

DEPARTMENT OF WAR

Department of the Navy

Record of Decision for Surveillance Towed Array Sensor System Low Frequency Active Sonar Training and Testing in the Western North Pacific and Indian Oceans Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement/Overseas Environmental Impact Statement

AGENCY: Department of the Navy, Department of War

ACTION: Record of Decision

SUMMARY: The United States (U.S.) Department of the Navy (Navy), after carefully weighing the strategic, operational, scientific, and environmental consequences of the Proposed Action, announces its decision to perform training and testing activities (also referred to as military readiness activities) as identified in Alternative 1, the Navy's Preferred Alternative, of the Surveillance Towed Array Sensor System (SURTASS) Low Frequency Active (LFA) Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement/Overseas Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS/OEIS). Implementation of Alternative 1 enables the Navy to meet military requirements to achieve the levels of operational readiness required under Title 10 United States Code (U.S.C.) section 8062. The full suite of mitigation measures detailed in Chapter 4 (Mitigation, Monitoring, and Reporting) of the SURTASS LFA Final SEIS/OEIS would be implemented to avoid or reduce potential impacts during military readiness activities under Alternative 1.

The Navy, as the lead agency, prepared the SURTASS LFA SEIS/OEIS in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA; 42 U.S.C. section 4321 *et seq.*), Executive Order 12114, *Environmental Effects of Major Federal Actions Abroad*, and applicable federal NEPA implementing regulations and guidance in place at the time the SEIS/OEIS was initiated. The SURTASS LFA Final SEIS/OEIS supports the issuance of a new Letter of Authorization (LOA) for the incidental taking of marine mammals under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA). National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is a cooperating agency for the SURTASS LFA SEIS/OEIS because the scope of the Proposed Action and alternatives involve activities that have the potential to affect protected resources under the agency's jurisdiction and about which they have special expertise. This Record of Decision is the decision document for the Navy.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION: Contact the SURTASS LFA SEIS/OEIS Project Manager (N46), 250 Makalapa Drive, Pearl Harbor, HI 96860-3131; or access the website at: www.nepa.navy.mil/surtass-lfa/.

A. BACKGROUND AND ISSUES: The Navy's statutory mission is to train and equip naval forces that are combat-ready and capable of accomplishing America's strategic objectives, deterring maritime aggression, and maintaining freedom of navigation in ocean areas. By law, the Secretary of the Navy is responsible for functions such as training, supplying, equipping, and maintaining naval forces that are ready to achieve national security objectives as directed by the National Command Authority. Preparing and maintaining forces skilled in anti-submarine warfare is a critical part of the Navy's mission.

In the SEIS/OEIS, the Navy proposes to continue utilizing SURTASS LFA and Compact LFA (CLFA) sonar systems onboard U.S. Navy surveillance ships for training and testing activities conducted in the western and central North Pacific and eastern Indian Oceans (Study Area). “SURTASS LFA sonar systems” are inclusive of both the LFA and CLFA systems, each having similar acoustic operating characteristics. The Navy has prepared a supplement to the 2019 SURTASS LFA SEIS/SOEIS to update the assessment of potential environmental impacts associated with the Proposed Action and Alternatives in the SURTASS LFA sonar system Study Area. Since the completion of the 2019 SEIS/Supplemental OEIS, the best available science has been updated, the regulatory environment has changed, and the impact analysis has been refined. All of this has been incorporated into the SEIS/OEIS analysis.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of the Navy’s Proposed Action is to perform training and testing activities to ensure that the Navy remains proficient in the use of SURTASS LFA sonar systems in support of the Navy’s mission. Additionally, the Proposed Action could include the at-sea sonar testing of up to three new Auxiliary General Ocean Surveillance (T-AGOS) vessels (one per year) starting in 2030. The need for the Proposed Action is to maintain a system and crews capable of detecting at long ranges the increasingly technologically advanced foreign submarine presence that threatens our national security.

Public Involvement

The Navy conducted extensive public involvement during the development of the SEIS/OEIS, including public scoping, release of the Draft SEIS/OEIS for review and comment, and release of the Final SEIS/OEIS. The Navy considered substantive comments received during scoping and the Draft SEIS/OEIS review when developing the Final SEIS/OEIS. Details on the public involvement process are found in Appendix A (Public and Agency Involvement) of the Final SEIS/OEIS. No letters were received during the SURTASS LFA Final SEIS/OEIS 30-day wait period, which ended on June 8, 2026.

Alternatives Considered

The identification, consideration, and analysis of a reasonable range of alternatives are critical components of the NEPA process and contribute to the goal of informed decision making. To be reasonable, an alternative, except for the No Action Alternative, must be technically and economically feasible and meet the purpose and need for the proposed action. Only those alternatives determined to be reasonable and that meet the purpose and need of the proposed action require analysis.

