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Department of the Navy

Notice of Record of Decision To Realign Marine Corps Air Station/ Marine Corps Base, Camp Pendleton, CA

SUMMARY: The Department of the Navy has decided to realign Marine Corps Air Station/Marine Corps Base (MCAS/ MCB) Camp Pendleton, California. This decision is made upon careful consideration of all comments on the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) prepared for the realignment action. It has been decided to implement the realignment action using the alternative B configuration, which was both the preferred alternative and also the environmentally preferred alternative.

DATES: This Record Of Decision becomes effective January 27, 1997.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Additional information regarding this Record Of Decision or the MCAS/MCB Camp Pendleton realignment may be obtained from Major Pat D. Pinkston at (714) 726-4047.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The text of the entire Record Of Decision is provided as follows:

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1. Introduction

The Department of the Navy (DoN) has been studying a proposal to realign Marine Corps Aviation assets temporarily located at MCAS El Toro and permanently assigned to MCAS

Tustin to other locations in Southern California. The realignment would include Marine Corps aircraft, their dedicated personnel, equipment and support. The realignment would be undertaken in accordance with the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Act of 1990 (BRAC) (Public Law 101-510). The DoN has conducted extensive analysis of the proposal under Section 102(2) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) and the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations implementing NEPA (40 CFR 1500-1508). The process used for the analysis sought the views of the public and those Federal, State and local agencies with special expertise. Public comments have been carefully considered. Having reviewed the Final Environmental Impact Statement, the public comments, and pertinent parts of the administrative record, the Department of the Navy announces its decision to proceed with the realignment of Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS)/Marine Corps Base (MCB) Camp Pendleton, California.

2. Proposed Action

In compliance with the approved recommendations of the 1991, 1993, and 1995 Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commissions, the proposed action involves the relocation of selected aviation assets (along with their dedicated personnel and equipment) that are temporarily located at MCAS El Toro and permanently assigned to MCAS Tustin to MCAS Camp Pendleton, changes in aviation operations, and the construction of facilities. The relocating assets include approximately 800 personnel, four CH-46E (medium-lift) helicopter squadrons (48 aircraft) and one detachment of CH-53E (heavy-lift) helicopters (four aircraft). Upon full implementation of the proposed action, MCAS Camp Pendleton would support ten helicopter squadrons and one detachment totaling 212 aircraft. Because one existing UH-1/AH-1 (light attack/utility) helicopter squadron (27 aircraft) and one CH-46 helicopter squadron (12 aircraft) will normally be deployed, normal base loading will consist of approximately 3,900 personnel and 173 rotary-wing aircraft.

3. Purpose and Need

The purpose and need of the proposed action is to comply with the 1991, 1993, and 1995 BRAC Commissions' recommendations for the closure and realignment of MCAS Tustin and relocation of MCAS Tustin aircraft, along with their dedicated personnel and equipment, in a manner

that is consistent with Marine Corps operational requirements.

4. Background

This action was initiated following the effective date of the 1993 recommendations of the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission established under the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Act of 1990, Public Law 101-510.

Pursuant to that law, recommendations of the Commission become final if the President sends them to Congress and Congress does not reject them within 45 legislative days. Once recommendations become final, 10 U.S.C. sec. 2904 requires that the closures and relocations must be implemented within six years. The 1993 recommendations included a change to the 1991 BRAC Commission's recommendations for MCAS Tustin, which had named Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (MCAGCC) Twentynine Palms as one of the receiving sites for helicopter assets being realigned from MCAS Tustin. The BRAC 93 Commission deleted MCAGCC as a receiving site and directed relocation to "NAS North Island, NAS Miramar, or MCAS Camp Pendleton, California." In BRAC 95, the Commission again altered the receiving site for assets realigned from MCAS Tustin by striking the three potential sites listed in BRAC 93 and substituting "other air stations consistent with operational requirements." As a result, aviation assets from MCAS Tustin are being realigned to: MCAS New River, North Carolina; MCB Hawaii; MCAS Camp Pendleton, California; and MCAS Miramar, California.

When the proposed action is completed, four CH-46E helicopter squadrons (48 aircraft) and one detachment of CH-53E helicopters (four aircraft) will be added to the existing MCAS Camp Pendleton loading (consisting of six squadrons totaling 160 aircraft. Because one existing UH-1/AH-1 (light attack/utility) helicopter squadron (27 aircraft) and one CH-43 helicopter squadron (12 aircraft) will normally be deployed, normal base loading will consist of approximately 3,900 personnel and 173 rotary-wing aircraft. In an interim move after the BRAC 1995 decision and unrelated to selection of permanent relocation sites, all of MCAS Tustin's CH-46Es have been relocated to MCAS El Toro, in order to facilitate placing a significant portion of MCAS Tustin in caretaker status.

As independent actions implementing the recommendations of the 1995 BRAC Commission, two MCAS Tustin

squadrons have already been permanently relocated: One to MCAS New River and one to MCB Hawaii. Separate NEPA documentation was completed for the relocation of these assets. Separate NEPA documentation has been completed for the realignment of NAS Miramar to MCAS Miramar, California, which includes the permanent relocation of the remainder of the MCAS Tustin assets.

5. Alternatives

NEPA and the CEQ regulations require the Department of the Navy to study and evaluate a reasonable range of alternatives for accomplishing the purpose and need underlying the proposed action. The underlying purpose of BRAC, including the recommendation to close MCAS Tustin and realign its assets, is to reduce infrastructure, costs, and personnel requirements, while maintaining operational capabilities. Because of this overriding purpose, alternative sites that did not contribute to such reductions did not fall within the range of reasonable alternatives and did not warrant detailed, comparative analysis.

The EIS process initially identified three alternatives: no action, the use of other military installations, and alternative site configurations at MCAS Camp Pendleton. The alternative site configurations primarily involve the location of refueling facilities and are described as Alternative A, Alternative B, and Alternative C. The environmentally preferred alternative is Alternative B.

The no-action alternative (i.e., not realigning MCAS Tustin aircraft) was not evaluated in the EIS because the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Act of 1990 (Public Law 101-510) exempts from consideration under NEPA, among other things, the need for closing a military installation and the need for transferring functions to selected receiving installations as recommended by the Commission.

