

**DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE  
DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY**

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT FOR THE ENVIRONMENTAL  
ASSESSMENT FOR ADVANCED HELICOPTER TRAINING SYSTEM  
AT NAVAL AIR STATION WHITING FIELD, FLORIDA**

Pursuant to Council on Environmental Quality regulations (40 Code of Federal Regulations Parts 1500-1508) implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), United States (U.S.) Department of the Navy (Navy) Regulations (32 Code of Federal Regulations part 775), and the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations Instruction 5090.1D, the Navy gives notice that an Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared, and an Environmental Impact Statement is not required for the Advanced Helicopter Training System (AHTS) at Naval Air Station (NAS) Whiting Field.

**Proposed Action:** The Proposed Action is to modernize the rotary-wing and tilt-rotor integrated pilot production training program at Training Air Wing Five located at NAS Whiting Field and its associated Navy Outlying Landing Fields (NOLFs) in Florida by implementing the AHTS. The AHTS would involve the replacement of TH-57 Sea Ranger training helicopters, replacement of existing ground based training systems (i.e., simulators), an increase in operational training tempo, changes in operational tactics based on a new curriculum, construction of new facilities, and an increase in personnel.

Implementing the AHTS would provide 130 newer, more capable, and more reliable training helicopters with associated Ground Based Training System to Training Air Wing Five at NAS Whiting Field. The TH-57 would be replaced with a yet-to-be-determined commercially available helicopter. As the specific commercial helicopter has not yet been selected, this document will refer to the new helicopter as the TH-XX. Additionally, for the EA, a conservative representative surrogate helicopter, the Eurocopter UH-72 Lakota, which is larger and louder than comparable commercially available helicopters, was used to analyze the potential impacts from the TH-XX.

Training operations would progressively transition from the TH-57 to the TH-XX beginning in 2021, with transition to be complete in the 2025 timeframe. Proposed TH-XX training operations would generally be similar to existing training operations currently conducted with the TH-57. Flight training operations with the TH-XX would be conducted at airfields, and within airspace, already utilized by Training Air Wing Five.

However, there would be an increase in the number of annual flight operations, to include training operations involving night vision device training, flying in formation at night, and search and rescue. Flight training operations would be conducted primarily at Whiting Field South and NOLF's Spencer, Pace, Site X, Harold, Santa Rosa, and Choctaw; TH-XX would continue to fly in and out of local municipal airports as necessary, including Pensacola International Airport and Peter Prince/Milton Airport among others, in executing flight training curriculum to gain required operational experience in Federal Aviation Administration-controlled airspace. All training operations would continue to observe all Federal Aviation Administration flight rules. Use of municipal airports by military aircraft is consistent with Federal Aviation Administration regulations and airport Master Plans.

Prior to the arrival of the TH-XX and Ground Based Training System in 2021, new facilities and associated infrastructure would be constructed at NAS Whiting Field to accommodate helicopter maintenance activities and ground based training requirements. The TH-XX and Ground Based Training System would arrive incrementally at NAS Whiting Field before two permanent facilities could be constructed; two temporary transitional facilities would be constructed as an interim measure.

In order to meet the requirements of the AHTS, there would be an increase of 33 Training Air Wing Five military personnel, Helicopter Instructor Training Unit contractor personnel, contractor academic instructors, and contractor flight simulator instructors.

**Purpose and Need:** The purpose of the Proposed Action is to address the capability and capacity gaps of the current aging TH-57 helicopter training system operated by Training Air Wing Five at NAS Whiting Field. The need for the Proposed Action is to provide capabilities for training and equipping combat-capable Naval forces ready to deploy worldwide. In this regard, the Proposed Action furthers the Navy's execution of its congressionally mandated roles and responsibilities under Title 10 United States Code section 8062. AHTS will be the primary training system for all U.S. Navy, U.S. Marine Corps, U.S. Coast Guard, and participating allied student rotary-wing and tilt-rotor combat pilots in support of worldwide operations at higher rates than have been seen over the last two decades. As TH-57 helicopters have been used to train pilots since the early 1970s, the technology used in their design is 50 years old, which by today's training standards, is considered obsolete. As

a result, the TH-57 does not meet the future training requirements of the Navy and Marine Corps. Moreover, the aging TH-57s are rapidly reaching the end of their useful service life. In order to keep the TH-57 operational, costly repairs and maintenance are frequently required to extend its service life. The infrastructure supporting TH-57 at NAS Whiting Field has been in operational use since the 1940s. For example, the existing hangar was built 75 years ago, was not designed for helicopters, and offers very limited protection against hazardous weather. The building containing eight existing simulators and training devices has no capacity for the AHTS simulators. Therefore, new facilities and associated infrastructure are required to be developed at NAS Whiting Field to support AHTS training and maintenance activities.

