

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI) FOR FLEET SUPPORT AND
INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS AT KEY WEST, FLORIDA

Pursuant to Council on Environmental Quality regulations (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508) implementing the procedural provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act, the Department of the Navy gives notice that an Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared and that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required for the fleet support and infrastructure improvements at Naval Air Station (NAS) Key West.

The proposed action is to modernize and update infrastructure and facilities to provide improved or additional capability essential to support aircraft squadrons and ships visiting at NAS Key West. Infrastructure and facilities improvements to support aircraft and ships would include limited new construction as well as adapting or upgrading existing structures for more modern combatants.

The Navy's purpose and need for the proposed action is to modernize and update capability of ship and aircraft support functions and facilities at Key West. Commander, U.S. Atlantic Fleet (COMLANTFLT) requires this modern support capacity at Key West to fulfill readiness requirements in what is becoming an increasingly restrictive environment for periods away from homeport and periods at sea. This would provide adequate Fleet training support, including ship and aircraft support functions and facilities with modern Anti-Terrorism Force Protection (AT/FP) at NAS Key West.

Navy evaluated the following alternatives for the proposed action: the preferred alternative, lease of facilities, alternate locations, modeling and simulation, full support services, and no action. Lease of facilities, alternate locations and modeling and simulation alternatives were eliminated from further consideration because they fail to satisfy the purpose and need. The full support alternative would allow additional flexibility to operational commanders in providing nearly the equivalent of home basing for visiting aircraft and homeport husbanding for visiting ships but at greater environmental cost to accomplish it. The Navy expects there may be greater impacts resulting from the full support Alternative, including potential impacts to wetlands from construction and potential increases in noise and safety footprints from aircraft activity. Under the no action alternative, facilities upgrades, renovations, maintenance, or repair activities would not occur. The no-action alternative would provide less support over time as ships and aircraft become increasingly more modern and the existing facilities continue to deteriorate or become outmoded.

The preferred alternative includes improvements at NAS Key West's Boca Chica Airfield and Truman Harbor. Boca Chica Airfield improvements would consist of upgrades to the aircraft refueling facility, the Radar and Air Traffic Control Facility (RATCF), and the Tactical Aircrew Combat Training System (TACTS) Building A-4082. Truman Annex improvements would include new construction, enhancements to existing structures, building demolition, Truman Harbor waterfront renovations, and maintenance dredging of the Key West main ship channel, the turning basin, and Truman Harbor. Dredge material placement location options were considered for the placement of dredge spoils, including Rockland Key, Fleming Key, and Dead-end Canal. Rockland Key provides the most suitable location for marine beneficial use, and thus, provides the best location for upland containment of dredge material.

Because the Truman Harbor waterfront area is a required operational facility, the Navy would retain 16.1 acres of property including the Mole Pier and immediately adjacent areas. Navy requires this property to provide logistics and maintenance support to Navy vessels training in Southeast U.S. Operating Areas (OPAREAS) at sea. This retention should have little, if any impact to Key West as the Navy and the City have developed a proposed lease agreement to allow the City continued use of the Mole Pier. Proposed lease provisions would allow the City to pay rent through in-kind actions at Navy property in Key West, resulting in further local benefits. Both Navy and cruise ship use of the Outer Mole pier should also bring additional economic benefit to Key West.

The preferred alternative also considers placement of additional readiness support equipment and operating personnel such as harbor craft, target retrievers, and opposition force support at Key West. These support assets will result in minimal small boat traffic in-and-out of Truman Harbor, and minimal additional aircraft take-offs and landings from NAS Key West. The updating, upgrading, maintenance, and construction would ensure facilities are able to provide optimum support capability for modern naval assets, bringing benefit to both the Navy and the City of Key West.

Navy submitted a Joint Application for an Environmental Resource Permit to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACOE) for maintenance dredging of the Key West main ship channel, turning basin, and Truman Harbor. The proposed dredging will restore the harbor to the charted depth and configuration. Upon completion of the permitting process, the FDEP will issue a water quality certification under Section 401 of the Clean Water Act. The Corps will issue a federal dredge and fill permit under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. Both permits will include conditions to protect potentially affected resources. Navy will coordinate with all relevant agencies who have purview over all resources in the area for expected and reasonably foreseeable effects of the action. This may include development of appropriate monitoring protocols and potential restoration of dredge impacts to resources.