Five possible locations that fit the final BRAC 95 recommendations were identified within the West Coast region: MCAS Camp Pendleton, NAS North Island, NAS Miramar, Naval Air Facility (NAF) El Centro, and March Air Reserve Base (ARB). In compliance with the decision of the 1995 BRAC, the ability of these sites to meet Marine Corps operational requirements efficiently was a prime consideration.

The primary mission of CH-46 and CH-53 helicopters is to provide tactical lift of Marine Corps ground combat and combat support elements. Camp Pendleton is the center of the West Coast training complex for the Marine

Corps, including ground combat elements. Integrated air-ground training is critical to the tactical proficiency and readiness of Marine Corps units. Therefore, regardless of where the CH-46 and CH-53 assets are assigned, significant helicopter operations and training will occur at Camp Pendleton.

The review of alternative receiving sites for helicopters revealed that operational efficiencies arising from collocating helicopters with ground elements resulted in clear and overwhelming military advantages. Consequently, this allowed detailed analysis to focus on alternative site configurations at Camp Pendleton.

The overwhelming operational advantages of the MCAS Camp Pendleton alternative over the other possible four alternatives are:

- It lies completely within the boundaries of MCB Camp Pendleton, and allows for collocation of Marine ground forces and a significant portion of the counterpart rotary-wing aviation support. This provides an optimal transit time to primary training areas and efficient use of limited manpower, equipment and fiscal resources. The collocation of ground and aviation units provides a synergistic effect on training and support, allowing more realistic and efficient training of the Marine Corps air-ground team in a "train as we will fight" environment.

- It provides immediate access to: Adequate areas for both helicopter and over-the-beach amphibious assault training; remote areas, suitable beaches, and undeveloped airfield sites for advance deployment training of air-ground teams; helicopter landing sites to support air-ground training and operations; and high elevation confined area landing sites for training.

- It provides ready access to: established logistics support; division training areas for combined arms and assault helicopter joint vertical training; restricted air space and ordnance target complexes within 50 air route miles of home base to train pilots and gunners; helicopter-capable amphibious shipping for ship-based training and operations; and outlying landing sites within 50 air route miles of home base for conducting syllabus training including field carrier landing practice.

These advantages demonstrate that relocation to MCAS Camp Pendleton provides the best overall mission capability for the concerned Marine Corps assets and best supports operational requirements. In fact, absent other constraints, MCAS Camp Pendleton would be the operationally preferred site for the remaining USMC rotary-wing squadrons subject to the BRAC recommendations. Unfortunately, MCAS Camp Pendleton is not a reasonable alternative for those additional squadrons because of severe geographic limitations on the size of the airfield. It cannot physically

accommodate the additional facilities that would be required for basing all of the west coast rotary-wing squadrons. The Santa Margarita River bounds MCAS to the east, north and west. Any additions to the runways would entail moving the Santa Margarita River. Riparian areas associated with the Santa Margarita River support nine federally-listed endangered species, including the least Bell's vireo and southwestern willow flycatcher. Any substantial modifications to the Santa Margarita River in order to extend the runways would eliminate their habitat and significantly impact these endangered species. An ancient Indian village is present on the south bank of the Santa Margarita River. Preliminary archeological information obtained from this site suggests the site had been continuously inhabited for over 2,500 years, making it one of the most important archeological resources in southern California. Any runway extensions would traverse this archeological site.

The alternative site configurations aboard MCAS Camp Pendleton included Alternative A, Alternative B, and Alternative C. Alternative B locates the fuel pits to the northwestern end of the air facility infrastructure and creates mitigable impacts to biological resources. Both Alternatives A and C would locate the fuel pits at the southeastern end of the air facility infrastructure and would create significant impacts to the historical/cultural site located east of the air facility infrastructure. After a systematic and multi-disciplinary evaluation, Alternative B was chosen to be the Preferred Alternative, providing for more efficient air operations with no impacts to sensitive and unique cultural (historical and archeological) resources.

For alternatives that were initially identified but subsequently eliminated from detailed study based on operational requirements, Council on Environmental Quality regulations require the Department of the Navy only to discuss briefly the reasons for their having been eliminated.

For the reasons summarized below, all of the potential sites except Camp Pendleton were found to be unreasonable alternatives and consequently were eliminated in the EIS process from detailed study and analysis. Eliminating unreasonable alternative sites allowed the Department of the Navy to focus rigorously upon reasonable alternatives at the Camp Pendleton site.

Potential receiving sites for the assets to be realigned from MCAS El Toro and MCAS Tustin were initially screened on

the basis of several criteria: (1) Realignment recommendations approved by the President and accepted by Congress in BRAC 91, 93, and 95; (2) operational requirements; (3) infrastructure required to support the realigned assets; (4) personnel requirements; and (5) military value. Because of the mission of the squadrons involved, considerable weight was placed on the ability of a site to provide aviation support of ground elements while maximizing operational efficiency.

To achieve the economies that were basic to BRAC, Marine Corps force structure relies on the location of installations to form interdependent, mutually supporting complexes on the East Coast, West Coast, and in the Pacific. In order to meet operational and mission requirements, the selected receiving site(s) should be in close proximity to the established regional complex. MCAS Tustin is located within the West Coast regional complex. Receiving sites for the realigned assets therefore need to lie within the West Coast region. The Marine Corps regional complex on the West Coast is centered around MCB Camp Pendleton, CA. Since collocation of helicopters with the ground elements that the helicopters support maximizes operational and training efficiencies, locating as many helicopter squadrons at the center of the regional complex (Camp Pendleton) is optimum.

NAS Miramar

After careful consideration, the Department of the Navy has decided to realign/convert NAS Miramar, located approximately 35 air route miles south of MCAS/MCB Camp Pendleton, to MCAS Miramar. Pursuant to this decision, MCAS Miramar will support a mix of fixed-wing and rotary-wing aircraft. Medium and heavy lift helicopters based at Miramar can not train with the troops, equipment, and attack helicopters already at Camp Pendleton as effectively as they could if located at Camp Pendleton. Moreover, the Department of the Navy has responded to community concerns at Miramar by committing to implement a series of measures to mitigate the noise impacts that will occur from rotary-wing aircraft that will be based at MCAS Miramar. Adding 52 more helicopters to MCAS Miramar, when there are other, operationally preferable sites, would frustrate these mitigation measures and is not reasonable.