The Navy developed screening criteria to aid in assessing the feasibility of proposed alternatives and defining the range of reasonable alternatives, as are described in Section 2.2.1 of the Final SEIS/OEIS. Two action alternatives (Action Alternative 1 and Action Alternative 2) were identified as meeting the Navy’s purpose and need and requirements of the screening factors. The No Action Alternative would not allow the Navy to meet any of the screening factor requirements or the Navy’s purpose and need. Even though the No Action Alternative would not meet the purpose and need for training and testing activities using SURTASS LFA sonar, it was

carried forward to provide a baseline for measuring the potential environmental consequences of the two action alternatives.

- No Action Alternative: Under the No Action Alternative, the Proposed Action would not occur, and therefore the Navy would discontinue SURTASS LFA sonar training and testing activities in August 2026 and no further activities would occur. The Navy's purpose and need would not be met under the No Action Alternative since its ability to train and test to locate and defend against enemy submarines would be greatly impaired. For NMFS, denial of an application for an incidental take authorization constitutes the No Action Alternative, which is consistent with NMFS's statutory obligation under the MMPA to grant or deny requests for take incidental to specified activities.
- Alternative 1 (Preferred Alternative): The Navy proposes to use 1,100 hours of SURTASS LFA sonar training per year for the foreseeable future. The SURTASS LFA sonar transmission hours under Action Alternative 1 (1,100 hours per year pooled across all SURTASS LFA sonar equipped vessels) represent a distribution across three activities including:
 - Training (i.e., contractor crew proficiency training, military crew proficiency training, active training)
 - Maintenance and upgrades (i.e., equipment maintenance checks, LFA/CLFA maintenance/performance testing, other maintenance/testing)
 - Exercises (e.g., Valiant Shield, RIMPAC)

Alternative 1 does not include additional testing outside of the maintenance and upgrades addressed in the second bullet above.

- Alternative 2: The Navy plans up to a maximum of 2,490 hours of SURTASS LFA sonar transmissions per year for training and testing activities, pooled across all SURTASS LFA sonar equipped vessels operating in the Study Area. This alternative assumes an increase in training requirements, as well as a need for additional SURTASS LFA sonar equipped vessels to be available in the Study Area, based on training requirements or a change in geopolitics. The Navy anticipates that up to one new T-AGOS vessel would be ready for at-sea testing within the Study Area annually beginning in 2030. Thus, the analysis under Alternative 2 includes 840 annual hours of testing of new T-AGOS vessels for years 5-7. It is possible that two of the new vessels could be added to the fleet as opposed to replacing existing vessels, meaning the total number of T-AGOS vessels in the Study Area would be a maximum of six. The Navy plans up to 1,100 hours of SURTASS LFA sonar transmissions per year for training activities pooled across all four current SURTASS LFA sonar equipped vessels operating in the Study Area for years 1-4, while up to 1,650 hours of SURTASS LFA sonar transmissions are planned per year for training activities pooled across all SURTASS LFA sonar equipped vessels for years 5-7.

Environmental Effects

The following table summarizes the potential effects on each resource area associated with implementing Alternative 1 (Preferred Alternative). Resources considered but not carried forward for further consideration include air quality, airspace resources, marine invertebrates, seabirds,

sea snakes, cultural resources, geological resources, hazardous materials and wastes, water quality, infrastructure, land use, public health and safety, socioeconomic, transportation, and benthic substrate. The Navy provided it's rational for not including these resources in Section 3.1.2 (Environmental Resources not Analyzed) of the Final SEIS/OEIS.

The discussion below summarizes the reasonably foreseeable effects of the Preferred Alternative on physical resources (acoustic marine environment), biological resources (fishes, sea turtles, marine mammals, marine protected habitats), and human resources (economic resources). The Navy provided the standard operating procedures and mitigation measures that would reduce the potential for impacts on biological resources in Chapter 4 (Mitigation, Monitoring, and Reporting) of the SURTASS LFA Final SEIS/OEIS. The Navy concluded that impacts would be less than significant for all analyzed resource areas in the SURTASS LFA Final SEIS/OEIS.

