

## Narrative

### 1 Introduction

Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet (CPF) submits this nomination for the Chief of Naval Operations Environmental Planning Team Award for the Northwest Training Range Complex (NWTRC) Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)/Overseas Environmental Impact Statement (OEIS). This EIS/OEIS was initiated to ensure the continued access to vital trainings areas within the NWTRC. The EIS/OEIS included the analysis of Navy training activities and the potentially significant environmental issues associated with marine mammals, ESA-listed salmon and marbled murrelet, explosives, and active sonar. It also addressed environmental issues associated with training activities (aircraft over-flights) conducted within the terrestrial environment of the study area. The Navy established the team to ensure compliance with environmental laws and regulations for current and future naval readiness activities in the NWTRC.

The team was composed of Navy and contractor personnel with expertise in naval operations, exercise planning, environmental planning, marine and terrestrial biology, and legal sufficiency. The team included marine biologists, acoustics analysis experts, terrestrial biologists, environmental compliance specialists, Geographic Information Systems experts, ecologists, public involvement specialists, and program managers. This vast array of expertise was required due to the complexity of the analyses to be completed. Analyses necessitated the collection and interpretation of best available science, creation of methodologies to predict environmental effects, and compilation of all information into a scientifically accurate and readable study. Compliance processes were followed pursuant to the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA), and Endangered Species Act (ESA).

The team composition and organization resulted in meeting the required completion date, even when timelines were revised by both internal and external entities and proposed activities were changed. The team succeeded due to highly motivated and skilled individuals from numerous federal and state agencies, companies, and organizations that were fully dedicated to the success of the project.

### 2 Background

#### 2.1 *Team Details Specific to This Project*

The NWTRC is described as a “backyard” range complex for the assets home based and homeported in the Pacific Northwest. Those assets include surface, aviation, submarine, and explosive ordnance disposal units. On a limited scale, some additional Navy units transit to the NWTRC to conduct training, such as Naval Special Warfare forces. The purpose of the EIS/OEIS was to analyze the training activities conducted within the NWTRC study area.

More than a year before the start of this EIS/OEIS, key members of the team were assembled for the NWTRC Range Complex Management Plan project, with the intent that these team members would develop expertise on the NWTRC study area and the Navy’s activities, and later provide continuity from one project to the next. Because of the close relationship between the Range Complex Management Plan and the EIS/OEIS, this plan proved very successful. At the outset of the EIS/OEIS development, many of the team members already enjoyed a great working relationship with each other, and very little time was required to orient the team and begin the EIS/OEIS development.

## 2.2 Team Organization and Staffing

Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet oversees all training for Carrier Strike Groups, Expeditionary Strike Groups, and independent deploying units. As the action proponent, CPF initiated this Navy project. Integral to the structure of CPF is the N01CE division, responsible for providing environmental support to the Commander. Commander, Pacific Fleet led the EIS/OEIS effort through the direct involvement of the N01CE staff, providing operational expertise and ensuring that all of the Navy's training requirements were accurately represented in environmental analyses. In addition to the leadership and operational guidance for this project, CPF also provided legal support and counsel at every step in the development of the EIS/OEIS, assuring the legal sufficiency of the document.

