, 2023. The public was able to provide comments on the scope of the Supplemental EIS/OEIS during the scoping period via the project website or by mail.

#### **M.2.1 PUBLIC SCOPING NOTIFICATION**

The Action Proponents made significant efforts to notify the public to ensure maximum public participation during the scoping process. A summary of these efforts follows.

##### **M.2.1.1 Notification Letters**

Notice of Intent and Scoping Notification letters were distributed at the beginning of the scoping period (November 17, 2023) to federally recognized tribes; state-elected officials; and federal, regional, and state agencies. Entities that received the Scoping Notification letter can be found in Table M.2-1 and an example of the letter can be found in Figure M.2-1.

**Table M.2-1: Entities that Received the Scoping Notification Letter**

<b><i>Federally Recognized Tribes</i></b>	
Absentee Shawnee Tribe of Indians of Oklahoma	Mohegan Indian Tribe of Connecticut
Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas	Nansemond Indian Nation
Aroostook Band of Micmacs	Narragansett Indian Tribe of Rhode Island
Catawba Indian Nation	Oneida Nation of New York
Cayuga Nation of New York	Onondaga Nation of New York
Chickahominy Indian Tribe	Passamaquoddy Tribe of Indian Township
Chickahominy Indian Tribe - Eastern Division	Penobscot Nation
Chitimacha Tribe of Louisiana	Poarch Band of Creek Indians of Alabama
Coushatta Tribe of Louisiana	Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe
Delaware Nation	Seminole Tribe of Florida
Delaware Tribe of Indians	Seneca Nation of Indians
Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians of North Carolina	Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma
Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians	Shinnecock Indian Nation
Jena Band of Choctaw Indians	Stockbridge-Munsee Band of the Mohicans
Kickapoo Traditional Tribe of Texas	Tonawanda Band of Seneca Indians of New York
Mashantucket Pequot Indian Tribe	Tunica-Biloxi Indian Tribe of Louisiana
Mashpee Wampanoag Indian Tribe	Tuscarora Nation of New York
Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida	Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head of Massachusetts
Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians	Ysleta del Sur Pueblo of Texas
<b><i>Alabama</i></b>	
<b><i>State-Elected Officials</i></b>	<b><i>State Agencies</i></b>
Office of the Governor	Alabama Department of Environmental Management
Congressional Delegates	Alabama Historical Commission
<b><i>Connecticut</i></b>	
<b><i>State-Elected Officials</i></b>	<b><i>State Agencies</i></b>
Office of the Governor	Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism, State Historic Preservation Office
Congressional Delegates	Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, Land and Water Resources Division
<b><i>Delaware</i></b>	
<b><i>State-Elected Officials</i></b>	<b><i>State Agencies</i></b>
Office of the Governor	Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control, Delaware Coastal Programs
Congressional Delegates	Delaware Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs
<b><i>Florida</i></b>	
<b><i>State-Elected Officials</i></b>	<b><i>State Agencies</i></b>
Office of the Governor	Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Coastal Management Program, Office of Resilience and Coastal Protection
Congressional Delegates	Florida Department of Environmental Protection, State Clearinghouse
	Florida Division of Historical Resources
<b><i>Georgia</i></b>	
<b><i>State-Elected Officials</i></b>	<b><i>State Agencies</i></b>
Office of the Governor	Georgia Historic Preservation Division
Congressional Delegates	Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Coastal Zone Management Program
<b><i>Louisiana</i></b>	
<b><i>State-Elected Officials</i></b>	<b><i>State Agencies</i></b>
Office of the Governor	Louisiana Department of Natural Resources
Congressional Delegates	Louisiana Office of Cultural Development, Division of Historic Preservation

**Table M.2-1: Entities that Received the Scoping Notification Letter (continued)**

<b>Maine</b>	
<b>State-Elected Officials</b>	<b>State Agencies</b>
Office of the Governor Congressional Delegates	Maine Coastal Programs Maine Historic Preservation Commission
<b>Maryland</b>	
<b>State-Elected Officials</b>	<b>State Agencies</b>
Office of the Governor Congressional Delegates	Maryland Department of Natural Resources Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Chesapeake and Coastal Service Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Wetlands and Waterways Maryland Historical Trust
<b>Massachusetts</b>	
<b>State-Elected Officials</b>	<b>State Agencies</b>
Office of the Governor Congressional Delegates	Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, Office of Coastal Zone Management Massachusetts Historical Commission
<b>Mississippi</b>	
<b>State-Elected Officials</b>	<b>State Agencies</b>
Office of the Governor Congressional Delegates	Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Historic Preservation Division, Federal and State Project Review Mississippi Department of Marine Resources, Coastal Programs
<b>New Hampshire</b>	
<b>State-Elected Officials</b>	<b>State Agencies</b>
Office of the Governor Congressional Delegates	New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services, Coastal Program New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources
<b>New Jersey</b>	
<b>State-Elected Officials</b>	<b>State Agencies</b>
Office of the Governor Congressional Delegates	New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, Coastal Management Program New Jersey Historic Preservation Office
<b>New York</b>	
<b>State-Elected Officials</b>	<b>State Agencies</b>
Office of the Governor Congressional Delegates	New York Department of State, Office of Planning, Development, and Community Infrastructure New York Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation
<b>North Carolina</b>	
<b>State-Elected Officials</b>	<b>State Agencies</b>
Office of the Governor Congressional Delegates	North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources North Carolina Division of Coastal Management North Carolina Division of Coastal Management, Coastal Area Management Act
<b>Rhode Island</b>	
<b>State-Elected Officials</b>	<b>State Agencies</b>
Office of the Governor Congressional Delegates	Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission
<b>South Carolina</b>	
<b>State-Elected Officials</b>	<b>State Agencies</b>
Office of the Governor Congressional Delegates	South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control, Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management South Carolina State Historic Preservation Office

**Table M.2-1: Entities that Received the Scoping Notification Letter (continued)**

<b>Texas</b>	
<b>State-Elected Officials</b>	<b>State Agencies</b>
Office of the Governor Congressional Delegates	Texas General Land Office, Coastal Resources Division Texas Historical Commission
<b>Virginia</b>	
<b>State-Elected Officials</b>	<b>State Agencies</b>
Office of the Governor Congressional Delegates	Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, Coastal Program, Environmental Impact Review and Long Range Priorities Virginia Department of Historic Resources Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources
<b>U.S. Virgin Islands</b>	
Department of Planning and Natural Resources, Coastal Zone Management Program State Historic Preservation Office	
<b>Federal Agencies</b>	
Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary National Marine Fisheries Service National Marine Fisheries Service; Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office National Marine Fisheries Service, Southeast Regional Office National Marine Fisheries Service, Office of Protected Resources National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Office of National Marine Sanctuaries U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Chesapeake Bay Ecological Services Field Office U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Eastern North Carolina Ecological Services U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Florida Ecological Services U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, South Carolina Ecological Services U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Virginia Ecological Services	

### **M.2.1.2 Scoping Email**

On November 17, 2023, emails were sent to recipients on the project mailing list, including individuals, nonprofit organizations, and for-profit organizations. The emails provided information on the Proposed Action, methods for commenting, and the project website address to obtain more information. The text of the email is shown in Figure M.2-2.

### **M.2.1.3 Newspaper Advertisements**

To announce the scoping period, advertisements were placed in the listed newspapers in the following cities on the dates indicated in Table M.2-2. The advertisements included a description of the Proposed Action, the address of the project website, the duration of the comment period, and information on how to provide comments. An example of the advertisement is shown in Figure M.2-3.





DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY  
U.S. FLEET FORCES COMMAND  
1562 MITSCHER AVENUE SUITE 250  
NORFOLK VA 23551-2487

5090  
Ser N46/XXX  
November 17, 2023

Dear Sir or Madam:

This letter is to inform you that the United States (U.S.) Department of the Navy (Navy), jointly with the U.S. Coast Guard, is in the beginning stages of preparing a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (Supplemental EIS)/Overseas Environmental Impact Statement (OEIS) for Atlantic Fleet Training and Testing (AFTT) activities in the seaspace and the airspace over areas of the western Atlantic Ocean along the east coast of North America, the Gulf of Mexico, and portions of the Caribbean Sea.

The U.S. Navy and U.S. Coast Guard are requesting your comments on the scope, content, and issues to be considered during the development of the AFTT Supplemental EIS/OEIS. This document will assess training and testing activities which are proposed to be conducted at levels that support military readiness requirements beginning in November of 2025 and into the reasonably foreseeable future. Such activities will also accommodate evolving mission requirements associated with force structure changes, including those resulting from the development, testing, and ultimate introduction of new platforms (vessels, aircraft, and weapon systems) into the fleet, thereby ensuring critical military readiness requirements are met.

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to maintain a ready force, which is needed to ensure the peacetime promotion of the national security interests and prosperity of the United States and for prompt and sustained combat incident to operations at sea and to meet the needs of war, consistent with Title 10, section 8062, of the United States Code.

You may send written comments to the following address:  
Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command Atlantic  
6506 Hampton Boulevard Building A  
Norfolk, Virginia 23508-1278  
ATTN: Code EV22 AFTT SEIS Project Manager

Comments also can be submitted electronically via the project website at:  
<https://www.nepa.navy.mil/aftteis>.

All Comments must be postmarked or received by December 16, 2023 to be considered in the Draft Supplemental EIS/OEIS. For additional information about the AFTT Supplemental EIS/OEIS, please visit the project website.

We appreciate your comments on this important project. My point of contact for this matter is Mr. Todd Kraft at (757) 836-2943 or [todd.m.kraft@us.navy.mil](mailto:todd.m.kraft@us.navy.mil).

