

**DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
UNITED STATES FLEET FORCES COMMAND**

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
FOR EXPANSION OF THE PINECASTLE RANGE COMPLEX RESTRICTED AREA**

Introduction

Pursuant to Council of Environmental Quality Regulations (40 Code of Federal Regulations Parts 1500–1508) implementing the procedural provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act, and in accordance with the Chief of Naval Operations Instruction 5090.1C, the United States Department of the Navy (Navy) gives notice that it prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) and that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required for the expansion of the Pinecastle Range Complex Restricted Area. The Proposed Action is to expand existing Restricted Areas, within the Palatka 1 and Palatka 2 Military Operations Areas (MOAs). This action would result in a safer environment for all aircraft operations. The Proposed Action would not require any change in the quantity and type of military aircraft operations, flight profiles, or increase in the operating hours of the Pinecastle Range Complex (PRC).

The PRC located within the Ocala National Forest in north central Florida consists of the land and airspace associated with the Pinecastle, Lake George, and Rodman Navy training ranges. The primary purpose of the PRC is to provide a training range for Atlantic Fleet Carrier Strike Groups (CSGs) and other military units to practice strike warfare training, which includes delivering air-to-ground explosive and non-explosive ordnance, air-to-ground gunnery (also known as strafing), and laser-guided weapons training.

Purpose and Need

The purpose and need for the Proposed Action is to support the operational readiness of military forces. Military aircrews use the PRC to maintain proficiency with their weapons systems in preparation for deployments. Expanding the Restricted Areas within the Palatka 1 and Palatka 2 MOAs will provide the necessary airspace the fighter/attack community requires to safely conduct long-range weapons delivery training.

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) served as the Cooperating Agency for this EA. The FAA issued a Notice of Proposed Rule Making (NPRM) in the *Federal Register* dated December 22, 2010, outlining the proposal to modify and expand the Restricted Areas of the Pinecastle, Rodman, and Lake George Ranges. The NPRM provided the public with an opportunity to review and comment on the effects that the proposal might have on aeronautical activities, prior to reaching a final decision on the proposed rule. As a result of comments received, the FAA and the Navy revised the internal dimensions and operating conditions of the preferred alternative (alternative #1) to further reduce the potential minor impacts and inconveniences on the public.

Proposed Action

The Proposed Action is to expand the existing Restricted Areas within the Palatka 1 and Palatka 2 MOAs, incorporating the unrestricted corridors between existing Restricted Areas (R-2906, R-2907, and R-2910). This would result in a larger contiguous Restricted Area to allow for a safer environment for aircraft. The Proposed Action would not require any change in the quantity and type of military aircraft operations, flight profiles, or increase in the operating hours of the Pinecastle Range Complex (PRC). There will be

no personnel changes or construction activities as part of the Proposed Action. The EA considered various alternatives to achieve the Proposed Action and satisfy the purpose and need.

Alternatives Considered

Alternative 1 (Preferred Alternative). This alternative would laterally expand portions of the existing Restricted Areas within the Palatka 1 and 2 MOAs to include the unrestricted corridors between them. Under this alternative, the unrestricted corridors would become horizontally subdivided Restricted Areas ranging, in the lower-altitude portions (R-2907C and R-2910E), from 500 feet above mean sea level (MSL) to less than 1,800 feet MSL and, in the upper-altitude portions (R-2907B and R-2910D), from 1,800 feet MSL to Flight Level 23,000 feet (FL 230). There would be a maximum of 800 training hours per year within the newly-designated, lower-altitude portions of the Restricted Area corridors. These lower-altitude Restricted Areas would be active only during hazardous training events. There would be no time limit restrictions on the upper-altitude Restricted Areas in the corridors; although training primarily occurs intermittently between the hours of 0800 and 2400. These upper-altitude Restricted Areas would be closed to all civilian aircraft during training events. Portions of the existing Restricted Areas would also be expanded vertically to ensure a consistent ceiling altitude of FL 230 across the airspace, except in the existing Rodman Restricted Area (R-2906), which will remain 14,000 feet MSL and the southeastern corner of R-2910 will remain 6,000 feet MSL. The Restricted Area in the southeastern corner of R-2910, which is outside the Palatka 1 and 2 MOAs, will be split into two separate Restricted Areas, R-2910B and R2910C. In order to improve coordination with commercial traffic, the southernmost Restricted Area, R-2910C, would be activated separately. Implementation of the Preferred Alternative would not result in any change in the quantity and type of aircraft operations, flight profiles, or increase in the operating hours of the PRC.