<i>Resource</i>	<i>Summary of Effects</i>
Acoustic Marine Environment	• Use of SURTASS LFA sonar would increase baseline noise conditions over a narrow low-frequency range within the Study Area. • The effects of SURTASS LFA sonar would be less than significant on the acoustic marine environment, as sonar transmissions are intermittent, occurring over a period of hours and dispersed across the entire geographic scope of the Study Area.
Fish	• Use of SURTASS LFA sonar could cause masking, physiological stress, and short-term behavioral reactions. SURTASS LFA sonar transmissions would only potentially affect fish if a vessel were within close proximity to an individual while actively transmitting LFA sonar. • The effects of SURTASS LFA sonar would be less than significant on marine fishes, since negligible auditory and non-auditory effects; and near negligible masking, physiological stress, and short-term behavioral reactions are anticipated.
Sea Turtles	• Use of SURTASS LFA sonar could cause masking, behavioral reactions, and potential auditory effects. SURTASS LFA sonar transmissions would only potentially affect sea turtles if a vessel were within close proximity to an individual while actively transmitting LFA sonar. • The effects of SURTASS LFA sonar would be less than significant on sea turtles, since near negligible non-auditory and auditory effects are anticipated.
Marine Mammals	• Use of SURTASS LFA sonar could cause auditory effects, physiological stress, masking, or behavioral reactions. SURTASS LFA sonar transmissions would moderately affect marine mammals only if a vessel were within close proximity to an individual while actively transmitting SURTASS LFA

<i>Resource</i>	<i>Summary of Effects</i>
	sonar. However, marine mammals' ability to swim away from the vessels and the use of mitigation protocols would limit exposure to SURTASS LFA sonar transmissions. • Effects are not expected to interfere with feeding, reproduction, or other biologically important functions such that the continued viability of the population would be threatened. • The effects of SURTASS LFA sonar would be less than significant on marine mammals, since minor non-auditory effects, auditory effects, physiological stress, and masking are anticipated, and behavioral reactions are expected to be short-term.
Marine Protected Habitats	• Use of SURTASS LFA sonar would not cause loss or destruction of marine protected habitats. Additionally, the implementation of mitigation measures would limit acoustic energy present in protected habitats. • The effects of SURTASS LFA sonar would be less than significant on marine protected habitats, since SURTASS LFA sonar would be introduced for a short period of time, thereby only temporarily increasing the ambient noise levels within marine protected habitats and would return to their previous conditions after SURTASS LFA sonar transmissions have ceased.
Economic Resources	• Use of SURTASS LFA sonar would not limit economic use of the Study Area (i.e., fisheries). Additionally, the implementation of mitigation measures would further ensure access for other recreational uses of the Study Area. • The effects of SURTASS LFA sonar would be less than significant on economic resources, since the Navy anticipates nearly negligible effects as most economic resources occur within 12 NM of land, and the Navy would restrict the SURTASS LFA sonar sound field within this area, making potential effects not reasonably foreseeable.

Recent Scientific Information

The SURTASS LFA Final SEIS/OEIS was prepared using the best available science to assess the potential environmental impacts associated with proposed military readiness activities the Navy plans to conduct in the Study Area. The Navy has reviewed science published since the preparation of the SURTASS LFA Final SEIS/OEIS and has identified no emergent best available science that would significantly change the analyses or conclusions in the SURTASS LFA Final SEIS/OEIS.

Agency Consultation and Coordination

NMFS served as a cooperating agency throughout the SEIS/OEIS process because of its expertise and regulatory authority over certain marine resources. Additionally, NMFS has adopted the SURTASS LFA Final SEIS/OEIS as its NEPA documentation in support of its rule-making process under the MMPA. Included below is a summary of the results from each consultation and coordination process. Copies of the agency correspondence are located on the project website.

- **MMPA.** The Navy applied for a 7-year incidental take authorization to NMFS for stressors associated with SURTASS LFA sonar activities as described under the Preferred Alternative (Alternative 1). NMFS expects to issue a Final Rule on August 10, 2026, and an LOA for SURTASS activities by August 11, 2026. Although Appendix D of the FSEIS/OEIS shows in Table D-45 that the Navy anticipated there could be one behavioral take of bearded seal over a maximum year of proposed activities, NMFS has determined that the take is not reasonably certain to occur.
- **Endangered Species Act (ESA).** The Navy requested initiation of formal consultation with NMFS on 27 ESA-listed species and three proposed and designated critical habitats. NMFS issued their Biological and Conference Opinion dated May 13, 2026, concluding that any adverse effects to ESA-listed species are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the species, and that SURTASS activities are not likely to adversely affect proposed or designated critical habitat. In addition to the Biological Opinion, NMFS issued an Incidental Take Statement. NMFS coordinated this Incidental Take Statement with the issuance of the LOA the Navy expects to receive for the incidental take of marine mammals pursuant to Section 101(a) (5) of the MMPA. The Incidental Take Statement exempts Navy actions as described in the SURTASS LFA Final SEIS/OEIS from the prohibitions set forth in Section 9 of the ESA.
- **National Marine Sanctuaries Act (NMSA).** The Navy has determined that its planned use of SURTASS LFA sonar pursuant to this SEIS/OEIS does not require consultation under Section 304(d) of the NMSA for the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale and Papahānaumokuākea National Marine Sanctuaries. The Navy made this determination in coordination with NMFS.