Sincerely,

AGUAYO.MARIA.L  
ORETO.115727673  
1

Digitally signed by  
AGUAYO.MARIA.LORETO.1157  
276731  
Date: 2023.11.14 17:19:57 -0500

M. L. AGUAYO  
Director, Fleet Installations and Environment  
and Deputy Chief of Staff

Figure M.2-1: Stakeholder Scoping Notification Letter

You previously requested to receive information regarding the Department of the Navy's Atlantic Fleet Training and Testing (AFTT) Environmental Impact Statement/Overseas Environmental Impact Statement (EIS/OEIS). This email provides an update on the project and ways to participate in the planning process.

#### **Navy to Begin Supplemental EIS/OEIS for Atlantic Fleet Training and Testing**

The Department of the Navy (including both the U.S. Navy and the U.S. Marine Corps), jointly with the U.S. Coast Guard (hereafter referred to as Action Proponents), announces its intent to prepare a supplement to the 2018 Atlantic Fleet Training and Testing (AFTT) Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)/Overseas Environmental Impact Statement (OEIS).

In the Supplemental EIS/OEIS, the Action Proponents will assess the potential environmental effects associated with ongoing and future at-sea military readiness activities conducted within the AFTT EIS/OEIS Study Area (Study Area) beyond 2025, and will include an analysis of these activities using new information that became available after the release of the 2018 Final EIS/OEIS.

Activities that will be assessed in the Supplemental EIS/OEIS are consistent with those analyzed in the 2018 Final EIS/OEIS and are representative of training and testing activities the Action Proponents have been conducting in the Study Area for decades. In addition, the Study Area remains consistent with what was described in the 2018 Final EIS/OEIS with the addition of some inland waters within the Gulf of Mexico coast.

#### **How to Participate in the Planning Process**

The 30-day public scoping period begins November 17, 2023 and ends December 16, 2023. The scoping process is used to identify the full range of issues including public concerns and local issues to be considered during the development of the Draft Supplemental EIS/OEIS.

All interested persons and organizations are encouraged to provide substantive comments on environmental resources and areas of concern that the commenter believes the Action Proponents should consider during the scoping period. To learn more, and to submit a comment, please visit the project website at <https://www.nepa.navy.mil/aftteis>.

#### **Next Steps**

After the scoping period the Action Proponents will coordinate with participating and cooperating agencies to develop a Draft Supplemental EIS/OEIS. The Draft Supplemental EIS/OES is anticipated to be available for public review in the fall of 2024. The Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS is anticipated to be released in the fall of 2025.

**Figure M.2-2: Stakeholder Scoping Email**

**Table M.2-2: Newspaper Announcements of Scoping Period**

<b>Bath, ME</b> <i>The Times Record</i> November 19, 2023 November 20, 2023 November 21, 2023	<b>Portland, ME</b> <i>The Portland Press Herald</i> November 18, 2023 November 19, 2023 November 21, 2023	<b>New Bedford, MA</b> <i>The Standard Times</i> November 19, 2023 November 20, 2023 November 21, 2023
<b>Boston, MA</b> <i>The Boston Herald</i> November 19, 2023 November 20, 2023 November 21, 2023	<b>Providence, RI</b> <i>The Providence Journal</i> November 19, 2023 November 20, 2023 November 21, 2023	<b>Newport, RI</b> <i>The Newport Daily News</i> November 17, 2023 November 18, 2023 November 20, 2023
<b>Salisbury, MD</b> <i>The Daily Times</i> November 19, 2023 November 20, 2023 November 21, 2023	<b>Norfolk, VA</b> <i>The Virginian-Pilot</i> November 19, 2023 November 20, 2023 November 21, 2023	<b>Newport News, VA</b> <i>The Daily Press</i> November 19, 2023 November 20, 2023 November 21, 2023
<b>Manteo, NC</b> <i>Coastland Times</i> November 19, 2023 November 22, 2023 November 26, 2023	<b>Jacksonville, NC</b> <i>Jacksonville Daily News</i> November 21, 2023 November 23, 2023 November 25, 2023	<b>Wilmington, NC</b> <i>Wilmington Star News</i> November 19, 2023 November 20, 2023 November 21, 2023
<b>Charleston, SC</b> <i>Charleston Post and Courier</i> November 19, 2023 November 20, 2023 November 21, 2023	<b>Savannah, GA</b> <i>Savannah Morning News</i> November 19, 2023 November 20, 2023 November 21, 2023	<b>Jacksonville, FL</b> <i>Florida Times Union</i> November 19, 2023 November 20, 2023 November 21, 2023
<b>Fort Lauderdale, FL</b> <i>Florida Sun Sentinel</i> November 19, 2023 November 20, 2023 November 21, 2023	<b>Brevard, FL</b> <i>Florida Today</i> November 19, 2023 November 20, 2023 November 21, 2023	<b>Panama City, FL</b> <i>Panama City News Herald</i> November 19, 2023 November 20, 2023 November 21, 2023
<b>Pensacola, FL</b> <i>Pensacola News Journal</i> November 19, 2023 November 20, 2023 November 21, 2023	<b>Biloxi, MS</b> <i>Sun Herald</i> November 21, 2023 November 22, 2023 November 24, 2023	<b>New Orleans, LA</b> <i>Times-Picayune</i> November 19, 2023 November 20, 2023 November 21, 2023
<b>Galveston, TX</b> <i>Galveston Daily News</i> November 19, 2023 November 20, 2023 November 21, 2023	<b>Corpus Christi, TX</b> <i>Caller-Times<sup>1</sup></i> November 19, 2023 November 20, 2023 November 21, 2023	

Notes: <sup>1</sup> Advertisement was also run in Spanish.

**The U.S. Navy INVITES YOU TO PARTICIPATE  
In the Atlantic Fleet Training and Testing  
Environmental Impact Statement**

The U.S. Navy, jointly with the U.S. Coast Guard, are in the early stages of preparing a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement/Overseas Environmental Impact Statement (EIS/OEIS) to evaluate the potential environmental effects associated with military readiness activities, which include training and research, development, testing, and evaluation activities conducted within the Atlantic Fleet Training and Testing (AFTT) Study Area. An EIS/OEIS for AFTT was completed for similar activities in September 2018; this new AFTT document will support future military readiness activities in the AFTT Study Area, which includes the western North Atlantic Ocean along the east coast of North America, the Gulf of Mexico, portions of the Caribbean Sea and select inshore and pierside locations.

**The Navy and Coast Guard invite comments on identifying the scope of issues to be addressed.**  
You can participate in a variety of ways:

- Visit the project website, <https://www.nepa.navy.mil/aftteis/>, to learn more about Navy at-sea training and testing activities and to provide comments;
- Mail written comments to the address listed below

**PROPOSED ACTION**

The Navy and Coast Guard propose to continue training and testing in the AFTT Study Area. The purpose of the Proposed Action is to maintain a ready force, which is needed to ensure the peacetime promotion of the national security interests and prosperity of the United States and for prompt and sustained combat incident to operations at sea and to meet the needs of war.

**SUBMIT WRITTEN COMMENTS VIA MAIL**  
Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command, Atlantic  
Attention Code: EV22 (AFTT EIS/OEIS Project Manager)  
6506 Hampton Boulevard, Building A  
Norfolk, Virginia, 23508-1278  
OR ELECTRONICALLY via <https://www.nepa.navy.mil/aftteis/>  
**Comments must be postmarked or submitted online  
no later than December 16, 2023.**

Figure M.2-3: Newspaper Announcement of Scoping

## M.2.2 PUBLIC SCOPING COMMENTS

The scoping comments could be submitted via the project website or by mail. The Action Proponents received comments from federal agencies, state agencies, non-governmental organizations, and individuals. A total of 15 scoping comments were received. The comments provided agency input; urged the consideration of impacts to the North Atlantic right whale, Rice's whale, and marine mammals in general; requested the use of updated sea turtle data for impact analysis; and provided general support for the Proposed Action. The scoping comments submitted during the public scoping period are provided in Table M.2-3 and relevant and substantive comments were considered during the development of this Draft Supplemental EIS/OEIS. Comments received through the project website are shown in Table M.2-3. Hard copy comments received by mail, comments received via email, and the attachments provided with website comments are shown in Figure M.2-4 through Figure M.2-14.

**Table M.2-3: Scoping Comments and Responses**

<i>Commenter</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Comment</i>
Private Individual (1)	November 19, 2023	WHAT IS THE BREAKING SYSTEM IN USE FOR ANY AND ALL OF YOUR SHIP'S ?
Virginia Department of Environmental Quality	November 20, 2023	Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, Office of Environmental Impact Review Scoping Comments (Figure M.2-4)
Federal Aviation Administration	November 21, 2023	Comment email (Figure M.2-5)
Private Individual (2)	November 24, 2023	It is critically important for the continued security of the United States of America that the U.S. Navy proceeds with the proposed action to continue training and testing in the AFTT Study Area. Other countries, particularly the USSR and China, are building up their naval capabilities, and are posing a greater and greater threat to our national security. Proceed without delay!!!!
Private Individual (3)	November 25, 2023	Hard copy comment (Figure M.2-6)
Texas Historical Commission	November 28, 2023	Comment email (Figure M.2-7)
Virginia Department of Health, Office of Drinking Water	November 30, 2023	VDH – Office of Drinking Water has reviewed the above project and has no comments to submit at this time.
Private Individual (4)	December 1, 2023	Hard copy comment (Figure M.2-8)
Private Individual (5)	December 4, 2023	As a boat captain and frequent fisherman in the Gulf of Mexico with many friends that are boat captains, we strongly support the Navy and Coast Guard training and testing in the Gulf. Current efforts to shut down large areas of the northern Gulf to "protect" the recently identified Right Whale would severely hurt our fishing in the Gulf and would likely adversely impact the Navy and Coast Guards training and testing to maintain a ready force. We believe the concerns about the whale are unjustified. Therefore we strongly support approval of this EIS.
New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, Office of Permitting and Project Navigation	December 15, 2023	Comment provided as attachment (Figure M.2-9)