NAF El Centro

The purpose of NAF El Centro is to support transient Department of the

Navy aircraft that come to the region to use the unique and varied training ranges in Southern California and Western Arizona. The high tempo of existing operations, and the condition, availability, and quantity of its infrastructure make it an unreasonable alternative. Medium and heavy lift helicopters based at El Centro cannot train with troops, equipment, and attack helicopter already at Camp Pendleton as effectively as they could if located at Camp Pendleton. The distance to MCB Camp Pendleton is 108 air route miles, which is over twice the normal combat/training range for CH-46 helicopters. The extended transits between El Centro and Camp Pendleton would provide significantly less opportunity for training as part of an air-ground team, and would increase operation and maintenance associated with these aircraft. The base was constructed in 1943, and over half of its buildings (by square foot of footprint) are temporary or semi-permanent in character, many of which are deteriorated. There are a limited number of hangars and even many of those are currently categorized as being in a substandard facilities condition. The maintenance facilities are also insufficient for Marine Corps requirements.

NAS North Island

NAS North Island, located approximately 40 air route miles from Camp Pendleton, is not a feasible alternative because it does not maximize operational efficiencies or meet operational requirements. Medium and heavy lift helicopters based at NAS North Island cannot train with the troops, equipment, and attack helicopters already at Camp Pendleton as effectively as they could if located at Camp Pendleton. Also, NAS North Island cannot accommodate Marine Corps rotary-wing operational requirements due to its location, existing tempo of operations, and nature of the surrounding property. NAS North Island is located approximately one mile from Lindbergh Field (the major commercial airport in San Diego) and is adjacent to downtown San Diego and the City of Coronado. Repetitive training events such as Touch and Go, and Ground Control Approach (GCA) could not be efficiently conducted due to proximity of the civilian development. Computer vehicle traffic, which is already congested in the City of Coronado, would be further impacted by the addition of personnel assigned to off-base housing.

March ARB

Relocating Marine Corps rotary-wing assets from MCAS Tustin to March ARB, an Air Force reserve facility approximately 35 air route miles from Camp Pendleton, would not maximize operational efficiency. Medium and heavy lift helicopters based at March cannot train with the troops, equipment, and attack helicopters already at Camp Pendleton as effectively as they could if located at Camp Pendleton. Also, as the active duty component at March ARB, the Marine Corps would become the host activity, a status which would require additional USMC personnel to perform base functions.

6. Implementation of the Proposed Action

Implementation of the proposed action at Camp Pendleton includes the addition of selected aviation assets, changes to aviation operations, and the construction of necessary facilities to support Marine Corps operations.

A. Addition of Aviation Assets

When the proposed action is complete, four CH-46E helicopter squadrons (48 aircraft) and one detachment of CH-53E helicopters (four aircraft) will be added to the existing MCAS Camp Pendleton loading (consisting of six squadrons totaling 160 aircraft). Since one of the existing UH-1/AH-1 (27 light attack/utility aircraft) squadrons and one CH-46 (12 medium lift helicopters) squadrons are normally deployed, the loading supported by MCAS Camp Pendleton upon completion of this action is projected to be approximately 173 rotary-wing aircraft and approximately 3,900 personnel.

B. Changes to Aviation Operations

Implementation of the proposed action will involve changes in the aviation operations at Camp Pendleton. These changes will include: increased use of the primary runway, decreased use of the "right grass" for skid-configured helicopters, increased use (within established restrictions) of Temporary Alternate Landing Area (TALA), and increased use of Red Beach VSTOL and LHA pads.

C. Construction of Facilities

Implementation of the proposed action will result in MCAS Camp Pendleton being configured to accommodate three of the four assigned CH-46 (medium lift) squadrons at any time, with the fourth on deployment. Implementation of the proposed action will involve a reconfiguration and expansion of existing aircraft aprons

and pavements, flightline facilities, and associated support facilities to meet USMC requirements. The potential for expansion to simultaneously accommodate all four CH-46 squadrons on a long-term basis has been identified as a possibility in the future. Any proposal to routinely house and operate four CH-46 squadrons simultaneously will be subjected to further NEPA analysis.

The action now under consideration would include the following construction and reconfiguration of assets at the MCAS:

- Expansion of aircraft parking apron to within 500 feet of the runway centerline.

- Relocation and consolidation of aircraft fueling operations northwest of the runway with eight refueling points and one stacking lane to accommodate waiting aircraft.

- Construction of a compass calibration pad, water well, crash crew "hot spot" facility, and connecting taxiways to replace the facilities displaced by runway apron expansion.

- Partial elimination of the existing "right grass" area, currently being utilized for helicopter training, due to construction of new facilities in that area.

- Construction of a concrete pad for siting of Marine Air Control Squadron (MACS-1, Det A) expeditionary radar gear.

- Construction of maintenance hangars and centralized hazardous material support facilities along the southeast side of the flightline to support the relocating squadrons.

- Expansion of the existing Marine Aviation Logistics Squadron (MALS) aircraft maintenance complex in order to accommodate CH-46E helicopters.

- Expansion of supply functions, including construction of a warehouse and concrete pads with supporting utilities for 35 maintenance vans.

- Relocation and expansion of the aircraft bulk fuel storage facility as well as the fuel truck parking/loading area and fill stand southwest of the runway.

- Expansion of administration and training-related facilities to accommodate the additional personnel.

- Modification to the engine test cell and expansion of the armory.

- Construction and modification of roads, parking lots, utilities and support buildings.

In addition to the facilities proposed at the MCAS, the proposed action would require new construction in Area 24 on MCB Camp Pendleton, including Bachelor Enlisted Quarters (BEQ's) with administrative spaces, and a physical fitness building in order to

accommodate additional on-base enlisted personnel. The proposed action would also require the construction of a Tactical Air Navigation (TACAN) facility in Area 32 on MCB Camp Pendleton, adjacent to Building 32942. A TACAN is primarily a military short-range (200 mile) navigational aid, which would house ultra high frequency (UHF) transmitting equipment. A TACAN provides omni-directional azimuth and distance information to aircraft in flight.