Name	Title / Discipline	Organization
<b>Management</b>		
Mr. John Mosher	Program Manager	U.S. Pacific Fleet
Ms. Kimberly Kler	Senior Environmental Planner/Project Manager	Naval Facilities Engineering Command, Northwest
Mr. Brian Wauer	Project Manager	SRS-Parsons Joint Venture
<b>Environmental Analysis, Report and Support</b>		
Ms. Marisha Apodaca	Document Publication Specialist	SRS-Parsons Joint Venture
Mr. Blair Brownyard	Environmental Scientist	SRS-Parsons Joint Venture
Ms. Jacklyn Bryant	Environmental Scientist, Project Manager	SRS-Parsons Joint Venture
Ms. Colleen Conklin	Environmental Scientist, Project Manager	SRS-Parsons Joint Venture
Mr. Jere Diersing	Assistant Environmental Counsel	Navy Region Southwest
CDR Dan Eldredge	Environmental Counsel	U.S. Pacific Fleet
Ms. Tania Fragomeno	Public Affairs Consultant	Katz & Associates
Mr. William Goosmann	Senior Environmental Planner	SRS-Parsons Joint Venture
Mr. Matthew Hahn	Military Operations Specialist	SRS-Parsons Joint Venture
Mr. George Hart	Biologist	Navy Region Northwest
Mr. Chip Johnson	Biologist	U.S. Pacific Fleet
Ms. Krystal Kermott	Environmental Planner	SRS-Parsons Joint Venture
CAPT Dean Leech	Assistant Environmental Counsel	U.S. Pacific Fleet
Mr. Ken MacDowell	Operations Specialist	U.S. Pacific Fleet
LCDR Joan Malik	Assistant Environmental Counsel	Navy Region Northwest
Mr. Rich Melaas	Operations Specialist	NAS Whidbey Island
Ms. Sheila Murray	Public Affairs	Navy Region Northwest
CDR Johnny Nilsen	Assistant Environmental Counsel	U.S. Pacific Fleet
Mr. Wesley Norris	Managing Senior	KAYA Associates, Inc.
Ms. Karyn Palma	Technical Editor	SRS-Parsons Joint Venture
Ms. Agnes Peters	NEPA Specialist	CNO, N45
Mr. Clark Pitchford	Environmental Engineer	Navy Region Northwest
Ms. Molly Rodriguez	Geographic Information Systems Specialist	SRS-Parsons Joint Venture
Mr. Baldev Sharma	Information Technology Specialist	SRS-Parsons Joint Venture
Mr. Bruce Snyder	Environmental Scientist	SRS-Parsons Joint Venture
Mr. Gerald Sodano	Operations Specialist	U.S. Pacific Fleet
Ms. Allison Turner	Public Affairs Consultant	Katz & Associates
LCDR Randy Vavra	Assistant Environmental Counsel	U.S. Pacific Fleet
Ms. Karen Waller	Senior Program Manager	SRS-Parsons Joint Venture
Ms. Carolyn Winters	Project Manager	U.S. Pacific Fleet
Mr. Ken Woo	IT/GIS Manager	SRS-Parsons Joint Venture

Naval Facilities Engineering Command Northwest (NAVFAC NW) and Commander, Navy Region Northwest (CNRNW) and Commander, Navy Region Southwest (CNRSW) teamed with CPF, providing technical contract support and scientific expertise. To manage a fluid environment, NAVFAC NW personnel developed and reshaped the contract, supporting five contract modifications, providing the team with the resources necessary to complete the project. Biologists and environmental scientists ensured the veracity of the environmental analyses used

to inform the Secretary of the Navy (the decision maker), and provided critical technical support during consultations with regulatory agencies and other governmental entities. With a project that geographically spanned across two Navy Region Commands, the team also enlisted support from CNRNW and CNRSW. These commands provided localized support that included both legal and public affairs expertise on critical regional issues.

Finally, the Navy's carefully selected team of contractors prepared the EIS/OEIS, and provided invaluable public participation support that included a public accessible website, multiple notification mailings and advertisements, and a public participation plan that focused the entire team's efforts.

### **2.3 *Challenges and Unusual Circumstances Addressed by the Team***

The EIS/OEIS presented several unique challenges including an unusually large study area that encompassed the coastlines of three states, a wide range of threatened and endangered species within the study area (both marine and terrestrial), a lack of existing marine mammal density information, and a very engaged and often vocal public.

The size and scope of the study area, stretching from the Canada-Washington State border south into Northern California and east to Idaho, required the team to consider impacts to a large number of marine mammal and threatened and endangered species, involving both the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). In addition to ESA consultations with NMFS and USFWS, the project required considerable communications with 30 federally recognized tribes from Washington, Oregon and Northern California and state agencies from Washington, Oregon, and California.

The EIS/OEIS applies a computer model to estimate potential acoustic impacts to marine mammals in the study area. This model requires several inputs, one of which is an estimate of marine mammal densities in the area throughout the year. In part due to erratic and often dangerous winter weather conditions in the Pacific Northwest, limited historical survey data was available from which to develop a complete estimate of marine mammals in all seasons. Without a scientifically defensible estimate of marine mammal densities, a quantitative assessment of acoustic impacts would not be achievable.

Finally, all of the challenges mentioned above occurred in a region that includes a very involved public, a public that is well versed in environmental issues and, in spite of a significant regional military presence, a public that views many military activities with caution. This demographic includes a number of local non-governmental organizations, a fishing community that faces numerous serious threats to its livelihood, and elected officials that are very responsive to the concerns of their constituents.