**Table M.2-3: Scoping Comments and Responses (continued)**

<i>Commenter</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Comment</i>
Congressman Seth Moulton	December 15, 2023	As the U.S. Navy and U.S. Coast Guard undertake a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (Supplemental EIS)/Overseas Environmental Impact Statement (OEIS) for Atlantic Fleet Training and Testing (AFTT) activities, I urge consideration of the impact on North Atlantic right whales. North Atlantic right whales are on the brink of extinction. As noted by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, there are approximately 360 individuals remaining of this endangered species in Atlantic waters, including fewer than 70 reproductively active females. Vessel strikes are a leading cause of mortality for North Atlantic right whales and increased ocean noise levels may interfere with their communication, stress levels, navigation, and ability to find food. Ensuring critical military readiness is of paramount importance when developing the AFTT Supplemental EIS/OEIS. When considering the environmental impacts of AFTT activities, informed decisions regarding impacts on North Atlantic right whales will be important for helping to conserve this endangered species. Thank you for your attention to this critical matter. I commend the U.S. Navy and U.S. Coast Guard's stalwart dedication to ensuring our national security interests and welcome your commitment to safeguarding the North Atlantic right whale. (Figure M.2-10)
Private Individual (6)	December 16, 2023	Hard copy comment (Figure M.2-11)
Maine Historic Preservation Commission	December 16, 2023	Hard copy comment (Figure M.2-12)
New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources	December 16, 2023	Comment email (Figure M.2-13)
Turtle Island Restoration Network	December 16, 2023	Comment provided as attachment (Figure M.2-14)





*Commonwealth of Virginia*  
**VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY**

1111 E. Main Street, Suite 1400, Richmond, Virginia 23219  
P.O. Box 1105, Richmond, Virginia 23218  
(800) 592-5482 FAX (804) 698-4178  
[www.deq.virginia.gov](http://www.deq.virginia.gov)

Travis A. Voyles  
Acting Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources

Michael S. Rolband, PE, PWD, PWS Emeritus  
Director  
(804) 698-4020

November 20, 2023

Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command, Atlantic  
6506 Hampton Boulevard, Building A  
Norfolk, Virginia, 23508-1278  
ATTN: EV22, AFTT SEIS Project Manager

RE: Scoping Comments, Notice of Intent To Prepare a Supplement to the September 2018 Final  
Atlantic Fleet Training and Testing Environmental Impact Statement/Overseas Environmental  
Impact Statement for Continuation of Navy Atlantic Fleet Training and Testing Activities

To Whom it May Concern:

This letter is in response to the scoping request for the above-referenced project.

As you may know, the Department of Environmental Quality, through its Office of Environmental Impact Review (DEQ-OEIR), is responsible for coordinating Virginia's review of federal environmental documents prepared pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and responding to appropriate federal officials on behalf of the Commonwealth. Similarly, DEQ-OEIR coordinates Virginia's review of federal consistency documents prepared pursuant to the Coastal Zone Management Act which applies to all federal activities which are reasonably likely to affect any land or water use or natural resources of Virginia's designated coastal resources management area must be consistent with the enforceable policies Virginia Coastal Zone Management (CZM) Program.

**DOCUMENT SUBMISSIONS**

In order to ensure an effective coordinated review of the environmental documents, notification should be sent directly to OEIR. We request that you submit one electronic to [eir@deq.virginia.gov](mailto:eir@deq.virginia.gov) (25 MB maximum) or make the documents available for download at a website, file transfer protocol (ftp) site or the VITA LFT file share system (Requires an "invitation" for access. An invitation request should be sent to [eir@deq.virginia.gov](mailto:eir@deq.virginia.gov)). We request that the review of these documents be done concurrently, if possible.

The environmental documents should include U.S. Geological Survey topographic maps as part of their information. We strongly encourage you to issue shape files with the NEPA document. In addition, project details should be adequately described for the benefit of the reviewers.

**Figure M.2-4: Virginia Department of Environmental Quality Comment**

**ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW UNDER THE NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT:  
PROJECT SCOPING AND AGENCY INVOLVEMENT**

As you may know, NEPA (PL 91-190, 1969) and its implementing regulations (Title 40, *Code of Federal Regulations*, Parts 1500-1508) requires a draft and final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for federal activities or undertakings that are federally licensed or federally funded which will or may give rise to significant impacts upon the human environment. An EIS carries more stringent public participation requirements than an Environmental Assessment (EA) and provides more time and detail for comments and public decision-making. The possibility that an EIS may be required for the proposed project should not be overlooked in your planning for this project. Accordingly, we refer to “NEPA document” in the remainder of this letter.

While this Office does not participate in scoping efforts beyond the advice given herein, other agencies are free to provide scoping comments concerning the preparation of the NEPA document. Accordingly, we are providing notice of your scoping request to several state agencies and those localities and Planning District Commissions, including but not limited to:

Department of Environmental Quality:

- DEQ Regional Office\*
- Air Division\*
- Office of Wetlands and Stream Protection\*
- Office of Local Government Programs\*
- Division of Land Protection and Revitalization
- Office of Stormwater Management\*

Department of Conservation and Recreation

Department of Health\*

Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

Department of Wildlife Resources\*

Virginia Marine Resources Commission\*

Department of Historic Resources

Department of Mines, Minerals, and Energy

Department of Forestry

Department of Transportation

Note: The agencies noted with a star (\*) administer one or more of the enforceable policies of the Virginia CZM Program.

**FEDERAL CONSISTENCY UNDER THE COASTAL ZONE MANAGEMENT ACT**

Pursuant to the federal Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972, as amended, and its implementing regulations in Title 15, *Code of Federal Regulations*, Part 930, federal activities, including permits, licenses, and federally funded projects, located in Virginia’s Coastal Management Zone or those that can have reasonably foreseeable effects on Virginia’s coastal uses or coastal resources must be conducted in a manner which is consistent, to the maximum extent practicable, with the Virginia CZM Program.

Additional information on the Virginia’s review for federal consistency documents can be found online at [Federal Consistency](#) | [Virginia DEQ](#)

**Figure M.2-4: Virginia Department of Environmental Quality Comment (continued)**



#### DATA BASE ASSISTANCE

Below is a list of databases that may assist you in the preparation of a NEPA document:

- DEQ Online Database: Virginia Environmental Geographic Information Systems  
Information on Permitted Solid Waste Management Facilities, Impaired Waters, Petroleum Releases, Registered Petroleum Facilities, Permitted Discharge (Virginia Pollution Discharge Elimination System Permits) Facilities, Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) Sites, Water Monitoring Stations, National Wetlands Inventory:
  - [www.deq.virginia.gov/ConnectWithDEQ/VEGIS.aspx](http://www.deq.virginia.gov/ConnectWithDEQ/VEGIS.aspx)
- DEQ Virginia Coastal Geospatial and Educational Mapping System (GEMS)  
Virginia's coastal resource data and maps; coastal laws and policies; facts on coastal resource values; and direct links to collaborating agencies responsible for current data:
  - <https://www.deq.virginia.gov/?splash=https%3a%2f%2fgaia.vcu.edu%2fportal%2fapps%2fsites%2f%23%2fgemsmaps&isexternal=true>
- MARCO Mid-Atlantic Ocean Data Portal  
The Mid-Atlantic Ocean Data Portal is a publicly available online toolkit and resource center that consolidates available data and enables users to visualize and analyze ocean resources and human use information such as fishing grounds, recreational areas, shipping lanes, habitat areas, and energy sites, among others.
  - <http://portal.midatlanticocean.org/visualize/#x=-73.24&y=38.93&z=7&logo=true&controls=true&basemap=Ocean&tab=data&legends=false&layers=true>
- DHR Data Sharing System.  
Survey records in the DHR inventory:
  - [www.dhr.virginia.gov/archives/data\\_sharing\\_sys.htm](http://www.dhr.virginia.gov/archives/data_sharing_sys.htm)
- DCR Natural Heritage Search  
Produces lists of resources that occur in specific counties, watersheds or physiographic regions:
  - [www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural\\_heritage/dbsearchtool.shtml](http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural_heritage/dbsearchtool.shtml)
- Wetland Condition Assessment Tool (WetCAT)
  - <https://www.deq.virginia.gov/our-programs/water/wetlands-streams/wetcat>
- DWR Fish and Wildlife Information Service  
Information about Virginia's Wildlife resources:
  - <http://vafwis.org/fwis/>
- Total Maximum Daily Loads Approved Reports
  - <https://www.deq.virginia.gov/programs/water/waterqualityinformationtmdls/tmdl/tmdldevelopment/approvedtmdlreports.aspx>
- Virginia Outdoors Foundation: Identify VOF-protected land

Figure M.2-4: Virginia Department of Environmental Quality Comment (continued)

- <http://vof.maps.arcgis.com/home/index.html>
  - Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Information System (CERCLIS) Database: Superfund Information Systems  
Information on hazardous waste sites, potentially hazardous waste sites and remedial activities across the nation, including sites that are on the National Priorities List (NPL) or being considered for the NPL:
    - [www.epa.gov/superfund/sites/cursites/index.htm](http://www.epa.gov/superfund/sites/cursites/index.htm)
  - EPA RCRAInfo Search  
Information on hazardous waste facilities:
    - [www.epa.gov/enviro/facts/rcrainfo/search.html](http://www.epa.gov/enviro/facts/rcrainfo/search.html)
  - Total Maximum Daily Loads Approved Reports
    - <https://www.deq.virginia.gov/our-programs/water/water-quality/tmdl-development/approved-tmdls>
  - EPA Envirofacts Database  
EPA Environmental Information, including EPA-Regulated Facilities and Toxics Release Inventory Reports:
    - [www.epa.gov/enviro/index.html](http://www.epa.gov/enviro/index.html)
  - EPA NEPAassist Database  
Facilitates the environmental review process and project planning:  
<http://nepaassisttool.epa.gov/nepaassist/entry.aspx>
- If you have questions about the environmental review process and/or the federal consistency review process, please feel free to contact me (telephone (804) 659-1915 or e-mail [bettina.rayfield@deq.virginia.gov](mailto:bettina.rayfield@deq.virginia.gov)).