7. Environmental Consequences

Environmental impacts on the following resources were analyzed in the EIS: Geology and soils, air quality, hydrology and water quality, biological resources, cultural resources, visual resources, land use, public health and safety, hazardous materials and wastes, aircraft operations, noise, transportation and circulation, socio-economics, and community services and utilities. The impacts analyzed in the EIS are grouped according to their degree of significance: residual significant impacts (those which cannot be mitigated below the threshold of significance); impacts mitigated below the threshold of significance; and impacts that are not significant. As discussed below, the Marine Corps will implement a number of mitigative measures to avoid or minimize environmental harm from the proposed action.

A. Residual Significant Impacts

There will be no significant environmental impacts after the mitigation measures described in the FEIS are implemented.

B. Impacts Mitigated Below Threshold of Significance

Geology and Soils

As discussed in the FEIS, the proposed action will include incorporating appropriate erosion control measures and proper excavation techniques to ensure protection of soil resources. The proposed action will not affect geologic resources as the facilities will be designed to reduce the potential for land slides and other adverse geologic activities. No significant impacts to soil will occur as a result of implementing the proposed action.

Hydrology

The MCAS facilities associated with the proposed action would be situated within the 100-year flood plain of the Santa Margarita River with the exception of the Area 24 and 32 construction. Although a temporary levee exists along the northern boundary of the MCAS, the air station is inadequately protected from flood

hazards and impacts due to flooding would be significant. To reduce the potential for flooding at the Air Station, a construction project has been proposed for fiscal year 1998. The project will construct a levee along the northern boundary of the MCAS to protect facilities from a 100-year flood. Separate NEPA documentation is being prepared for this project. The proposed levee project is needed regardless of the proposed realignment action, and is functionally independent of the proposed realignment action. Under the proposed realignment action, the bulk fuel farm and the hazardous material facility will be elevated by constructing them on fill material to reduce their susceptibility to impacts from flooding. The proposed realignment of helicopter squadrons has been reviewed in accordance with Executive Order 11988 and has been found to be the only practicable alternative for meeting mission requirements. The proposed action and other planned construction have incorporated accepted flood protection measures to the extent practicable.

Water Quality

Surface waters within the Santa Margarita River and its coastal estuary have been designated by the San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board (SDRWQCB [1995]) as having beneficial uses, which include municipal and domestic supply, agricultural and industrial supply, contact and non-contact recreation, warm and cold fresh water habitats, wildlife habitat and preservation of rare and endangered species. The proposed action would result in increased pavement and storm water runoff. Construction-related activities such as clearing, grading, and excavation often result in the potential for fuels, oil, grease, and sediment to be carried in storm water runoff to nearby surface waters. In addition, operation of aircraft and other equipment, as well as fueling procedures such as those associated with the proposed facilities, typically result in the release of fuels, oils and solvents, and other compounds onto paved surfaces.

The potential release of these materials into the adjacent Santa Margarita River, either directly during a large spill, or indirectly from small releases via storm water runoff, represents a potentially significant impact on water quality. Discharge of contaminated surface water to the Santa Margarita River can potentially impact groundwater quality via recharge of groundwater through the highly permeable river alluvium. To reduce impacts on surface water quality from

construction-related and operational activities to an acceptable level, the Marine Corps will: (1) Obtain coverage under the State of California General Construction Activity Storm Water Permit to identify the sources of sediment and other pollutants that affect the quality of storm water discharges and to identify the measures to reduce sediment and other pollutants in storm water discharges; (2) implement standard construction best management practices including use of silt barriers and vegetative cover to provide erosion control; (3) locate all hazardous material and waste storage areas within containment structures; (4) design pavement areas to prevent fuel spills or runoff from directly entering natural drainage features; (5) direct storm water discharge to concrete channels or swales that provide a single point of discharge for non-point source storm water runoff from the developed portions of the air station. Oil/water separators will be constructed to remove the "first flush" (approximately the first 20 minutes of a storm event) of petroleum, oil and lubricant residue from the storm water prior to release into the Santa Margarita River watershed; (6) connect hangar trench drains to four 30,000 gallon holding tanks for containment of the emergency Aqueous Film Forming Foam (AFFF) fire suppression system discharges; (7) ensure all discharges to natural drainages will comply with Section 402 of the Clean Water Act, requirements for storm water discharges; and (8) update the MCAS/ MCB Camp Pendleton Oil and Hazardous Substances Spill Contingency Plan, as well as the Spill Prevention Control and Countermeasures (SPCC) and the Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) as required under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) and the Clean Water Act, to provide for specific measures in the event of a spill.

The EPA, in a comment on the FEIS, requested corroboration from the Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB) that proposed mitigation measures were adequate to ensure compliance with the Clean Water Act. While the RWQCB did not provide comments on the FEIS, the RWQCB has reviewed the mitigation measures as part of the state water quality certification process under section 401 of Clean Water Act. (The certification process under Section 401 is part of the permit process under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act.) Conditions identified in the water quality certificate will be included in the 404 permit issued under

the Clean Water Act. The Marine Corps will comply with those conditions.

As discussed in the FEIS, appropriate measures will be implemented to ensure that the potential for release of fuels is minimized. The installation spill response plan will be updated to cover the new facilities. No significant impacts to water quality will occur as a result of implementing the proposed action with the proposed mitigation measures in place.

The proposed action will result in additional withdrawals of groundwater from the San Margarita groundwater basin because of an increase in military personnel and operational facilities. The historical and current pumping rate of this groundwater basin totals approximately 6,065 acre-feet per year (AFY). Safe yield for the Santa Margarita groundwater basin is estimated to be 7,650 AFY. Implementation of the proposed action could result in an overdraft of the aquifer, which would be a significant impact. To reduce significant impacts on groundwater supply to an acceptable level, the Marine Corps will: (1) Limit groundwater withdrawals from the aquifer contained within the Santa Margarita River watershed to established safe yield (7,650 AFY); (2) continue to implement water conservation measures; and (3) continue groundwater monitoring in all drainages where groundwater is extracted.