**Alternatives Analyzed:** The Navy considered two alternatives: the Action Alternative and the No Action Alternative.

Action Alternative. The Proposed Action is the only action alternative considered by the Navy to meet the purpose of and need for modernizing the rotary-wing and tilt-rotor integrated pilot production training program at Training Air Wing Five. The AHTS would provide a newer, more capable, more reliable helicopter and training system to Training Air Wing Five. The proposed AHTS would meet the advanced helicopter and intermediate tilt-rotor training requirements through 2050.

No Action Alternative. The Navy would not modernize the rotary-wing and tilt-rotor integrated pilot production training program at Training Air Wing Five by implementing the AHTS at NAS Whiting Field and its associated NOLFs. Training would not increase to accommodate Fleets' increased demand for pilots. No AHTS facilities would be constructed and there would be no increase in personnel to support the AHTS. Training operations with the TH-57 would continue to be conducted within existing airfields and airspace currently utilized by Training Air Wing Five. The No Action Alternative would not meet the purpose of and need for the Proposed Action.

**Environmental Effects:** The following is a summary of the environmental consequences of the Proposed Action.

Air Quality. Emissions of criteria pollutants associated with construction and flight training operations would, based on the UH-72 surrogate, increase relative to the emissions under the No Action Alternative. The UH-72 is larger than the commercially available helicopters that could be selected as the TH-XX, thus, UH-72 air emissions are expected to be higher than the air

emissions that would actually be generated by TH-XX. Use of the UH-72 for analysis provides a conservative (i.e., higher) estimate of air emissions associated with flight training operations under the Action Alternative. The region is currently in attainment for all National Ambient Air Quality Standards. Changes in mobile emissions from construction and flight training operations are not considered significant. Changes in mobile emissions are not subject to permit requirements or regulatory emission thresholds. The air emissions from training activities on the airfields would contribute to regional emission totals; however, the increased emissions would represent an average of less than 1 percent of the current regional inventory for all pollutants. The Proposed Action would not result in significant impacts to air quality.

Water Resources. Implementation of the Proposed Action at NAS Whiting Field would not result in significant impacts to water resources from proposed facility development. The water quality of surface water and groundwater would not be impacted. Construction activities would avoid wetlands and floodplains impacts, and would be performed in compliance with Florida's General Construction Stormwater Permit. A Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan and Best Management Practices would be implemented to limit erosion and runoff into surface waters. Implementation of the Proposed Action would not result in significant impacts on water quality at NAS Whiting Field or the region.

Cultural Resources. There are no known archaeological resources within the Area of Potential Effects where ground would be disturbed from construction activities; as a result, there would be no effect under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, and no significant impacts to archaeological resources under NEPA. There are no National Register of Historic Places-eligible architectural resources within the affected environments at NAS Whiting Field or NOLF's Spencer, Pace, Site X, Harold, Santa Rosa, and Choctaw, so there would be no effect under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. Therefore, under NEPA, there would be no significant impacts to historic architectural resources. The Navy consulted with the Florida Division of Historical Resources, and received concurrence on August 20, 2019, with the extent of the Area of Potential Effects and the determination of No Historic Properties Affected. The Navy consulted with federally recognized tribes and no significant traditional cultural properties were identified. The Navy would have an archaeologist

meeting the Secretary of the Interior's Professional Qualifications Standards present to monitor ground-disturbing activities from construction for potentially intact cultural resources. Implementation of the Proposed Action would not result in significant impacts to cultural resources or traditional cultural properties.

Biological Resources. The Proposed Action would not result in significant impacts to vegetation and terrestrial wildlife, would have no effect on federally threatened or endangered species, would not result in significant adverse effects on a population of a migratory bird species, including the take of bald eagles, and would not significantly impact any state protected species. Implementation of the Proposed Action would not result in significant impacts to biological resources.