I hope this information is helpful to you.

Sincerely,



Bettina Rayfield, Program Manager  
Environmental Impact Review and  
Long-Range Priorities

Figure M.2-4: Virginia Department of Environmental Quality Comment (continued)

**From:** Riegert, Michael W (FAA) <Michael.W.Riegert@faa.gov>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, November 21, 2023 8:19 AM  
**To:** Kraft, Todd M CIV USN (USA) <todd.m.kraft.civ@us.navy.mil>  
**Cc:** Williams, Reginald (FAA) <Reginald.Williams@faa.gov>; Favors, Lisa (FAA) <Lisa.Favors@faa.gov>  
**Subject:** [Non-DoD Source] FW: Notice of Intent To Prepare a Supplement to the September 2018 Final Atlantic Fleet Training and Testing EIS/OEIS

Good morning Mr. Kraft,

My name is Michael Riegert with FAA, I am an Environmental protection specialist for FAA ECINA group specifically working with airspace environmental impacts. I am contacting you regarding the supplemental EIS for AFTT study area. Our management received the auto generated email below from your office and want to follow up regarding any support needed for this action from FAA. I have reviewed the website and have some questions regarding the upcoming supplemental EIS.

1-Can you provide some clarity on changes to current operations and existing foot prints for airspace within the AFTT study area?

2-Will you be expanding any airspace to include lateral or vertical changes for future training needs?

3-Has there been a request for FAA cooperating agency in support of airspace changes or modifications?

4-Is this supplemental primarily focused on impacts to marine mammals or will it also address changes to training requirements?

V/r,

Michael W. Riegert (PMP)  
Environmental Protection Specialist, CI & NAS Analytics  
Eastern Service Center, Operations Support Group (AJV-E25)  
Phone 404-305-5962  
Cell 404-861-2099



Figure M.2-5: Federal Aviation Administration Comment



## Proposed Action

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 (hereinafter jointly referred to as the “Action Proponents”) propose to continue to conduct military readiness training and research, development, testing, and evaluation (hereinafter referred to as “testing”) activities in the Atlantic Fleet Training and Testing (AFTT) Study Area, as represented in Figure 1. These military readiness activities include the use of active sonar and explosives, primarily within existing range complexes and testing ranges that are comprised of operating areas (sea space) and warning areas (airspace) located in the Atlantic Ocean along the eastern coast of North America, the Gulf of Mexico, and portions of the Caribbean Sea, at select Navy pierside locations, within port transit channels, and some inland waters.

In order to achieve and maintain military readiness, the Action Proponents propose to:

- Adjust training and testing activities from current levels to levels required to support U.S. Navy (Navy), U.S. Marine Corps (USMC), and U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) military readiness requirements beginning November 2025 and into the reasonably foreseeable future.
- Accommodate evolving mission requirements associated with force structure changes, including those resulting from the development, testing, and eventual introduction of new weapon systems and platforms (vessels, aircraft) into the fleet.

This analysis of the environmental impacts of the Proposed Action supports the Action Proponents’ request for incidental takes of marine mammals from military readiness activities as required by the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA). The analysis also supports the Action Proponents’ requirements to consult with NMFS and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Since the Proposed Action for the fourth phase is largely similar to training and testing activities analyzed in the third phase, the Action Proponents are preparing a supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)/Overseas Environmental Impact Statement (OEIS), referred to hereinafter as the Supplemental. The Supplemental will be updated with new information to include new acoustic criteria, updated acoustic and explosive modeling, and updated marine species data.

The following range complexes fall within the AFTT Study Area:

- Northeast Range Complexes;
- Virginia Capes (VACAPES) Range Complex;
- Navy Cherry Point Range Complex;
- Jacksonville (JAX) Range Complex;
- Key West Range Complex; and
- Gulf of Mexico (GOMEX) Range Complex.

Testing ranges in the AFTT Study Area include:

- Naval Undersea Warfare Center Division, Newport Testing Range;
- Naval Surface Warfare Center, Panama City Division Testing Range; and
- Naval Surface Warfare Center Carderock Division, South Florida Ocean Measurement Facility Testing Range.

While most military readiness activities will take place in open ocean operating and warning areas, some activities, such as sonar maintenance and gunnery exercises, are conducted concurrent with normal transits and occur outside of these areas, but still within the Study Area.

The pierside testing locations and associated port transit channels are located at the following Navy ports and naval shipyards:

- Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, Kittery, Maine;
- Naval Submarine Base New London, Groton, Connecticut;
- Naval Station Newport, Newport, Rhode Island;
- Naval Station Norfolk, Norfolk, Virginia;
- Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek-Fort Story, Virginia Beach, Virginia;

Figure M.2-5: Federal Aviation Administration Comment (continued)

- Norfolk Naval Shipyard, Portsmouth, Virginia;
- Naval Submarine Base Kings Bay, Kings Bay, Georgia;
- Naval Station Mayport, Jacksonville, Florida; and
- Port Canaveral, Cape Canaveral, Florida.

In addition, Navy-contractor pierside testing locations in the following cities, along with their associated port transit channels and inshore waters (such as bays and rivers) are in the AFTT Study Area:

- Bath, Maine;
- Groton, Connecticut;
- Newport News, Virginia;
- Pascagoula, Mississippi;
- North Bay, Florida;
- New Orleans, Louisiana; and
- Mobile, Alabama.

For decades, the Navy has been conducting military readiness activities in the AFTT Study Area. During this time, the tempo and types of military readiness activities in the Study Area have evolved due to changing requirements, the introduction of new technologies, the dynamic nature of international events, advances in warfighting doctrine and procedures, and force structure changes.

**Figure M.2-5: Federal Aviation Administration Comment (continued)**

JOHN STELLA

NAVAL FACILITIES ENGINEERING SYSTEMS COMMAND ATLANTIC  
ATTN.: EV22 (AFTT EIS/OEIS PROJECT MANAGER)  
6506 HAMPTON BLVD BLDG A  
NORFOLK, VA. 23508-1278

NOV. 25 , 2023

DEAR SIR :

I SUPPORT THE U.S. NAVY TO WORK WITH U.S. COAST GUARD FOR  
TRAINING AND TESTING IN THE AFTT STUDY AREA FROM MAINE COAST TO BOSTON COAST  
TO CAPE COD COAST TO RHODE ISLAND COAST.

MOST IMPORTANTLY THE U.S. NAVY SHOULD WORK WITH U.S. COAST GUARD  
TO TRAIN AND TEST ON BOSTON HARBOR COAST WHERE THE FORMER U.S. ARMY BASE  
BLACK FALCON PIER AND THE FORMER BOSTON NAVAL SHIPYARD AND FORMER BOSTON  
NAVAL STATION.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION .

SINCERELY,

JOHN STELLA

Figure M.2-6: Private Individual (3) Comment

From: noreply@thc.state.tx.us <noreply@thc.state.tx.us>  
Sent: Monday, December 18, 2023 3:48 PM  
To: Kraft, Todd M CIV USN (USA) <todd.m.kraft.civ@us.navy.mil>; reviews@thc.state.tx.us  
Subject: [Non-DoD Source] Atlantic Fleet Training and Testing



**TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION**  
*real places telling real stories*

**Re:** Project Review under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act  
**THC Tracking #202402738**  
**Date:** 12/18/2023  
Atlantic Fleet Training and Testing  
Western Atlantic Ocean North Am E Coast and Gulf

**Description:** Beginning stages of preparing a Supplemental EIS /OEIS for Atlantic Fleet Training and Testing activities.

1

**Figure M.2-7: Texas Historical Commission Comment**

Dear Todd Kraft:

Thank you for your submittal regarding the above-referenced project. This response represents the comments of the State Historic Preservation Officer, the Executive Director of the Texas Historical Commission (THC), pursuant to review under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

The review staff, led by Amy Borgens, Caitlin Brashear and Alexander Shane, has completed its review and has made the following determinations based on the information submitted for review:

We have the following comments: The Texas Historical Commission thanks the Department of the Navy for the invitation to comment on the Draft Supplemental EIS.

We look forward to further consultation with your office and hope to maintain a partnership that will foster effective historic preservation. Thank you for your cooperation in this review process, and for your efforts to preserve the irreplaceable heritage of Texas. If the project changes, or if new historic properties are found, please contact the review staff. If you have any questions concerning our review or if we can be of further assistance, please email the following reviewers: [amy.borgens@thc.texas.gov](mailto:amy.borgens@thc.texas.gov), [caitlin.brashear@thc.texas.gov](mailto:caitlin.brashear@thc.texas.gov), [Alexander.Shane@thc.texas.gov](mailto:Alexander.Shane@thc.texas.gov).