## **3 Environmental Planning Summary**

### **3.1 *Environmental Plans and Agreements***

The NWTRC EIS/OEIS officially kicked off with the publication of the Notice of Intent in the Federal Register on July 31, 2007, which initiated the 60-day public scoping period. Following the scoping period, the team considered the public's input and began developing the EIS/OEIS.

The Navy released the Draft EIS/OEIS on December 29, 2008 for a 45-day public review. During this review period, the Navy received and authorized three extensions of the comment period and requests to hold an additional public meeting in Oregon. The official comment period extended to 105 days that ended on April 13, 2009.

The Navy submitted its CZMA Consistency Determination to Washington and its Negative Determinations to Oregon and California in October 2009. All three states concurred with the Navy's determinations.

After considering all of the public and agency comments on the Draft EIS/OEIS, The Navy completed the NWTRC Final EIS/OEIS and provided it to the public on September 10, 2010.

On October 25, 2010, the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy (Energy, Installations and Environment), Mr. Roger M. Natsuhara, signed the Record of Decision for the NWTRC Final EIS/OEIS.

The Navy completed consultations with NMFS and USFWS pursuant to the MMPA and the ESA. The USFWS provided its concurrence letter and Biological Opinion regarding ESA species on August 12, 2010. On November 10, 2010, the MMPA Final Rule was published in the *Federal Register*. NMFS completed its Biological Opinion for this project on November 12, 2010.

### **3.2 Most Outstanding Program Features**

Threatened and endangered species. While the EIS/OEIS considered impacts to all species, special attention was paid to marine mammals and endangered species. Throughout the development of the EIS/OEIS, the Navy team worked tirelessly with representatives from NMFS and USFWS to ensure compliance with the MMPA and ESA. As part of that effort, the team initially notified each agency of the Navy's intent to prepare the EIS/OEIS, and invited each to partner with the Navy in a cooperating role. This relationship led to numerous meetings and exchanges of information to support NMFS MMPA rule making and the ESA consultation process for both agencies.

The Navy team's efforts resulted in a better understanding by NMFS and USFWS of the Navy's proposed activities, as well as the potential impacts to marine mammals and endangered species from those activities. The activities included airborne sound from low-flying aircraft, bombing and gunnery exercises, mid-frequency active sonar, and underwater detonations. Among the species of special agency concern were four terrestrial species, five bird species, and numerous fish and marine mammal species. The level of cooperation fostered by the Navy led ultimately to the NMFS Final Rule and biological opinions from both NMFS and USFWS.

Public and government involvement. Knowing the public climate in the Pacific Northwest, the NWTRC team engaged key agencies, officials and stakeholder groups early and often throughout the development of the EIS/OEIS. The team began scheduling informational and fact-gathering briefings following the July 2007 Notice of Intent. In September 2007, key team members briefed the Washington State Governor's Executive Policy Office, the Washington State Department of Natural Resources, the Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council, and regional offices of both NMFS and USFWS.

Going well beyond NEPA requirements and demonstrating great flexibility, the team quickly and fully responded to requests from Oregon's U.S. Congressional Delegation. Following the release of the Draft EIS/OEIS, and with only a few days notice, key team members traveled to Washington D.C. to brief the Draft EIS/OEIS to staff members of the Oregon Congressional Delegation. During the brief, the delegation staff formally requested that the Navy conduct an additional public hearing in Oregon. The team responded quickly, reassembled the public hearing team of experts, and scheduled the additional hearing. Also at the request of the Oregon Congressional Delegation, the NWTRC team extended the Draft EIS/OEIS comment period several times, ultimately increasing the period from 45 days to 105 days.

In March 2009, the Mendocino County (California [CA]) Board of Supervisors asked the Navy to present an informational brief and respond to questions during a County Board of Supervisors meeting in Ukiah, CA. Three NWTRC team members, representing the Navy, participated in the March 31 meeting and provided a short brief about the project. Following the brief, the team members responded to public questions and comments for more than four hours before the live, web broadcast meeting adjourned.

Members of the public across several states were also very interested in the NWTRC EIS/OEIS project during this period. Individuals and organizations made several Freedom of Information Act requests and made over 3,000 comments on the Draft document. Team members reviewed every comment submitted, provided responses to each, and, where appropriate, made appropriate changes to the EIS/OEIS.

The NWTRC Team engaged the commercial fishing industry early and consistently throughout the project. Fishing communities along the Pacific Northwest have been impacted by a number of changes to fishing stocks, fishing regulations, and the threat of encroachment on their fishing grounds by energy and minerals industries. The Navy team learned of their concerns early, during the scoping period, and addressed them both in the Draft EIS/OEIS and in response to comments on the Draft EIS/OEIS.