Noise. No significant impacts from noise would occur. The Proposed Action would not result in any off-base noise impacts above 65 decibel (dB) day-night average sound level (DNL) at Whiting Field South. NOLF Choctaw is used by military jets for pattern training and the proposed TH-XX operations at NOLF Choctaw would not contribute a significant difference to the noise environment. For noise exposure in off-base locations in the immediate vicinity of the remaining five NOLFs, noise levels above 65 dB DNL would affect an additional 200 acres and 215 more people when compared to noise levels under the No Action Alternative. Noise levels for 196 of the 200 acres would be from 65 to <70 dB DNL at five NOLFs: 73 acres at NOLF Spencer, 37 acres at NOLF Pace, 18 acres at NOLF Site X, 1 acre at NOLF Harold, and 67 acres at NOLF Santa Rosa. Noise levels for the remaining 4 acres would be from 70 to <75 dB DNL at NOLF Santa Rosa. Noise levels for all 215 people would be from 65 to <70 dB DNL at two NOLFs: 148 people at NOLF Spencer and 67 people at NOLF Santa Rosa. None of the 215 people affected would experience noise above 70 dB DNL. Noise modeling results indicate an average increase of 5 dB DNL, as compared to the No Action Alternative, may be expected in these areas due to a combination of an increase of 22 percent in flight operations and the change from the TH-57 to the TH-XX. The increase of 22 percent to flight operations would contribute a nearly 1 dB increase to the overall DNL while the change from the TH-57 to the TH-XX, based on the UH-72 surrogate, would be responsible for the remainder of the change. The UH-72 is larger and louder than the commercially available helicopters that could be selected as the TH-XX, thus, UH-72 modeled noise levels are expected to be higher than the noise levels that would actually

be generated by TH-XX. Use of the UH-72 for analysis provides a conservative (i.e., higher) estimate of noise levels associated with flight training operations under the Action Alternative. On average; NAS Whiting Field receives less than 10 noise complaints per month from helicopter flight training operations, to include repeat complaints from one or more complainants (NAS Whiting Field, 2019). NAS Whiting Field and Training Air Wing Five have standard operating procedures to receive and assess noise and/or safety complaints from members of the public, to ensure that training operations are conducted in accordance with Federal Aviation Administration regulations and established Navy flight rules and training profiles. These procedures would continue during and after transition to AHTS. The changes in modeled noise levels would vary slightly by location relative to flight paths. The changes in DNL and single-event noise levels would likely be noticeable at NOLFs Spencer and Santa Rosa, which are both areas that are currently exposed to regular helicopter traffic, but would not constitute a dramatic change to the intensity of noise in the local environment. Domestic animals, including horses, have likely habituated to existing helicopter activity at the NOLFs, and proposed changes to the type of helicopter and increased flight training operations would likely be insufficient to result in significant impacts. Implementation of the Proposed Action would not result in significant impacts to the noise environment.

Land Use. The Proposed Action would result in additional acreage requiring compatible land use considerations in potential development; however, these considerations are consistent with the No Action Alternative and land use planning processes already in place in Santa Rosa County. The Proposed Action would result in increased acres of off-base lands, including some designated residential, exposed to 65 to <70 dB DNL noise levels; however, these potential noise increases would occur in areas considered incompatible in the current Air Installations Compatible Use Zones Study and land use compatibility would remain similar to the No Action Alternative conditions. Clear Zones and Accident Potential Zones would remain unchanged under the Proposed Action. All local and regional land use controls would continue to be implemented. The Proposed Action is consistent, to the maximum extent practicable, with the enforceable policies of the Florida Coastal Management Program and therefore, would not introduce significant effects to coastal zone resources. Concurrence on the Coastal Consistency Determination from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection was received on August 13, 2019. Implementation of

the Proposed Action would not result in significant impacts to land use.

Infrastructure. The Proposed Action would result in increased quantity, consumption, or demand for water, wastewater, stormwater, solid waste management, and energy from a small increase in population that would be spread throughout Santa Rosa County. New facilities would also result in increased demand for infrastructure resources. Based on existing and future capacity and projected demand, Navy and local infrastructure systems are expected to have sufficient capacity to accommodate the increase in population and facility requirements. Implementation of the Proposed Action would not result in significant impacts to infrastructure.