Biology

The Department of the Navy has carefully studied the potential impacts of the proposed action on endangered species and wetlands and in consultation with the requisite agencies, has developed and will implement appropriate measures to protect these sensitive resources. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has been formally consulted during the preparation of the EIS. Based upon consultation with the USFWS, three federally-listed endangered/threatened species were identified as present on MCAS Camp Pendleton. The endangered species that are included are the California gnatcatcher (gnatcatcher), the least Bell's vireo, and the southwestern willow flycatcher. The Department of the Navy prepared a Biological Assessment on these three species and other biological resources. Information provided to USFWS in the Biological Assessment is summarized in the DEIS and the FEIS. Specifically, the DEIS and the FEIS discussed the existing condition of these threatened and endangered species as well as other sensitive species and their habitat in considerable detail. The DEIS and FEIS

identified the impacts associated with the proposed action and discussed mitigation measures that would reduce the potential for adverse impacts on the threatened and endangered species and their habitat.

The results of this consultation are provided in the USFWS Biological Opinion 1-6-95-F-02, Programmatic Activities and Conservation Plans in Riparian and Estuarine/Beach Ecosystems on Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, dated October 30, 1995. The Biological Opinion states that the proposed action will not jeopardize the existence of listed species. The Marine Corps will comply with all terms and conditions of the Biological Opinion. The Biological Opinion includes an Incidental Take Statement with reasonable and prudent measures to minimize impacts on the species of concern. The Marine Corps will comply with these measures.

As a result of the environmental review conducted in conjunction with the Marine Corps' application for a permit under section 404 of the Clean Water Act, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) has said that it will place conditions on dredge and fill aspects of the proposed action. Those conditions resulted in a slight decrease in the amount of wetlands that would be impacted. Under the conditions imposed in the Clean Water Act permit, the proposed action will result in permanent loss of approximately 9.5 acres of wetlands. Additionally, approximately 5.0 acres of wetlands and waters would be temporarily impacted by implementation of a 100 foot wide edge effect around the fuel points. The Marine Corps has determined that the proposed project would indirectly impact approximately 15 acres of endangered species habitat through development, construction, and habitat fragmentation. An undetermined amount of additional wetlands and waters adjacent to the proposed project site would be indirectly impacted by noise, helicopter downwash, and human activity at the fueling point. These direct and indirect impacts may be significant if unmitigated.

Consistent with the Department of the Navy's policy for "no net loss" of wetlands functions and values, as part of the Clean Water Act Section 404 Permit process, the Marine Corps will mitigate direct impacts to wetlands and waters of the U.S. by carrying-out restoration. Also, the Marine Corps will conduct exotic weed control as part of its mitigation for indirect impacts. This mitigation measure was subject to public review, and approval by the ACOE as part of the Clean Water Act

permitting process. No construction activities will occur in wetland areas until the permit from the ACOE is received. The Marine Corps will comply with all the terms and conditions of the permit.

As set forth in the Biological Opinion, the Marine Corps will minimize impacts to existing wetlands during construction by implementing the following measures: (1) Delineating wetland boundaries on contractor drawings and flagging the site to prevent impacts to habitat outside project boundaries; (2) taking erosion and sediment transport control measures (e.g. sediments basins, hay bales, silt fences, etc.); (3) staging construction equipment at least 100 feet from wetlands; (4) minimization of dust from construction activities; (5) revegetation of temporarily impacted areas; and (6) education of construction workers with regard to wetland habitats and their sensitivity. Biological monitoring during construction shall occur in areas adjacent to the Santa Margarita River Basin.

The federally endangered least Bell's vireo and southwestern willow flycatcher occupy the wetland habitats of the Santa Margarita River that surround the Air Station on two sides. The federally threatened California gnatcatcher occupy coastal sage scrub habitat in the vicinity of the Santa Margarita River. Annual surveys at the MCAS indicate that the presence of helicopter activity has not precluded a substantial increase in the least Bell's vireo population within the Santa Margarita River drainage since 1981 (USFWS 1995 Biological Opinion 1-6-95-F-02). Nesting has occurred in habitat adjacent to the Air Station every year since survey data has been collected. Annual survey maps indicate that the heaviest concentration of the nesting least Bell's vireo appear to be influenced by the quality of riparian habitat rather than distance to the MCAS. The proposed action may result in indirect noise impacts on these species. The Marine Corps is conducting on-going monitoring of the effects of helicopter flights between 300 and 500 ft AGL in the adjacent habitat. Mitigation measures described in the Terms & Conditions of the Biological Opinion are designed to reduce impacts to an acceptable level.

No mitigation for biological impacts are required in Areas 24 and 32. Area 24 is a "disturbed" area, and Area 32, an Upland Area, was surveyed for the Pocket Mouse and the California gnatcatcher, and found to be devoid of those species.

Cultural Resources

In accordance with 36 CFR Part 800, regulations implementing Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, three cultural sites were evaluated for eligibility for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). Only one site, CA-SDi-10156/12599/H, was determined to be eligible. The State Historic Preservation Officer agrees with this determination. Similarly, the State Historic Preservation Officer has concurred in the determination that the proposed action will not affect this or any other historic properties. Therefore, due to avoidance, the proposed realignment of MCAS Camp Pendleton will not significantly impact cultural resources listed or determined eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

As there are no cultural resources recorded within the limits of construction for the proposed action, no direct impacts to known cultural resources will occur. However, one extensive archaeological site, CA-SDi-10156/12599/H, is located near the limits of the proposed action and is associated with the Santa Margarita Ranch House complex, a site listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Therefore, significant indirect impacts from the proposed action could occur if measures to protect the site during construction are not implemented. To reduce potentially significant indirect impacts on cultural resources to below the threshold of significance, the Marine Corps will: (1) Prior to commencement of construction activities, protect (by fencing or other means) portions of site CA-SDi-10156/12599/H outside of the project area from potential incidental construction-related impacts; and (2) pursuant to 36 CFR 800.11, if any archaeological resources are discovered during project grading or construction, halt all activities in that particular location until an archaeologist is notified and the resources assessed. The archaeologist will establish procedures for redirecting or halting work to permit the sampling, identification and evaluation of previously unidentified archaeological resources.