The large number of comments was due in large part to the ease with which the Navy made commenting possible. Two-thirds of all comments received were uploaded directly on the public website, where the public could also view and download all pertinent documents. The team was successful at including more members of the public in the EIS process with this user-friendly approach to document access and provision for submittal of comments.

The NWTRC team continued to respond to Congressional interest in the project, even after the release of the Final EIS/OEIS and the Record of Decision. Within the first two months after signing of the Record of Decision, the NWTRC team briefed U.S. Congressman Michael Thompson (CA) on the EIS/OEIS, and planned and facilitated two informational meetings for the public in Northern California. During each of these meetings, Navy representatives listened to public concerns and responded to questions for over 4 hours.

### ***3.3 Unique Aspects of Planning Effort***

Marine mammal and sea turtle density estimates. One of the immediate challenges facing the team was the requirement to model acoustic impacts to marine mammals. The Navy team formed a group of marine mammal biologists to determine marine mammal densities in the Pacific Northwest, so that the modeling could move forward. This group included contractors and personnel from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Southwest Fisheries Science Center in La Jolla, CA. This group developed a method that combined available data with known environmental indicators of seasonal variations to accurately predict marine mammal and sea turtle densities in the study area. This effort was summarized in a report included as an EIS/OEIS appendix, and resulted in viable data with which the acoustic modeling could proceed. Not only did the Navy team provide a scientifically approved method for developing the necessary data, it also completed the entire process within a period that allowed the modeling to proceed without any project delays.

## **4 Accomplishments**

### ***4.1 Objectives Attainment***

From the outset, the team's goal was to prepare a thorough, comprehensive, and legally defensible EIS/OEIS, obtain the necessary MMPA permits, and successfully negotiate a Biological Opinion for endangered species within the study area. This was accomplished in a

public climate that presented unique challenges. The team successfully planned for most contingencies, and reacted quickly to unexpected difficulties. The level of U.S. Congressional involvement was both unprecedented and more impactful to the NEPA process than the Navy anticipated, yet the team responded to each Congressional request, adding meetings that went beyond NEPA requirements, extending comment periods for the Draft EIS and Final EIS, and providing direct Congressional briefings and public outreach. Throughout this process, the NWTRC team made inroads into areas of Oregon and Northern California that previously had little exposure to and great apprehension of Navy activities. The team's above and beyond efforts to respond to every request and answer every question have greatly improved the public's understanding and awareness of the Navy mission in the Pacific Northwest.

The team also learned valuable lessons that have been shared among Navy NEPA specialists. Primarily, the team learned the value of early engagement of state, local, and federal officials. In Washington State, where the vast majority of Navy activities take place, the team involved officials at every level. This effort resulted in no additional requests or involvement from State of Washington officials.

#### ***4.2 Specific Benefits to the Navy, the Public, and the Environment***

The Navy can conduct training and testing activities in the Pacific Northwest with the knowledge that the activities are in full compliance with NEPA, the MMPA, the ESA, and the CZMA. The Navy's environmental planners now have a better understanding of issues and concerns held by the public in this area.

The public and government officials in the area are now much more familiar with the Navy and have a better understanding of the Navy's activities in this region. Public officials especially have experienced how responsive the Navy is to their inputs and requests. The team's openness and responsiveness have created a more trusting climate between the Navy and the public in the Pacific Northwest.

The Navy's commitment to the environment is evidenced by its partnership with NMFS and USFWS throughout this project. The NWTRC team worked with USFWS to ensure that all potential impacts to endangered species were fully considered. This cooperative effort resulted in new, effective mitigation measures the Navy is implementing that will further ensure the continued survival of the bull trout and the marbled murrelet.

Based on similar discussions held with NMFS, the Navy will continue to apply mitigation measures designed to prevent harm to all marine mammal and sea turtle species in the study area.

#### ***4.3 Most Outstanding Accomplishments***

Of the challenges faced and surmounted, particularly noteworthy were the unique approach taken to estimate marine mammal densities, and the responsiveness demonstrated to multiple requests from elected officials and members of the public.

The NWTRC team met every challenge, achieved each of the Navy's goals, went beyond NEPA requirements, and demonstrated unfailing dedication to ensuring the Navy's training and testing mission requirements were met.