Public Health and Safety. The Proposed Action would not result in changes to community emergency services. There would be no impacts to public health and safety from construction and demolition activities. There would be no change to the Clear Zones or Accident Potential Zones under the Proposed Action. The changes associated with the implementation of the AHTS do not pose a significant threat to public health and safety or aviation safety. The risk of Bird/Animal Aircraft Strike Hazard would increase slightly due to the increase in annual operations but, no aspect of the Proposed Action would increase concentrations of birds/wildlife on or near the airfields. The Navy has determined that there are no environmental health and safety risks associated with the Proposed Action that would disproportionately affect children or the general public. Implementation of the Proposed Action would not result in significant impacts to public health and safety.

Hazardous Materials and Wastes. The Proposed Action would result in an increased volume of hazardous wastes used for helicopter maintenance, but no new hazardous materials are anticipated to be required to support maintenance activities. All hazardous wastes would be managed in accordance with applicable Federal, State, and local regulations and the installation's Hazardous Waste Management Plan. Any special hazards encountered would be removed and managed in accordance with applicable Federal and State regulations. Defense Environmental Restoration Program sites would be avoided to the extent practicable, or any excavation within an Installation Restoration Program Site would follow specific protocols and all regulations. Implementation of the Proposed Action would not result in significant impacts to hazardous materials and wastes.

Environmental Justice. The Proposed Action would impact population census block groups that are either fully or partially within noise contours from 65 to <70 dB DNL surrounding NOLFs Spencer and Santa Rosa, and would not impact populations at the other airfields. The intensity of noise levels between 65 and 70 dB DNL would be experienced equally by both populations identified as minority and low-income and populations not considered minority or low-income. Noise modeling results indicate an average increase of 5 dB DNL noise levels would likely be noticeable at NOLFs Spencer and Santa Rosa, which are currently exposed to regular helicopter traffic, but would not constitute a dramatic change to the intensity of noise in the local environment. The noise impacts would not be significant, and use of the UH-72 for analysis provides a conservative (i.e., higher) estimate of noise levels associated with flight training operations under the Proposed Action. Therefore, these impacts would not be disproportionately high and adverse on an environmental justice population, and the implementation of the Proposed Action would not result in significant impacts to environmental justice.

Cumulative Impacts. After a review of other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions within the study area of the Proposed Action, implementation of the Proposed Action in conjunction with the other identified actions would not represent a significant cumulative impact on environmental or human resources addressed in the EA.

**Public Involvement:** A Notice of Availability of the Draft EA was published in the Pensacola News Journal on June 28-30, 2019 and in Santa Rosa's Press Gazette on June 29 and July 3, 2019. The Draft EA was made available for review from June 28 to July 19, 2019. The Draft EA was posted on the Navy's website, <http://www.nepa.navy.mil/ahts> and paper copies were available at eleven local libraries. Eight public comments were received on the publically released Draft EA. In response to comments received, the EA was revised to provide further clarification that in addition to helicopter flight training operations conducted primarily at Whiting Field South and NOLFs Spencer, Pace, Site X, Harold, Santa Rosa, and Choctaw, helicopter flight training operations are also conducted from local municipal airports as necessary, including Pensacola International Airport and Peter Prince/Milton Airport among others. Biological resources were updated to reflect that no known bald eagle nests are located within one mile of Whiting Field South or its NOLFs. Noise effects on domestic animals was evaluated. Information was



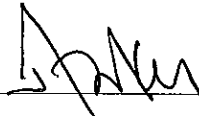
added to clarify that use of the UH-72 surrogate helicopter to analyze potential air emissions and noise provides a conservative (i.e., higher) estimate of potential impacts because the UH-72 is larger and louder than the commercially available helicopters that could be selected as the TH-XX.

**Finding:** Based on analysis presented in the EA, the Navy finds that implementation of the Proposed Action (Action Alternative) will not significantly impact the quality of the human or natural environment or generate significant controversy. Therefore, the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement will not be required.

The EA prepared by the Navy is on file and interested parties may obtain a copy by downloading the EA from the project website: <http://www.nepa.navy.mil/ahts>.

17 September 2019

Date



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