This response has been sent through the electronic THC review and compliance system (eTRAC). Submitting your project via eTRAC eliminates mailing delays and allows you to check the status of the review, receive an electronic response, and generate reports on your submissions. For more information, visit <http://thc.texas.gov/etrac-system>.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Alexander Shane". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Alexander" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Shane".

for Mark Wolfe, State Historic Preservation Officer  
Executive Director, Texas Historical Commission

**Please do not respond to this email.**

**Figure M.2-7: Texas Historical Commission Comment (continued)**



December 1 2023

[REDACTED]  
Location peninsula on Boston Harbor , formerly Lawley Naval Shipyard. Atlantic Ocean inlet

Response invitation re Atlantic Fleet Training / environmental impact statement

November 21 2023 posting date. Response 12-1 -2023

Purpose : proposed action to maintain a ready force which is necessary to ensure the peacetime promotion of the national security interests of the United States and for prompt and sustained combat incident to operations at sea and meet the needs of war .

Comments : Naval facilities engineering systems command Atlantic

Attention code : EV22 ( AFTT EIS / OEIS Project manager ) , 6506 Hampton Blvd,  
Building A , Norfolk , Va 23508-1278

Electronic via [https:// : https www.navy .mil/ atteis/](https://https://www.navy.mil/atteis/)

Greetings : Nav facilities engineering systems command Atlantic .

Attach pls. find resume of my lifes work including US Navy Active service , under contract , enlisted in the design and construction team USNavy NAVSEC Hyattsville Md. Dec 1972 Nov 1972 .for Project : design and construction force full time for the effort to deliver the quick turnaround of a number of vessels to be built by US naval shipyard contractors ; competitive bidders in Washington State , Pascagoula Miss. And Bath Maine . full delivery . Patrol Frigate project , designed for operations in the Mekong River theatre , republic of Vietnam . Asia.

I am a semi retired registered Architect In Massachusetts who is interested in being part of our nations efforts as a part of Americas Ready force to enforce the peacetime promotion of America's national security interests. A resume will be available if requested. I may be contacted by phone :


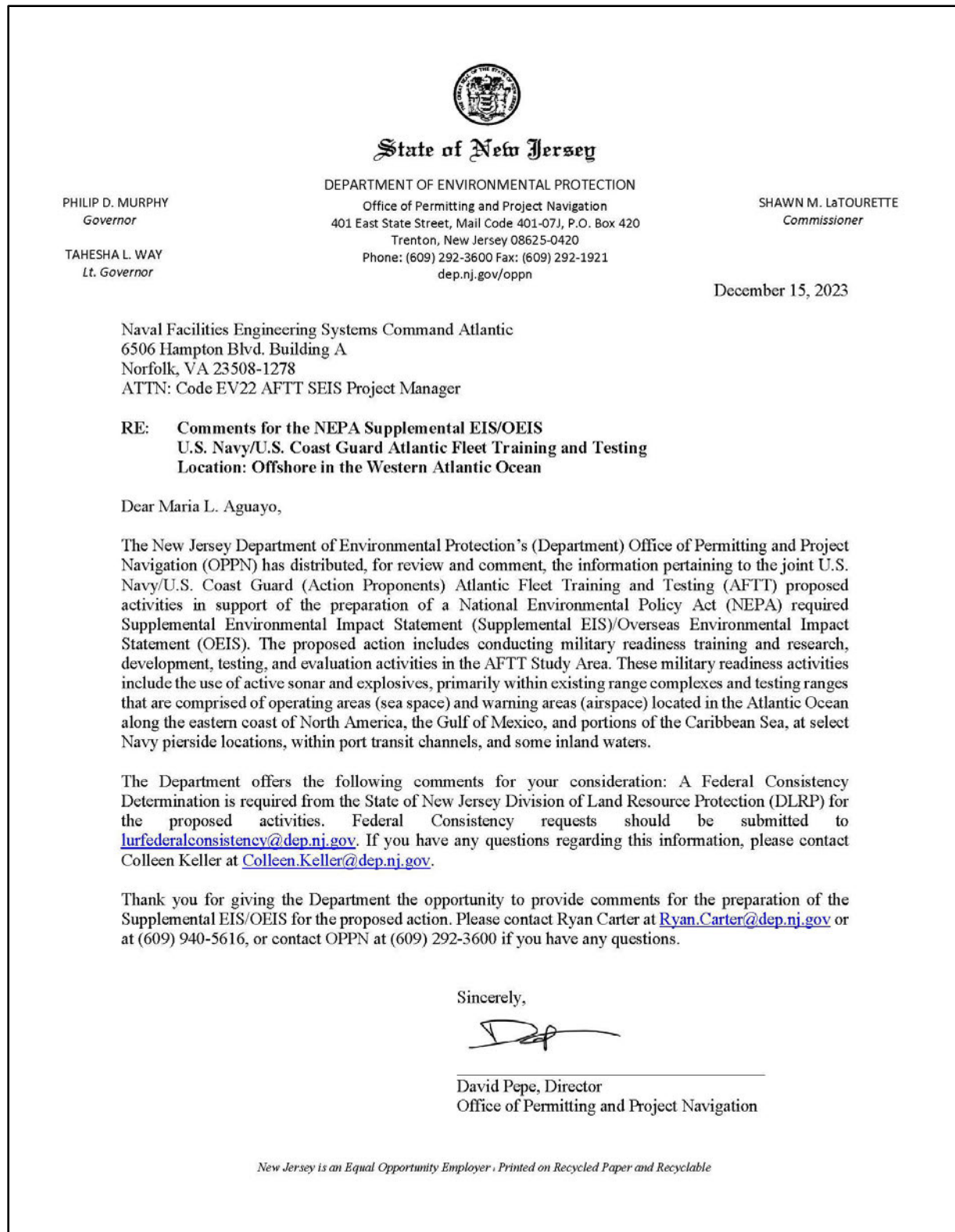
[REDACTED]  
  
John Edward Roche  
Architect Massachusetts

Figure M.2-8: Private Individual (4) Comment



**Figure M.2-9: New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, Office of Permitting and Project Navigation Comment**

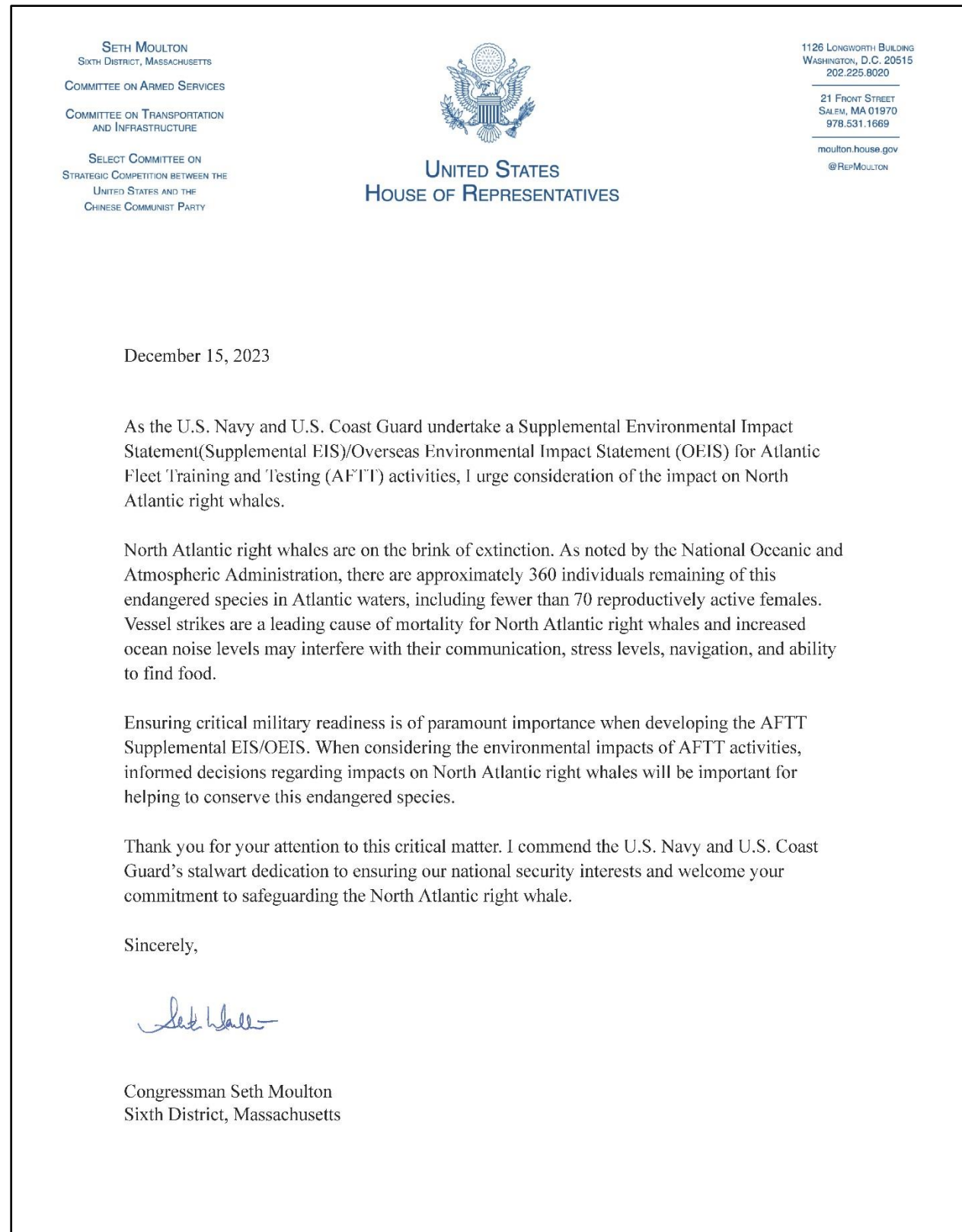


Figure M.2-10: Congressman Seth Moulton Comment

To: Naval Personell (Thanksgiving)  
as a volunteer, I joined The  
Navy at the Korean Conflict  
was in force and enjoyed my time  
of learning discipline. To give back  
I submit a "Must Read" for all  
high-ranking staff. It is:  
"The Last Beach" by Prof.  
Orin Pilkey and Andrew Cooper -  
so that the Naval Forces have  
enough time to adjust before  
the inevitable. Submitted by  
a Naval Corpsman - now M.D.  
ART LABRUE, M.D.