Alternative 2. This Alternative would expand the existing Restricted Areas to encompass the entire Palatka 1 and Palatka 2 MOAs. Under Alternative 2, both the Palatka 1 MOA and Palatka 2 MOA would be redesignated as Restricted Areas from 500 feet MSL to FL 230, except for the ceiling of the existing Rodman Restricted Area, R-2906, which would remain at 14,000 feet MSL. In the southeastern corner of the PRC, R-2910B and R-2910C, would continue to extend from the surface up to 6,000 feet MSL. All currently designated Restricted Areas would retain their floors at the surface. The quantity and type of aircraft operations, flight profiles, and operating hours of the PRC would not change under Alternative 2.

Alternative training locations. FAA order 7400.2H Chapter 21-3-3 requires alternative sites be considered. As such, relocating Navy training events to Avon Park, Fort Stewart, Townsend Range, and Eglin Air Force Base (AFB) were considered. These training sites are located in the southeastern U.S. and possess land ranges with associated Restricted Areas. Similar to the PRC, these locations provide air-to-ground weapons delivery and tactical training capabilities. The alternative locations were evaluated based on characteristics of the existing Restricted Areas, the munition capabilities of the land range, the distance from foreseeable Naval activities, and the availability of those training assets. Upon evaluation, Avon Park Range does not allow for explosive ordnance training. High explosive ordnance delivery, is a requirement under CNAF INST 3500.1C for FA-18 Naval training operations. Eglin AFB is the furthest potential location from Navy training activities originating from aircraft carriers in the Atlantic Ocean, and has limited availability for Navy use, due to ongoing and foreseeable Air Force training requirements. Townsend and Fort Stewart Ranges have limited maneuvering airspace for lasing. As a result, none of these alternative locations provide the required training capabilities of the PRC and thus were eliminated from detailed analysis.

Increased use of simulator flight training. Under this alternative, simulator flight training would replace current operations at PRC. Simulator flight training is a valuable training tool for preliminary training activity, and is also used for continuation training for various procedures, including emergency training

and instrument refresher courses. However, the dynamics of weather, the three-dimensional environment in flight, G-forces, and many other flight conditions can only be experienced in actual flight. Therefore, simulators alone do not provide the realistic tactical training scenarios required for military operations and as such this alternative was eliminated from detailed analysis.

Increased outreach and surveillance. Under this alternative, additional outreach and surveillance system utilization were considered to ensure the fighter/attack community can safely conduct long-range weapons delivery profiles. These efforts will not solve the problem of non-military aircraft interference with military training. With increased public outreach, non-military aircraft would still be allowed to fly the corridors between Restricted Areas during various training exercises and there would be no enforcement mechanism to ensure that non-military pilots abide by potential airspace recommendations. Even with an improved surveillance system, it would be necessary for Visual Flight Rules (VFR) traffic to have a transponder turned on. Not all pilots have transponder-equipped aircraft and, often, those that have them do not turn the equipment on. The safety risks related to non-military pilots, flying through the existing corridors between active Restricted Areas would remain. As such this alternative was eliminated from detailed analysis.

No Action Alternative. Under the No Action Alternative, no change to the airspace of the Palatka 1 and 2 MOAs would occur. The safety risks related to non-military pilots, flying through the existing corridors between active Restricted Areas, and the associated effects on military training would remain.

Summary of Environmental Effects

In this EA, the No Action Alternative serves as a baseline against which the impacts of the Preferred Alternative and Alternative 2 are evaluated. The EA evaluates potential effects of the Preferred Alternative and Alternative 2 on the following resource categories: air quality; noise; human health and safety; wild and scenic rivers; coastal resources; socioeconomics; environmental justice; and children's environmental health and safety risks.

The Region of Influence (ROI) for this EA, unless otherwise defined for a particular resource category, includes the existing Palatka 1 and Palatka 2 MOAs, R-2910 (SE Outer), the land areas underneath those airspace areas, and the areas where non-military aircraft might re-route when the proposed Restricted Areas are active.

Resource areas affected by operational use of the PRC land and airspace were previously analyzed in the Final SEIS *Renewal of Authorization to Use Pinecastle Range, Ocala National Forest, Florida*, and the FEIS *Authorization to Use Pinecastle Range, Ocala National Forest, Florida*, (U.S. Navy 2010, U.S. Navy 2002a). Since the operational use of the PRC is not changing, this EA does not analyze operations within the PRC.