Aircraft Operations

Aircraft operations for the proposed action would result in a significant increase in the use of runways, established military airspace, and military flight tracks. The Marine Corps will mitigate these impacts to an acceptable level by using as necessary the following measures: (1) Scheduling training other than during morning peak times, (2) scheduling block training

times, (3) utilizing the Red Beach area, and (4) utilizing the Temporary Alternate Landing Area (TALA).

C. Impacts That Are Not Significant

Air Quality

The San Diego Air Basin is federally classified as a serious ozone non-attainment area and a moderate carbon monoxide (CO) non-attainment area. Pursuant to Section 176(c) of the Clean Air Act, US EPA promulgated a final rule "Determining Conformity of General Federal Actions to State or Federal Implementation Plans" (General Conformity rule), 58 Fed. Reg. 63214 (Nov 30, 1993) (40 C.F.R. Parts 51 and 93). A conformity applicability analysis of the air emissions associated with the proposed action was conducted. The conformity applicability analysis determined that air emissions associated with the proposed action (reduced by the amount of emissions associated with the departing Marine Corps aircraft) are: (1) Below de minimis levels (i.e., the net changes in emissions of criteria pollutants do not exceed threshold levels established in the General Conformity Rule); and, (2) not regionally significant (they do not exceed 10% of the San Diego Air Basin's total emissions inventory for any applicable criteria pollutant). Consequently, the proposed action is not subject to the General Conformity Rule. (FEIS, § 4.2 and FEIS Appendix B)

In conducting a conformity applicability analysis for the proposed action, the Department of the Navy selected 1990 as the most appropriate year to reflect Marine Corps aircraft operations and activities at MCAS Camp Pendleton as a fully operational Air Station in normal circumstances. As such, 1990 was used as a basis to calculate emissions increases and decreases caused by the proposed action; i.e., the "net" emissions considering all incoming and outgoing direct and indirect emissions. The "netting" of emissions in this manner appropriately accounts for the total direct and indirect emissions associated with the proposed action and is in accordance with provisions of the General Conformity Rule. The Department of the Navy's use of 1990 to analyze net emissions is also consistent with the San Diego Air Pollution Control District's (APCD) use of 1990 for determining emissions inventories. Even though total operations dropped in 1990 from previous years' totals due to deployments for Operation Desert Shield and Storm, a comparison of yearly level of operations for years when the OV-10 aircraft was still operational

reveals that 1990 is a representative year for calculating pre-BRAC operations and emissions.

I took a hard look at the Department of the Navy's method for estimating air emissions and the supporting data. The Department of the Navy's method for calculating aircraft emissions applies the following elements: number of aircraft operations; type or mode of operation (power setting); number and type of aircraft engines per aircraft; time in mode; and, corresponding emission factors. The emission factors were obtained from studies conducted by the Navy Aircraft Environmental Support Office (AESO) that are referenced in the EPA "Compilation of Air Pollutant Emission Factors (AP-42)."

In summary, the Department of the Navy has conducted a thorough review of the data and methods used to analyze

whether the requirement for a conformity determination applies to this proposed action. My review of the record indicates that the proposed realignment of MCAS Camp Pendleton represents a net decrease in the total emissions of those air pollutants for which the San Diego area is in nonattainment. During the most recent review done in preparation for making this Record of Decision, however, the Department of the Navy has accounted for a number of changed circumstances. Some of these changes, such as shifts in projected construction schedules and delays in the migration of the realigning aircraft, resulted from delays in the EIS process. As a result, some of the data and dates in the conformity applicability analysis as summarized in the FEIS have changed. The Marine

Corps carefully recalculated its emission estimates for the proposed action's conformity applicability analysis to reflect these changes and other refinements of data. These recalculations demonstrate that the net emissions from the proposed action remain below de minimis levels. Some of the changes of note in the applicability analysis include using an on-site batch concrete plant at MCAS Camp Pendleton during construction and deferring the construction of the hot refueling pits from 1997 to 1998. Data refinements included correcting some emission factors and hours of operations for equipment and aircraft. These changes and refinements indicate that emissions from the proposed action will remain below de minimis levels, as shown in the table below.

Annual net emissions (as compared to 1990)	Emission rates (tons per year)		
	NO _x	CO	ROG/HC
1997 Net Emissions	38	-619	-18
1998 Net Emissions	-27	-695	-28
1999 Net Emissions	13	-243	20
2000 Net Emissions	10	-287	17
De minimis threshold level	50	100	50

Visual Resources

As discussed in the FEIS, the proposed action will not have any significant impacts on the visual resources.

Land Use

As discussed in the FEIS, the proposed action will not result in the change of any off-base land use designation, and therefore will not have any significant impacts on the land use of developed areas.

Public Health and Safety

As discussed in the FEIS, the proposed action will not have any significant impacts on the local or regional public health and safety.

Hazardous Material and Wastes

As discussed in the FEIS, the proposed action will not have any significant impacts on the life cycle (procurement, storage, use, through disposal) of hazardous materials or wastes.

Socioeconomics

As discussed in the FEIS, the proposed action will not have any significant impacts on the local or regional socio-economics. In compliance with Executive Order 12898, an analysis was conducted to determine if minority or low-income

populations would suffer disproportionate environmental impacts as a result of the proposed action. It was determined that these populations would not suffer disproportionate impacts.

Noise

The FEIS carefully analyzed the issue of noise, recognizing that some members of the public are concerned about noise that would be generated by additional helicopter operations at MCAS Camp Pendleton.

Noise impacts were assessed using the State of California's standard, the Community Noise Equivalent Level (CNEL), expressed in units of decibel (dB). The State of California's Title 21, Subchapter 6, Section 5006 states: "The level of noise acceptable to a reasonable person residing in the vicinity of an airport is established as a community noise equivalent level (CNEL) value of 65 dB for purposes of these regulations. This criterion level has been chosen for reasonable persons residing in urban residential areas where houses are of typical California construction and may have windows partially open. It has been selected with reference to speech, sleep and community reaction." Section 5014 describes the land use that are incompatible within the noise impact boundaries. It provides that noise

exposure levels less than 65 dB are generally compatible for noise sensitive land uses, including residential areas and schools. The aircraft operations-related noise analysis is based on data presented in the "Aircraft Noise Study for Marine Corps Air Station, Camp Pendleton, CA" (NAVFACENCOM 1995). The aircraft noise study utilized aircraft operations data from the Naval Aviation Simulation Model (NASMOD) report. Noise contours defining the areas of impact in 5 dB increment were developed using the NOISEMAP model and projected operational tempo data. The analysis considered the existing six squadrons, with one deployed, and the addition of four squadrons and the detachment of four helicopters.