P.S. - my traveling companion was Commander David  
Youngblood, M.D. - Chief of All Navy Diving Med. (SEALS)

Figure M.2-11: Private Individual (6) Comment





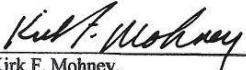
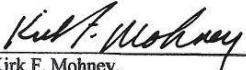
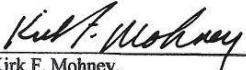
	<b>DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY</b> U.S. FLEET FORCES COMMAND 1562 MITSCHER AVENUE SUITE 250 NORFOLK VA 23551-2487		5090 Ser N46/020 November 14, 2023		
<p>Dear Sir or Madam:</p> <p>This letter is to inform you that the United States (U.S.) Department of the Navy (Navy), jointly with the U.S. Coast Guard, is in the beginning stages of preparing a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (Supplemental EIS)/Overseas Environmental Impact Statement (OEIS) for Atlantic Fleet Training and Testing (AFTT) activities in the seaspace and the airspace over areas of the western Atlantic Ocean along the east coast of North America, the Gulf of Mexico, and portions of the Caribbean Sea.</p> <p>The U.S. Navy and U.S. Coast Guard are requesting your comments on the scope, content, and issues to be considered during the development of the AFTT Supplemental EIS/OEIS. This document will assess training and testing activities which are proposed to be conducted at levels that support military readiness requirements beginning in November of 2025 and into the reasonably foreseeable future. Such activities will also accommodate evolving mission requirements associated with force structure changes, including those resulting from the development, testing, and ultimate introduction of new platforms (vessels, aircraft, and weapon systems) into the fleet, thereby ensuring critical military readiness requirements are met.</p> <p>The purpose of the Proposed Action is to maintain a ready force, which is needed to ensure the peacetime promotion of the national security interests and prosperity of the United States and for prompt and sustained combat incident to operations at sea and to meet the needs of war, consistent with Title 10, section 8062, of the United States Code.</p> <p>You may send written comments to the following address: Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command Atlantic 6506 Hampton Boulevard Building A Norfolk, Virginia 23508-1278 ATTN: Code EV22 AFTT SEIS Project Manager</p> <p>Comments also can be submitted electronically via the project website at: <a href="https://www.nepa.navy.mil/aftteis">https://www.nepa.navy.mil/aftteis</a>.</p> <p>All comments must be postmarked or received by December 16, 2023 to be considered in the Draft Supplemental EIS/OEIS. For additional information about the AFTT Supplemental EIS/OEIS, please visit the project website.</p> <p>We appreciate your comments on this important project. My point of contact for this matter is Mr. Todd Kraft at (757) 836-2943 or <a href="mailto:todd.m.kraft.civ@us.navy.mil">todd.m.kraft.civ@us.navy.mil</a>.</p>					
<table border="0" style="width: 100%;"><tr><td style="width: 50%; vertical-align: top;"><p>Based on the information submitted, I have concluded that there will be no historic properties affected by the proposed undertaking, as defined by Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. Consequently, pursuant to 36 CFR 800.4(d)(1), no further Section 106 consultation is required unless additional resources are discovered during project implementation pursuant to 36 CFR 800.13.</p><p> Kirk F. Mohnhey, State Historic Preservation Officer Maine Historic Preservation Commission</p><p style="text-align: right;">12/12/23 Date</p></td><td style="width: 50%; vertical-align: top;"><p>Sincerely, AGUAYO.MARIA.L <small>Digitally signed by</small> ORETO.115727673 <small>AGUAYO MARIA LORETO 115727673 Date: 2023.11.14 17:19:57 -0500</small> M. L. AGUAYO Director, Fleet Installations and Environment and Deputy Chief of Staff</p></td></tr></table>				<p>Based on the information submitted, I have concluded that there will be no historic properties affected by the proposed undertaking, as defined by Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. Consequently, pursuant to 36 CFR 800.4(d)(1), no further Section 106 consultation is required unless additional resources are discovered during project implementation pursuant to 36 CFR 800.13.</p> <p> Kirk F. Mohnhey, State Historic Preservation Officer Maine Historic Preservation Commission</p> <p style="text-align: right;">12/12/23 Date</p>	<p>Sincerely, AGUAYO.MARIA.L <small>Digitally signed by</small> ORETO.115727673 <small>AGUAYO MARIA LORETO 115727673 Date: 2023.11.14 17:19:57 -0500</small> M. L. AGUAYO Director, Fleet Installations and Environment and Deputy Chief of Staff</p>
<p>Based on the information submitted, I have concluded that there will be no historic properties affected by the proposed undertaking, as defined by Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. Consequently, pursuant to 36 CFR 800.4(d)(1), no further Section 106 consultation is required unless additional resources are discovered during project implementation pursuant to 36 CFR 800.13.</p> <p> Kirk F. Mohnhey, State Historic Preservation Officer Maine Historic Preservation Commission</p> <p style="text-align: right;">12/12/23 Date</p>	<p>Sincerely, AGUAYO.MARIA.L <small>Digitally signed by</small> ORETO.115727673 <small>AGUAYO MARIA LORETO 115727673 Date: 2023.11.14 17:19:57 -0500</small> M. L. AGUAYO Director, Fleet Installations and Environment and Deputy Chief of Staff</p>				

Figure M.2-12: Maine Historic Preservation Commission Comment

**From:** Schneible, Elizabeth <Elizabeth.A.Schneible@dncr.nh.gov>  
**Sent:** Thursday, December 7, 2023 12:42 PM  
**To:** Kraft, Todd M CIV USN (USA) <todd.m.kraft.civ@us.navy.mil>  
**Subject:** [Non-DoD Source] Supplemental EIS/OEIS for AFTT activities

Dear Mr. Kraft,

We received the attached letter regarding the Supplemental EIS/OEIS for AFTT activities. If there is a Section 106 component to this project, we need to be able to comment in official capacity, which means completing a Request for Project Review. I have attached the Request for Project Review (RPR) form and instructions here for your convenience. Please let me know if you have any questions about this process.

Sincerely,

Liz Schneible  
DHR Program Specialist  
NH Division of Historical Resources  
NH Dept of Natural & Cultural Resources  
172 Pembroke Road, Concord, NH 03301  
[Elizabeth.a.schneible@dncr.nh.gov](mailto:Elizabeth.a.schneible@dncr.nh.gov)



**Figure M.2-13: New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources Comment**



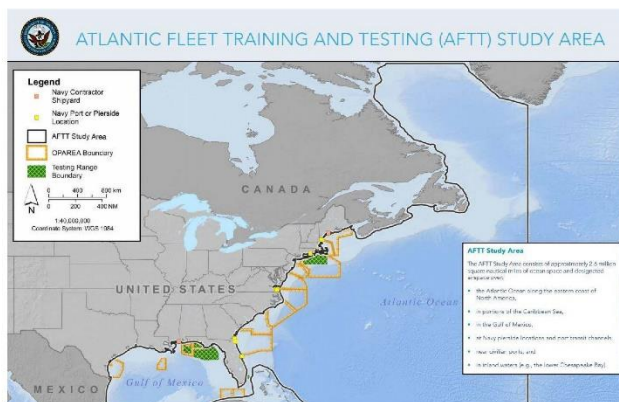
December 15, 2023

Submitted Electronically

Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command, Code EV22SG (AFTT Project Manager)  
6506 Hampton Boulevard  
Norfolk, Virginia 23508-1278

Dear U.S. Department of the Navy and U.S. Coast Guard,

The United States Department of the Navy (including both the U.S. Navy and the U.S. Marine Corps) and the U.S. Coast Guard have proposed they continue military readiness testing and training exercises in predetermined locations in the North Atlantic, the Gulf of Mexico, and portions of the Caribbean Sea, at select Navy pierside locations, within port transit channels, and some inland waters, as seen in **Figure 1**.



P.O. Box 370, Forest Knolls, CA 94933 • 415.663.8590 • [www.seaturtles.org](http://www.seaturtles.org) • [info@seaturtles.org](mailto:info@seaturtles.org)

Figure M.2-14: Turtle Island Restoration Network Comment

**Figure 1:** The map of the Atlantic Fleet Testing and Training area.

1

Different exercises are expected to be conducted involving the use of sonar, explosives, and other weaponry. Exercises will be focused on different warfare communities, including aviation, surface, submarine, and expeditionary.<sup>2</sup>

Turtle Island Restoration Network (TIRN) respectfully submits the following comments in regards to the notice of intent to prepare a draft supplemental environmental impact statement (SEIS) for the Atlantic Fleet Training and Testing (AFTT) study area.

1. In light of marine mammal data developments and Unusual Mortality Events (UME) along the Atlantic Coast, careful consideration must be given to the testing locations and exercises carried out.

The Atlantic coast of the United States is home to several diverse species of marine mammals. Unfortunately, many of these species are at risk due to threats associated with human activity.<sup>3</sup>

#### *Humpback Whales*

Humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) along the Atlantic coast have been experiencing an UME since 2016.<sup>4</sup> As seen below in **Figure 2**, a large amount of humpback whale strandings associated with the UME have been located near the AFTT study area in the North Atlantic.