Navy has submitted a separate Joint Application for an Environmental Resource Permit to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACOE) for Mole Pier improvements including the addition of mooring dolphins and removal of the Mole Pier tip for navigation safety. The FDEP and USACOE would issue permits as described above for the proposed Mole Pier improvements.

The FDEP has determined that the proposed dredge activities are consistent to the maximum extent practicable with the approved Florida Coastal Management Plan (FCMP), Chapter 308FS, ASCS and Chapter 163, Part II, Local Government Comprehensive Planning and Land Development. The Navy expects a separate FDEP Coastal Zone determination for Mole Pier improvements during the FDEP water quality certification process.

For dredge-related aspects of the preferred alternative, the Navy is initiating an abbreviated consultation with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries for compliance with the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (16 U.S.C. § 1801-1882), also known as Essential Fish Habitat (EFH). EFH requires the Navy consult with NOAA if actions may adversely affect EFH. EFH covers "those waters and substrate necessary to fish for spawning, breeding, feeding or growth to maturity." EFH in the project area includes: Sargassum; Corals, Coral Reefs, and Live/Hard Bottom; Penaeid and Rock Shrimps; Spiny Lobster; Stone Crab; Reef Fishes (Snapper-Grouper Management Unit); Highly Migratory Fishes; and Coastal Pelagic Fishes. Potential impacts to EFH from dredging include seafloor disturbance,

temporarily increased turbidity, and entrainment. The Navy has determined that given the small areas affected by the dredging relative to the entire region, impacts may adversely affect but are not likely to have a substantial adverse effect on EFH. Per Section 305(b)(2) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act the Navy will seek NOAA's concurrence that with these conclusions.

Five species of turtle, all protected under the Endangered Species Act, are known to occur within the waters of the Florida Keys. The Navy and USACOE intend the USACOE's Endangered Species Act (ESA) Section 7 Biological Opinion (BO) for hopper dredging in channels and borrow areas along the Southeast U.S. Atlantic Coast to apply to the proposed action, if a hopper dredge is used. The BO, which concludes that hopper dredging will not likely jeopardize the continued existence of marine turtles or their critical habitat, authorizes the following incidental takes of marine turtles from hopper dredging projects in the Southeast U.S.: 35 loggerheads, 7 Kemp's ridleys, 7 green turtles, and 2 hawksbills. Alternately, if a cutterhead dredge is used, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has concurred with the Navy that the dredge is not likely to adversely affect marine turtles, or their critical habitat. Depending on the dredge method used, the Navy will implement appropriate protective measures included in the BO for the hopper dredge or in the concurrence letter for the cutterhead dredge.

Landside endangered or threatened species that may occur with the preferred alternative include the Lower Keys Marsh Rabbit, the Silver Rice Rat, bald eagles, and marine turtles. If the Navy determines that these species may be affected by the dredge, the Navy will initiate consultation as appropriate with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

Marine mammal species that may be found in the dredge project area include the common bottlenose dolphin, the Atlantic spotted dolphin, and the manatee. The manatee is also listed as an endangered species under the ESA. Dredging the Key West main ship channel, turning basin, and Truman Harbor is not expected to result in any marine mammal takes under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA). Navy intends to implement the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's (FFWCC) Florida Special Manatee Protection Conditions, which will be incorporated into the Environmental Resource Permit mentioned above. These protective measures, combined with conservation recommendations included in the USACOE's NMFS-issued BO for dredging in the Southeast U.S., will ensure that the dredging is not likely to adversely affect manatees or their critical habitat. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has concurred with this determination.