Although the standard for significance is 65 dB, the noise contours as low as 60 dB CNEL associated with the proposed action will remain entirely contained within the base boundaries of MCB Camp Pendleton. The average annual day 60-65 dB CNEL noise contour would increase by approximately 564 acres, while the total acreage increase within the 65-70 dB CNEL noise contour would be 141 acres. No additional on-base sensitive noise receptors will be contained within the new 65-70 dB noise contour. Most notable is the increase in area of the 60-65 dB CNEL noise contour by about 42

percent (or from 1,339 to 1,903 acres). This increase is attributed to the large increase in Ground Control Approach (GCA) pattern operations, the use of the pattern during evening and nighttime hours (when larger weighting factors are used to compensate for quieter background noise, resulting in larger noise contours than would be created by daytime flights), and a significant increase in arrivals using the North initial approach route. Similarly, there is a major projected increase in aircraft departures and arrivals, causing the 60–65 dB CNEL noise contour to extend farther southwest. The remaining increase in the 60–65 noise contour is consistent with increased operations for most departures, arrivals, and pattern operations.

In addition, two off-base locations, located in the town of Fallbrook, were identified as potential noise sensitive receptors (the intersection of Mission Road and Industrial Way, and the Fallbrook Union High School). Under the proposed action, the intersection of Mission Road and Industrial Way (currently 46 dB CNEL), and the Fallbrook Union High School (currently 38 dB CNEL) will be exposed to sound level increases of 5 dB at the intersection, and 6 dB at the High School, during an average annual day. These increases and resulting noise levels are compatible with the established noise impact standards contained within the State of California Regulations (Title 21) for these land uses.

The Marine Corps will continue to examine operations for ways to further reduce noise impacts on communities subject to routine overflight of MCAS Camp Pendleton aircraft. The MCB Camp Pendleton Community Plans and Liaison (CP&L) Office will continue to coordinate efforts with the local community by working with community leaders, local elected officials and professional staffs through established community relations and local government processes, e.g., the Fallbrook Ad Hoc Committee, to ensure that the concerns of local communities regarding Marine Corps operations will be taken into consideration.

Construction noise associated with the proposed action would raise ambient noise levels in the vicinity of individual construction sites. Noise levels produced by typical construction equipment (e.g. heavy trucks, loaders, backhoes, cranes, and assorted pneumatic and diesel equipment) are of the same intensity as the 75–80 db CNEL noise contour created by aircraft operations. Impacts due to noise produced by construction equipment

will be temporary, and although audible in the immediate vicinity, will not occur outside of the MCAS/MCB area of construction and will not increase noise levels beyond the MCAS/MCB boundaries. Traffic generated by construction activity is estimated to be approximately 30 to 50 construction-type vehicles per day. The increase in traffic noise would be approximately 0.5 dB and is not significant.

Transportation and Circulation

Traffic-related impacts to either the on- or off-base circulation system, due to both construction and operation of the proposed action, would not be significant. Construction volumes would represent a small and temporary portion of daily traffic volumes on area roadways, carrying materials and heavy equipment to the site. Heavy construction equipment and vehicles would comprise a small portion of off-base traffic, since the vehicles would be driven to the site, and then kept on-site for the duration of the construction. It is estimated that construction traffic would range from 150 to 200 vehicles per day (including personal vehicles of construction employees), depending on the timing of construction of each facility. It is also assumed that traffic would approach the project sites equally from the Main Gate near 1–5, and the San Luis Rey Gate, near Oceanside, with the concentration of heavy construction vehicles using the Main Gate. Service contractors (equipment suppliers, maintenance, fuel trucks, etc) would comprise approximately 50 trips to and from the facilities each day.

The proposed action is expected to generate a total of approximately 1,485 vehicles on off-base roadways during the weekdays. The Level of Service (LOS) and capacity on primary off-base roadways in the vicinity of MCB Camp Pendleton would not be lowered. Project-related traffic would represent a negligible increase to off-base major intersections, which would not result in lowering the LOS with the addition of project-related traffic.

Community Services and Utilities

Of the projected approximately 800 personnel associated with the proposed action, approximately 43 would be civilians who would be housed off-base, independent of the military personnel. School-aged dependents of civilian personnel would be absorbed into the local community. It is estimated that 363 school-aged military dependents will be introduced into the Oceanside, Fallbrook and Capistrano School Districts upon implementation of the proposed action. The additional families

and their school-aged children would be disbursed throughout the existing housing stocks on base and in adjacent communities in San Diego and Orange Counties, and would not significantly impact school districts.

8. Comments Received on the Final EIS Public Review

Twelve comment letters were received following publication of the FEIS. With the exception of an issue with cumulative impacts addressed below, the comments received were addressed in the sections corresponding to the issues of concern.

The EPA expressed a concern that the FEIS should contain an explanation as to why several projects identified in the Draft EIS cumulative impacts analysis appear to be in support of the proposed action, but are analyzed under separate NEPA documentation. The projects identified in the cumulative impacts portion of the FEIS, both at MCB and MCAS Camp Pendleton (e.g., sewage treatment upgrades and construction of an outlying landing field) do not directly support the proposed BRAC action, and would be undertaken irrespective of the realignment of MCAS Tustin assets to Camp Pendleton. Many of the actions identified in the cumulative impacts section are only in the conceptual planning stage. The FEIS Cumulative Impacts section was expanded to address potential impacts for each project to the extent known; however, the available information was limited since many of these projects are only in the early stage of planning. The impacts associated with each of these projects would be mitigated at the project-specific level to ensure the continued protection of the natural and cultural resources, including the Santa Margarita River Basin.