There will be no significant impacts on air quality under the preferred alternative. The PRC ROI includes the Jacksonville – Brunswick Air Quality Control Region (AQCR) and the Central Florida Intrastate AQCR. As defined in 40 CFR 81.310, they are designated as attainment-unclassifiable for all criteria pollutants. Therefore, General Conformity Rule requirements are not applicable. Aircraft re-routing around the Restricted Area would generate a negligible increase in emissions well below *de minimis* levels. In addition, emissions would be generated well below 10 percent of the emissions inventories for the Jacksonville – Brunswick and Central Florida Intrastate AQCRs. Consequently, no significant impacts on air quality at the PRC or on regional air quality would be expected. Additionally, Federal Prevention of Significant Deterioration regulations do not apply to mobile sources.

The potential effects Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions from the preferred alternative are not large enough to have an appreciable effect on climate change. GHG emissions are by nature global and cumulative, and are further discussed in the context of cumulative impacts.

A small number of non-military aircraft that might take alternative routes around the Restricted Areas would slightly and temporarily increasing noise in the surrounding areas. The potential routes utilized to circumnavigate the Restricted Area are not unknown and will vary by individual pilots. As a result, the effects on the local populations are expected to be intermittent and not significant. Noise levels from military and commercial Instrument Flight Rules (IFR) aircraft are not expected to change with the implementation of the Preferred Alternative, thus no significant change in noise impacts are expected.

No significant impacts on airspace management would be expected under the preferred alternative. Military and commercial Instrument Flight Rules (IFR) aircraft are not expected to change with the implementation of the Preferred Alternative. Additionally, there are no public or private use airports underneath the proposed Restricted Areas.

Implementation of the preferred alternatives would decrease the aircraft safety risks within the PRC, therefore, beneficial impacts on aircraft safety would be expected. No significant impacts on aircraft safety would be expected on non-military aircraft operating outside the PRC.

There would be no development-related or significant noise-related impacts on national wild and scenic rivers, or potentially eligible national wild and scenic rivers, as a result of implementing the preferred alternative. Only one of Florida's federally designated/state designated wild and scenic rivers, the Wekiva River, is near the ROI. Additionally, two separate segments of the Oklawaha River and Silver Spring Run system underlie the ROI and have been deemed potentially eligible for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. Based on the small number of non-military aircraft that might fly around the proposed Restricted Areas when active (and possibly over the Wekiva River and the potentially eligible wild and scenic rivers), noise from the aircraft or views of these aircraft would be negligible.

Regarding coastal resources, the Navy determined that the implementation of the preferred alternative will have no impact and prepared Negative Determination under the Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA) of 1972 (16 U.S.C. 1451 et seq.) and 15 CFR Part 930.35. The Navy submitted a Negative Determination to the State of Florida on 15 November 2011. Concurrence was received on 16 November 2011.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with the Final EA, that the proposed action will not have an adverse effect on fish and wildlife in the area.

No significant impacts on socioeconomic resources would be expected under the preferred alternatives. Slightly longer non-military flight routes may result in increased fuel and maintenance costs to local aviators, but related impacts are not expected to be significant.

Since the preferred alternative would not result in a significant change in the noise conditions or other significant impacts, disproportionate impacts on minority, low-income, and youth populations would not be expected.

Summary of Cumulative Effects

The Navy investigated other actions and projects for evaluation in the context of the cumulative impact analysis. This research included a review of public documents and coordination with various applicable

agencies. The ROI for cumulative impacts varies depending on the resource area analyzed. However, for cumulative impacts the ROI considered includes: Palatka 1 and Palatka 2 MOAs, R-2910 (SE Outer), the land areas underneath those airspace areas, and the areas where the non-military aircraft might re-route when the proposed Restricted Areas are active. For analysis of cumulative impacts, it was assumed that changes to the Restricted Airspace would occur in 2013. Emphasis was placed on identifying other projects that are similar in nature to the Proposed Action or large projects that could affect resources identified in the EA. The *Implementation of Next Generation Air Transportation System Technologies in Florida*, the *Improvements at Ocala International Airport* and the *Improvements at Dunnellon/Marion County and Park of Commerce Airport* projects were reviewed for cumulative impacts within the ROI. Five other projects outside the ROI were analyzed for cumulative impacts with the Proposed Action: the proposed *Beddown of 59 F-35 Aircraft at Eglin AFB; Florida*, the proposed *Beddown of F-35 Aircraft at Air National Guard installations* (for which the USAF published an intent to prepare an EIS with the Jacksonville International Airport as one of the proposed locations); the *Modernization and Expansion of Townsend Bombing Range, Georgia*; the recently completed *Construction of Runway Safety Area at Northeast Florida Regional Airport*; and the recently relocated *Combat Systems Officer (CSO) Training at NAS Pensacola*.