The Navy does not expect implementation of the preferred alternative to cause any significant impacts to bathymetry and sediment quality. The Navy will avoid marine resources during the routine dredging activities to ensure the action causes no significant impacts to sensitive benthic communities. Turbidity and sedimentation will be limited spatially and temporally and will insignificantly affect water quality and marine resources. A beneficial impact to local benthic resources regarding turbidity and sedimentation may occur due to dredging and removal of large amounts of fine sediments that have accumulated in the Ship Channel, turning basin, and Truman Harbor that are now resuspended each time large vessels enter and leave port. An additional beneficial effect to benthic communities may be realized by filling the quarry pits at the proposed dredged material placement site to depths that would allow seagrasses to colonize and provide habitat for fishes and benthic organisms. The cumulative impact on marine resources resulting from the incremental impact of the preferred alternative when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions are not likely to adversely affect marine resources.

The proposed dredging and Mole Pier improvements would occur within waters of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (FKNMS). Section 312 of the National Marine Sanctuaries Act of 1972 prohibits removal of, or injury to, or possession of coral or live rock. The preferred alternative would be conducted in a manner consistent with the FKNMS Water Quality Action Plan and FKNMS Management Plan, Volume I. The FKNMS would assist in the appropriate identification and implementation of benthic resource protection strategies and assist in benthic resource relocations when all other appropriate methods to avoid or minimize dredge-related impacts are ruled out.

No significant changes in air quality, off-base noise exposure or accident potential zones (APZ) are expected to result from the preferred alternative. Key West is well under the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) pollutant levels; any minor, temporary increases to pollution emission levels as a result of the preferred alternative are not expected to exceed the NAAQS. The Navy anticipates no significant increase in noise contours or APZs from aircraft operations. To the extent projected noise contours and APZs of the preferred alternative differ from the currently used planning noise contours and APZs, the changes are largely a result of improved modeling and a more accurate reflection of current operations.

One landside component of the preferred alternative may occur within an important archeological site near Fort Zachary Taylor State Park (Fort). Consequently, impacts to existing cultural resources are possible. While complete archeological resources present at the site are unknown, limited excavation is proposed at the Fort under the Preferred Alternative. The Navy will attempt to avoid such sites during this excavation. If Navy conducts excavation in an archaeologically significant site, Navy will initiate provisions under the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA).

The preferred alternative would result in a small change to the number of Navy personnel stationed at NAS Key West; it would also likely cause a slight increase in the total number of transient Navy personnel in the area during each year. While the preferred alternative would likely result in greater visitation by fleet unit personnel, existing utilities and public services (potable water, sanitary sewer, stormwater drainage, and solid waste management) have adequate capacity to accommodate the preferred alternative. No significant hazardous materials/waste management impacts will occur from the preferred alternative. The preferred alternative would have some beneficial impact on the socioeconomic conditions at NAS Key West and within the local community. Land uses would stay the same. Housing populations may increase only minimally, but no additional Navy housing units are planned and a socioeconomic status change in the area is not expected. There will not be any disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects from the action on minority or low-income populations.

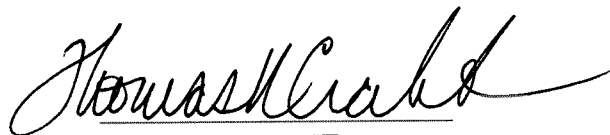
No projects with the potential to interact with the implementation of the preferred alternative that could result in cumulative effects have been identified in the form of NEPA documentation. The Navy is, however, planning to prepare NEPA documentation for a proposal to improve airfield safety at Boca Chica Airfield. Other future-year development proposals consist of repair and rehabilitation projects for existing facilities. Finally, the City of Key West is also developing tentative plans to build a marina in the Truman Harbor with excessed Navy property. Implementation of the preferred alternative in conjunction with other reasonable foreseeable actions will result in more efficient land use at Key West.

Based on the information gathered during preparation of the EA, the Navy finds that fleet support and infrastructure improvements at Naval Air Station (NAS), Key West, will not significantly impact the human environment.

The EA addressing this action may be obtained from: Commander, Southern Division, Naval Facilities Engineering Command, P. O. Box 190010, North Charleston, SC 29419-9010 (Attn: Mr. Will Sloger, Code ES12), telephone 843/820-5797. A limited number of copies of the EA are available to fill single copy requests.

4/14/03

Date



T. R. CRABTREE

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