9. Conclusion

On behalf of the Department of the Navy, I have decided to realign selected aviation assets (four twelve-aircraft squadrons of medium-lift CH-46E helicopters and one four-aircraft detachment of heavy-lift CH-53E helicopters), along with their dedicated personnel, equipment, and support, from MCAS El Toro and MCAS Tustin to MCAS Camp Pendleton, which is located within MCB Camp Pendleton. After reviewing the FEIS, supporting documents, and comments and information received during the environmental review process, I have decided to implement this action using Camp Pendleton Site Alternative B (fuel pits to Northwest of existing airfield infrastructure), which was both the

Preferred Alternative and also the Environmentally Preferred Alternative.

10. Where to Obtain Further Information

For further information, contact Major Pat D. Pinkston at (714) 726-4047.

Dated: January 27, 1997.

Duncan Holaday,

Deputy Assistant Secretary, Installations and Facilities.

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BILLING CODE 3810-FF-M

Department of the Navy, DoD

Record of Decision for the Disposal and Reuse of Naval Civil Engineering Laboratory, Port Hueneme, California

SUMMARY: The Department of the Navy (Navy), pursuant to Section 102(2)(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), 42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*, and the regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality that implement NEPA procedures, 40 CFR Parts 1500-1508, hereby announces its decision to dispose of Naval Civil Engineering Laboratory, Port Hueneme, California (NCEL).

Navy intends to dispose of the property in a manner that is consistent with the NCEL Community Reuse Plan (Reuse Plan) submitted by the Port Hueneme Surplus Property Authority (SPA), the Local Redevelopment Authority (LRA) for NCEL. The City of Port Hueneme established SPA to plan future uses of the closing facilities. The Reuse Plan is general in nature and proposes maritime and related uses rather than particular reuse projects.

In its Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), Navy evaluated a "No action" alternative and three "action" alternatives: port and coastal activities ("Port/Coastal"), described in the FEIS as the preferred alternative; port and related industrial activities ("Port/Industrial"); and port, aquaculture, retail and commercial activities ("Mixed Use"). In a Resolution dated August 7, 1996, SPA determined that the Port/Industrial alternative's emphasis on port activities would be consistent with the Reuse Plan and endorsed the land uses proposed in that alternative.

In deciding to dispose of NCEL Port Hueneme, Navy has determined that both the Port/Coastal alternative and the Port/Industrial alternative will meet the goals of achieving local economic redevelopment of the closing facility and creating new jobs, while limiting adverse environmental impacts and ensuring land uses that are compatible with adjacent property. This Record Of

Decision leaves selection of the particular means to achieve the proposed redevelopment to the acquiring entity and the local zoning authority.

Background

The 1993 Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission recommended closure of NCEL Port Hueneme. This recommendation was approved by President Clinton and accepted by the One Hundred Third Congress in 1993. NCEL Port Hueneme closed in April 1996, and the property has been in caretaker status since that date.

The NCEL property occupies 33.1 acres along the Pacific Ocean in the City of Port Hueneme, which is located in Ventura County, California. NCEL lies adjacent to the Oxnard Harbor District's Port of Hueneme, about 60 miles northwest of Los Angeles and 40 miles southeast of Santa Barbara, California. The property contains 53 structures that were used for Naval research and development.

Navy published a Notice of Intent in the Federal Register on March 8, 1995, announcing that Navy would prepare an Environmental Impact Statement that would analyze the impacts of disposal and reuse of the land, buildings, and infrastructure at NCEL Port Hueneme. A 30-day public scoping period was established, and Navy held a public scoping meeting on March 23, 1995, at the Port Hueneme City Hall.

On February 13, 1996, Navy distributed a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) to Federal, State, and local agencies, elected officials, special interest groups, and interested persons. Navy held a public hearing in the Port Hueneme City Council chambers on March 12, 1996, to discuss the DEIS. During the forty-five day review period after publication of the DEIS, Federal, State, and local agencies submitted written comments concerning the DEIS. These comments and Navy's responses were incorporated in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), which was distributed to the public on July 19, 1996, for a 30-day review period that concluded on August 18, 1996. Navy received three letters commenting on and supportive of the FEIS.

Alternatives

NEPA requires Navy to evaluate a reasonable range of alternatives for the disposal and reuse of this Federal property. In the NEPA process, Navy analyzed the environmental impacts of various proposed land uses that could result from disposal of the NCEL property. Navy also evaluated a "No

action" alternative that would leave the property in a caretaker status with Navy maintaining the physical condition of the property, providing a security force, and making repairs essential to safety.

As the basis for its analysis of the "action" alternatives, Navy relied upon SPA's proposals for maritime and related uses that were set forth in the Reuse Plan. SPA considered various activities that the NCEL property could support, prepared the Reuse Plan, and submitted it to Navy in August 1995.

The first "action" alternative, the Port/Coastal alternative, proposed a moderate expansion of the Oxnard Harbor District's port facilities by using 5.5 acres on the NCEL property as additional area for wharfside activities such as the handling and storage of cargo. Another part of the property, 6.1 acres, would be dedicated to recreation and public access, and the remainder, 21.5 acres, would be set aside for coastal activities such as fish processing, aquaculture, and maritime training and other educational uses.

The second "action" alternative, the Port/Industrial alternative, proposed greater expansion of the Oxnard Harbor District's port facilities on to the NCEL property, with 27 of NCEL's 33 acres dedicated to cargo handling, storage, and distribution. As in the Port/Coastal alternative, 6.1 acres at NCEL would be dedicated to recreation and public access.

The third "action" alternative, the Mixed Use alternative, proposed the use of 5.5 acres at NCEL for expansion of the Oxnard Harbor District's port facilities, 9.2 acres for use in aquaculture and commercial activities, and 12.3 acres for retail stores, offices and maritime education. As in the Fort/Coastal and Port/Industrial alternatives, 6.1 acres would be dedicated to recreation and public access.

Environmental Impacts

Navy analyzed the potential impacts of the "No action" and three "action" alternatives for their effects on land use, socioeconomics, public services, cultural resources, biological resources, water resources, geology and soils, traffic and circulation, air quality, noise, utilities, hazardous materials and hazardous waste. In light of SPA's endorsement of the Port/Industrial alternative, this Record Of Decision will focus on the impacts that could result from implementing that proposal.

No significant adverse impacts on land use would arise out of the Port/Industrial alternative. This proposal is compatible with the existing and projected uses of adjacent property and is consistent with the existing land use