No significant long-term cumulative impact on air quality at the PRC or on regional or local air quality would be expected. Short-term, localized impacts would result from aircraft emissions from ongoing aircraft flights, including some flights from the recently relocated CSO training at NAS Pensacola in the air quality resource area ROI, which consists of the Jacksonville–Brunswick Interstate and the Central Florida AQCRs. Combining the negligible increase of air emissions from the implementation of the Preferred Alternative, with the ongoing emissions from aircraft operations in the ROI, would likely result in negligible cumulative adverse impacts on air quality.

The potential effects of proposed GHG emissions are by nature global and cumulative impacts, as individual sources of GHG emissions are not large enough to have an appreciable effect on climate change. There are currently no formally adopted or published NEPA thresholds of significance for GHG emissions. Notwithstanding, the criteria pollutant emission increases from the implementation of the Preferred Alternative combined with the actions listed above are expected to be negligible, and therefore, GHG emission increases would be negligible when compared to the total U.S. annual GHG emissions.

No significant cumulative impacts to the community from noise would be expected. The noise impacts of military and commercial aircraft at PRC would not change as a result of the Preferred Alternative. Implementation of the Preferred Alternative could result in a small number of non-military aircraft re-routing around the PRC. Short-term, localized impacts from ongoing aircraft noise would combine with noise impacts from the implementation of the Preferred Alternative to result in negligible, intermittent, changes in noise conditions and would likely result in negligible cumulative adverse impacts.

In terms of additional noise from other military aircraft, impacts from the beddown of 59 F-35 aircraft at Eglin AFB were evaluated in the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure Commission EIS. According to the EIS, the F-35 aircraft training requirements can be accommodated within the nearby airspace overlying Eglin AFB's land and water ranges, which does not include any of the airspace within or near the PRC. The recently relocated CSO training in T-1 aircraft would not occur in the ROI.

Long-term beneficial cumulative impacts on airspace management and aircraft safety would be expected. Military and commercial aircraft operations would not change as a result of the preferred alternative although there is potential for minor changes to non-military aircraft flight routes.

The Next Generation Air Transportation System will allow aircraft operators to fly more precise flight paths, enhance weather awareness and management, and deploy performance-based communications for

flight planning and flight plan management. The projects at Northeast Florida Regional Airport and Ocala International Airport would improve aircraft safety. Implementation of the Preferred Alternative would eliminate the hazard to non-military aircraft associated with the laser training activities in the PRC. Consequently, a long-term beneficial cumulative impact on airspace management and aircraft safety would be expected from the Next Generation Air Transportation System and the airport improvement projects, combined with the implementation of the Preferred Alternative.

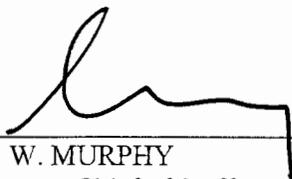
No significant cumulative impacts on wild and scenic rivers would be expected. The ongoing aircraft flights in the ROI, combined with the implementation of the Preferred Alternative, could result in a negligible and intermittent increase in observations of noise and views of aircraft over wild and scenic rivers.

Finding

Based on information gathered during the preparation of the EA, the U.S. Navy finds that the Proposed Action implemented in accordance with the Preferred Alternative, Alternative 1, will not have a significant impact on the environment. The EA prepared by the U.S. Navy addressing this action may be obtained from the Naval Facilities Engineering Command, Atlantic, Lafayette River Annex; Pinecastle Range Complex Restricted Area EA Project Manager, 6506 Hampton Boulevard; Norfolk, VA 23508-1278. A limited number of hard copies of the EA are available to fill single copy requests.

10/5/2012

Date



J. W. MURPHY
Deputy Chief of Staff
for Shore and Environmental Readiness
United States Fleet Forces Command