<sup>1</sup> US Department of the Navy. Available at:

<https://www.nepa.navy.mil/Current-Projects/At-Sea-Ranges/Atlantic-Fleet-Training-and-Testing-Phase-IV/Proposed-Action/>

<sup>2</sup> US Department of the Navy. Final Environmental Impact Statement. 2018. Available at:

<https://media.defense.gov/2020/May/13/2002299472/-1/1/2.0%20AFTT%20FEIS%20DESCRIPTION%20OF%20PROPOSED%20ACTION%20AND%20ALTERNATIVES.PDF> Page 2-1.

<sup>3</sup> Waring, G. T., Palka, D. L., & Evans, P. G. (2009). North Atlantic marine mammals. In *Encyclopedia of marine mammals* (pp. 773-781). Academic Press.

<sup>4</sup> NOAA Fisheries. 2016–2023 Humpback Whale Unusual Mortality Event Along the Atlantic Coast. Available at:

<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/marine-life-distress/2016-2023-humpback-whale-unusual-mortality-event-along-atlantic-coast>

P.O. Box 370, Forest Knolls, CA 94933 • 415.663.8590 • [www.seaturtles.org](http://www.seaturtles.org) • [info@seaturtles.org](mailto:info@seaturtles.org)

**Figure M.2-14: Turtle Island Restoration Network Comment (continued)**





**Figure 2:** A map showing the humpback whale strandings associated with the ongoing UME in the area of the AFTT location.

5

Necropsies have not been able to be conducted on every whale due to different factors, including location and condition of the body. However, a large percentage of the whales that were able to be necropsied presented with injuries associated with human interaction, specifically vessel strike injuries and entanglement in fishing gear. Some of the whales presented with pre-mortem vessel strike injuries indicative of being struck by a moving vessel while still alive.<sup>6</sup> The 2018 Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) indicates that the US Navy accurately reports all collisions with whales and has historically had interactions with humpback whales.<sup>7</sup> With the current exercises being conducted within the AFTT study area following the 2018 FEIS, it must be considered that an increase of vessel traffic related to training and testing exercises could be having a significant impact on humpback whale populations in the North Atlantic along the east coast of the United States. As a result, the data presented within the 2018 FEIS is outdated and cannot effectively be used to pass blame to other vessels operating near the AFTT study area.

<sup>6</sup> NOAA Fisheries. 2016-2023 Humpback Whale Unusual Mortality Event along the Atlantic Coast Dead Animal Locations. Available at:

<https://noaa.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=f9eef8e52fc84144b1bfc84e931ba54c>

<sup>6</sup> NOAA Fisheries. 2016–2023 Humpback Whale Unusual Mortality Event Along the Atlantic Coast.

Available at:

<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/marine-life-distress/2016-2023-humpback-whale-unusual-mortality-event-along-atlantic-coast>

<sup>7</sup> US Department of the Navy. Final Environmental Impact Statement. 2018. Available at:

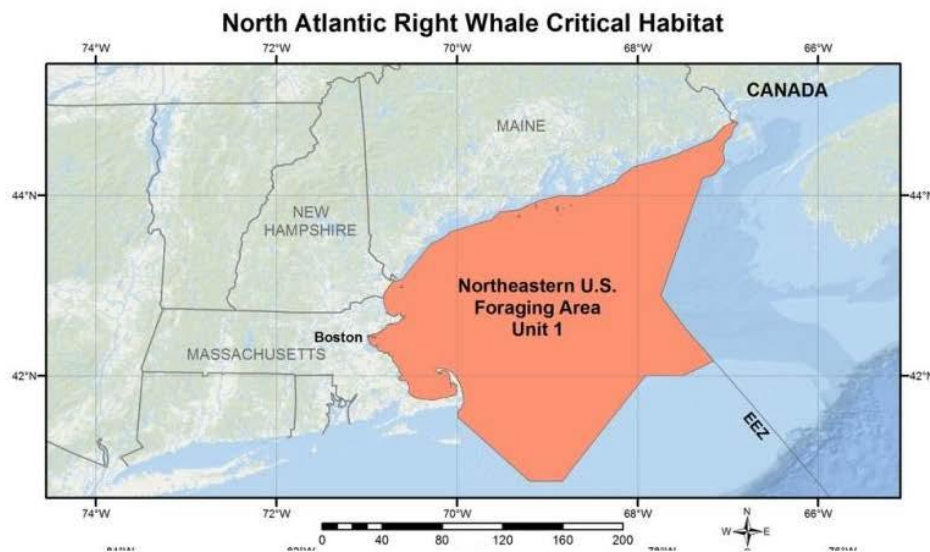
<https://media.defense.gov/2020/May/13/2002299480/-1/-1/1/3.07%20AFTT%20FEIS%20MARINE%20AMMAL.S.PDF> Page 3.7-25.

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**Figure M.2-14:** Turtle Island Restoration Network Comment (continued)

### *North Atlantic Right Whales*

The North Atlantic Right Whale (*Eubalaena glacialis*) is approaching extinction after an UME was officially declared in 2017. Unfortunately, vessel strike injuries are a leading cause of mortality.<sup>8</sup> Critical habitat for the North Atlantic Right Whale has been established in areas of the North Atlantic, as seen below in **Figure 3**. The location of the critical habitat is just east of the AFTT study area.



**Figure 3:** A map showing the critical habitat of North Atlantic Right Whales in the North Atlantic that is located east of the AFTT location.

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North Atlantic Right Whales travel up the coast to feed in the waters around New England during the winter and early spring, as defined by the critical habitat.<sup>10</sup> North Atlantic Right Whales do not follow the boundaries of a map. Once they are outside the boundaries of the critical habitat, they are at an increased risk of experiencing anthropogenic threats. The AFTT study area is far too close to this critical habitat and increases the risk of vessel strike injuries as North Atlantic Right Whales migrate along the coast. The 2018 FEIS specifically highlights that

<sup>8</sup> NOAA Fisheries. 2017–2023 North Atlantic Right Whale Unusual Mortality Event. Available at: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/marine-life-distress/2017-2023-north-atlantic-right-whale-unusual-mortality-event>

<sup>9</sup> NOAA Fisheries. North Atlantic Right Whale Critical Habitat Map and GIS Data. Available at: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/resource/map/north-atlantic-right-whale-critical-habitat-map-and-gis-data>

<sup>10</sup> Parks, S. E., Warren, J. D., Stamieszkin, K., Mayo, C. A., & Wiley, D. (2012). *Dangerous dining: surface foraging of North Atlantic right whales increases risk of vessel collisions*. *Biology letters*, 8(1), 57-60.

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**Figure M.2-14: Turtle Island Restoration Network Comment (continued)**

despite strict regulations regarding vessel speed and routing, there have been no measurable effects on reducing the number of marine mammal mortalities associated with vessel strike injuries.<sup>11</sup> As North Atlantic Right Whales remain critically endangered, it is vital that the SEIS is revised to contain recent data associated with North Atlantic Right Whale population distribution and vessel strike injuries.

We ask that the US Department of the Navy and the US Coast Guard consider halting training and testing exercises within these critical areas in light of the ongoing UMEs associated with both humpback and North Atlantic Right Whales.

2. All species of marine mammals are put at risk due to the type of training and testing exercises conducted within the marine environment.

Numerous species of marine mammals inhabit the waters within the AFTT study area and are at risk of disruption, injury, or death as a result of the training and testing exercises. A majority of the proposed exercises involve the use of sonar, explosives, and other weaponry.

#### *Acoustic Stressors*

In the 2018 FEIS, acoustic stressors were associated with sonar and other transducers, air guns, pile driving, vessel noise, aircraft noise, and weapons noise.<sup>12</sup> Marine mammals rely on sound to communicate and move around within their environment. Some species of marine mammals also use echolocation to feed. Underwater noise has the potential to disrupt essential life functions of marine mammals, such as feeding, mating, nursing, resting, and migrating.<sup>13</sup> Over the course of history, military training exercises have been considered to be a substantial threat to marine mammals, even suspected of leading to mass stranding events. Following a mass stranding event in the Bahamas in the 2000s after a military exercise, the US government acknowledged sonar as a potential contributing factor.<sup>14</sup> With many vulnerable and endangered marine mammal populations in decline, it is concerning that the continuation of testing and training exercises that will contribute significantly to noise pollution is even being considered.

#### *Explosive, Energy, and Physical Stressors*

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<sup>11</sup> US Department of the Navy. Final Environmental Impact Statement. 2018. Available at: <https://media.defense.gov/2020/May/13/2002299480/-1/-1/1/3.07%20AFTT%20FEIS%20MARINE%20MAMMALS.PDF> Page 3.7-25.

<sup>12</sup> US Department of the Navy. Final Environmental Impact Statement. 2018. Available at: <https://media.defense.gov/2020/May/13/2002299480/-1/-1/1/3.07%20AFTT%20FEIS%20MARINE%20MAMMALS.PDF> Page 3.7-105.

<sup>13</sup> Erbe, C., Dunlop, R., & Dolman, S. (2018). Effects of noise on marine mammals. Effects of anthropogenic noise on animals, 277-309.

<sup>14</sup> Simmonds, M. P., Dolman, S. J., Jasny, M., Parsons, E. C. M., Weilgart, L., Wright, A. J., & Leaper, R. (2014). Marine noise pollution-increasing recognition but need for more practical action.

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Figure M.2-14: Turtle Island Restoration Network Comment (continued)



In the 2018 FEIS, explosive stressors were associated with explosions in-air and in-water, while energy stressors were associated with in-water electromagnetic devices and lasers. Physical stressors are related to vessels and in-water devices, military expended materials, and seafloor devices.<sup>15</sup> With an increase of vessel traffic associated with training and testing exercises, we can expect an increase in human interaction with marine mammals. Many marine mammals are often struck by moving vessels while they are at the surface feeding, as seen in a study conducted on vessel strike related mortalities in humpback whales.<sup>16</sup> Further research is necessary to reduce the likelihood of vessel interaction with marine mammals.