Mitigation Measures

The Navy worked collaboratively with NMFS through the consultation and permitting processes to develop and finalize the mitigation measures, which are actions taken to completely avoid, partially reduce, or minimize the potential for a stressor to impact a resource. Additionally, the Navy considered mitigation measures proposed during the public participation process. The Navy designed these final measures to be practicable to implement in accordance with the purpose and need for the Proposed Action and implemented under either action alternative. Chapter 4 of the SURTASS LFA Final SEIS/OEIS presents full descriptions of the activity-based and geographic mitigation requirements, descriptions of the development and assessment processes, and discussions of measures considered but eliminated.

The Navy analyzed potential mitigation measures individually and then collectively as a mitigation package to determine if mitigation would meet the appropriate balance between being environmentally beneficial and practical to implement. Through the mitigation development and assessment processes, the Navy is committing to the maximum level of mitigation that is both beneficial and practical to implement under the Proposed Action. The Navy organized its mitigation measures into two categories, as described below.

- **Activity-Based Mitigation.** Activity-based mitigations are designed to limit the potential for activities to be conducted when marine mammals and sea turtles are nearby. There have been no changes to the rationale for use of specific received levels or mitigation zone distances since the 2019 SEIS/SOEIS. Section 4.3 of the SURTASS LFA Final SEIS/OEIS provides more information on activity-based mitigation.
- **Geographic Mitigation.** Designated portions of the SURTASS Study Area where the Navy will implement geographic mitigation for physical habitats, marine species habitats, or cultural resources are referred to as “mitigation areas.” In each geographic mitigation area, the lead agencies have agreed to activity limits, mitigation procedures, or special reporting requirements. Mitigation areas pertain to a stressor or mitigation type such as acoustic stressors or special reporting requirements. Geographic mitigation associated with SURTASS LFA includes a coastal standoff range and Offshore Biologically Important Areas where received sonar generated sound fields will be below certain levels. Section 4.4 and Appendix F of the SURTASS LFA Final SEIS/OEIS provides more information on geographic mitigation.

Monitoring and Adaptive Management

The Navy maintains a scientific research and monitoring program for protected marine species and works collaboratively with NMFS to determine where monitoring efforts should be focused to comply with the requirements outlined in the SURTASS permits and consultations. Through the Navy’s environmental offices and programs, U.S. Navy Marine Species Monitoring Program, Living Marine Resources Program, and Office of Naval Research, the Navy has sponsored research and monitoring for more than 30 years to improve the understanding of environmental effects from military readiness activities.

The Navy will continue submitting marine species monitoring reports, annual training and testing activity reports, and incident reports, as detailed in Chapter 4 of the SURTASS LFA Final SEIS/OEIS, to track compliance with MMPA and ESA authorizations. In its annual report on SURTASS LFA sonar activities, the Navy will describe the level of training and testing conducted during the reporting period (i.e., the locations in which LFA sonar transmissions occurred, the duration of LFA sonar transmissions, and the results of the mitigation monitoring). If they occur, the Navy will report incidents involving biological resources, such as strikes of protected species or sightings of injured or dead marine mammals and sea turtles.

The Navy will continue to host marine species monitoring technical review meetings with NMFS, to include researchers and the Marine Mammal Commission. Additionally, Adaptive Management meetings will continue to be held with NMFS and the Marine Mammal Commission as a systematic approach to help account for advancements in science and

technology made after issuance of MMPA Regulations and LOAs. Through Adaptive Management, the Navy can adjust decisions, policies, or actions as the science and outcomes from management actions become better understood over time.

Responses to Comments Received on the SURTASS LFA Final SEIS/OEIS

The Navy received no comments during the EO 12114 30-day wait period following the issuance of the NOA of the Final SEIS/OEIS.

B. CONCLUSION: After careful consideration of the purpose and need for the Proposed Action, the analysis of potential environmental effects in the SURTASS LFA Final SEIS/OEIS, relevant strategic and operational policies and guidance, proposed mitigation measures, and comments received from federal agencies, non-governmental organizations, and members of the public, the Navy has decided to proceed with implementation of the Preferred Alternative, Alternative 1. Alternative 1 best meets the current and future training and testing needs of the Navy to meet its national defense mission as prescribed by Congress. With implementation of the mitigation measures identified in the SURTASS LFA Final SEIS/OEIS and associated regulatory documents developed in consultations with NMFS, and adherence to management plans and monitoring requirements described herein and in the SURTASS LFA Final SEIS/OEIS, environmental impacts associated with implementing Alternative 1 will be minimized. In addition, the Navy assessed the effects of Alternative 1 in accordance with Executive Order 12114 and concluded that there would be no significant harm to the environment in areas outside the United States, its territories, and possessions.

10 July 2026

Date

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