#### *Entanglement and Ingestion*

In the 2018 FEIS, entanglements were associated with wires and cables, decelerators/parachutes, and biodegradable polymer, while ingestion was associated with military expended materials—munitions and military expended materials other than munitions.<sup>17</sup> Some marine mammal entanglements have historically been associated with underwater cables. While technological advances have decreased the likelihood of such entanglements,<sup>18</sup> the risk is still present. Different types of marine debris related to the training and testing exercises are also considered to be a risk factor for entanglements among marine mammals. Marine debris can also be ingested by marine mammals, leading to impairment of gastrointestinal functionality and even death.<sup>19</sup>

#### *Secondary Stressors*

In the 2018 FEIS, secondary stressors were associated with impacts on habitat and prey availability.<sup>20</sup> Different training and testing exercises will have varying effects on the marine ecosystem as a whole. If the trophic cascade of an ecosystem is disrupted, we can expect to see different behavioral changes amongst large marine megafauna populations, including marine

<sup>15</sup> US Department of the Navy. Final Environmental Impact Statement. 2018. Available at: <https://media.defense.gov/2020/May/13/2002299480/-1/-1/1/3.07%20AFTT%20FEIS%20MARINE%20MAMMALS.PDF> Page 3.7-105.

<sup>16</sup> Stepanuk, J. E., Heywood, E. I., Lopez, J. F., DiGiovanni Jr, R. A., & Thorne, L. H. (2021). Age-specific behavior and habitat use in humpback whales: implications for vessel strike. *Marine Ecology Progress Series*, 663, 209-222.

<sup>17</sup> US Department of the Navy. Final Environmental Impact Statement. 2018. Available at: <https://media.defense.gov/2020/May/13/2002299480/-1/-1/1/3.07%20AFTT%20FEIS%20MARINE%20MAMMALS.PDF> Page 3.7-105.

<sup>18</sup> Taormina, B., Bald, J., Want, A., Thouzeau, G., Lejart, M., Desroy, N., & Carlier, A. (2018). A review of potential impacts of submarine power cables on the marine environment: Knowledge gaps, recommendations and future directions. *Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews*, 96, 380-391.

<sup>19</sup> Simmonds, M. P. (2012). Cetaceans and marine debris: the great unknown. *Journal of Marine Sciences*, 2012.

<sup>20</sup> US Department of the Navy. Final Environmental Impact Statement. 2018. Available at: <https://media.defense.gov/2020/May/13/2002299480/-1/-1/1/3.07%20AFTT%20FEIS%20MARINE%20MAMMALS.PDF> Page 3.7-105.

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Figure M.2-14: Turtle Island Restoration Network Comment (continued)

mammals. Marine mammal populations can be influenced by both abiotic and biotic factors. Biotic factors, including prey availability, can be considered a significant driver of marine mammal distribution and behavior.<sup>21</sup>

With so many different areas of military training and testing coupled with a diverse array of marine mammal species, it is imperative that updated marine mammal population and strandings data be a significant part of the SEIS.

3. Updated sea turtle data is needed for the SEIS to accurately determine the threat of different activities and exercises to vulnerable and endangered sea turtle species.

Different species of sea turtles can be found throughout the AFTT study area, including green sea turtles (*Chelonia mydas*), hawksbill turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*), Kemp's ridley turtle (*Lepidochelys kempi*), leatherback turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*), and loggerhead turtle (*Caretta caretta*). According to the 2018 FEIS, some sea turtle species, like the hawksbill sea turtle, have critical habitat that is located within the AFTT study area.<sup>22</sup> The endangered Kemp's Ridley sea turtle has a smaller range within the Gulf of Mexico,<sup>23</sup> but is still at risk due to the training and testing exercises in the Gulf. In a majority of the individual species backgrounds presented in the 2018 FEIS, vessel strike injuries were not necessarily considered to be a significant threat to their populations. A multi-year study focused along the Florida coast found vessel strike related mortality in sea turtles to be a significant threat among several species.<sup>24</sup> We can expect to see increased vessel traffic related to testing and training exercises within the AFTT study area and, as a result, sea turtle populations are at a heightened risk of vessel strike related mortality.

In the 2018 FEIS, different types of marine debris were touched upon and discussed their overall impacts to sea turtles. Marine debris can lead to entanglements and ingestion in sea turtles. The 2018 FEIS references a study in which juvenile sea turtles were more likely to ingest marine debris than adults.<sup>25</sup> Different types of marine debris related to training and testing exercises are

<sup>21</sup> Kiszka, J. J., Heithaus, M. R., & Wirsing, A. J. (2015). Behavioural drivers of the ecological roles and importance of marine mammals. *Marine Ecology Progress Series*, 523, 267-281.

<sup>22</sup> US Department of the Navy. Final Environmental Impact Statement. 2018. Available at: <https://media.defense.gov/2020/May/13/2002299481/-1/-1/1/3.08%20AFTT%20FEIS%20REPTILES.PDF> Page 3.8-22.

<sup>23</sup> US Department of the Navy. Final Environmental Impact Statement. 2018. Available at: <https://media.defense.gov/2020/May/13/2002299481/-1/-1/1/3.08%20AFTT%20FEIS%20REPTILES.PDF> Page 3.8-28.

<sup>24</sup> Foley, A. M., Stacy, B. A., Hardy, R. F., Shea, C. P., Minch, K. E., & Schroeder, B. A. (2019). *Characterizing watercraft-related mortality of sea turtles in Florida*. *The Journal of Wildlife Management*, 83(5), 1057-1072.

<sup>25</sup> US Department of the Navy. Final Environmental Impact Statement. 2018. Available at: <https://media.defense.gov/2020/May/13/2002299481/-1/-1/1/3.08%20AFTT%20FEIS%20REPTILES.PDF> Page 3.8-15.

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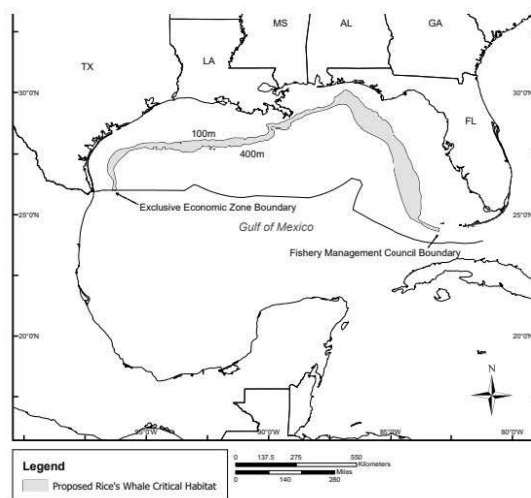
Figure M.2-14: Turtle Island Restoration Network Comment (continued)

expected to impact sea turtle populations within the AFTT study area. A more dynamic study is necessary to determine the full extent at which sea turtles would be exposed to entanglement and ingestion stressors as a result of marine debris.

To fully understand how the training and testing activities will impact sea turtle populations within the AFTT study area, the SEIS will need to analyze updated data related to strandings and population distribution in conjunction to potential stressors.

4. With less than 100 individuals remaining, the critically endangered Rice's whale is at risk of extinction.

At the time of the 2018 FEIS, the Rice's whale (*Balaenoptera ricei*) had not been identified as its own species.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, this species was technically not a part of the 2018 FEIS and had not been accurately assessed for potential stressors caused by training and testing exercises in the Gulf of Mexico. Recently, NOAA Fisheries proposed critical habitat designation for the Rice's whales in response to their incredibly small population size and limited distribution range. The proposed critical habitat for the Rice's whale can be seen below in **Figure 4**. A portion of the critical habitat overlaps with the AFTT study area in the Gulf of Mexico.



<sup>26</sup> Soldevilla, M. S., Ternus, K., Cook, A., Hildebrand, J. A., Frasier, K. E., Martinez, A., & Garrison, L. P. (2022). Acoustic localization, validation, and characterization of Rice's whale calls. *The Journal of the Acoustical Society of America*, 151(6), 4264-4278.

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Figure M.2-14: Turtle Island Restoration Network Comment (continued)



**Figure 4:** A map showing the proposed critical habitat of Rice's Whales in the Gulf of Mexico.

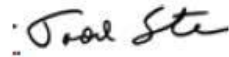
27

As with other marine mammals, the Rice's whales are at risk of the same stressors as identified in item 2. The Rice's whale is protected under both the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA). This species is considered to be depleted under the MMPA, heightening the need to further protect this species from anthropogenic threats.<sup>28</sup> We recommend all military training and testing be immediately stopped within the Gulf of Mexico to ensure the protection and survival of the critically endangered Rice's whale.

*Final Thoughts*

In light of ongoing UMEs, increased anthropogenic pressure, and declining species populations, it is vital that the SEIS further examines the impact training and testing exercises will have on the marine ecosystem. The data used in the 2018 FEIS is outdated and unreliable as the ocean is a dynamic system and always changing. We recommend that all exercises be stopped until an updated analysis becomes available to reduce the impact on our oceans and marine life.

Thank you for your consideration,



Todd Steiner  
Executive Director

<sup>27</sup> NOAA Fisheries. Proposed Rice's Whale Critical Habitat. Available at: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/s3/2023-07/Rices-Whale-Proposed-CH-Map-508-Final.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> NOAA Fisheries. Rice's Whale. Available at: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/species/rices-whale>

**Figure M.2-14: Turtle Island Restoration Network Comment (continued)**

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