

limits. IWC-set catch limits are, in turn, based on IWC Scientific Committee advice on the sustainability of proposed catch limits using a population model, referred to as a Strike Limit Algorithm. The Strike Limit Algorithm used by the IWC is specific to this population of bowhead whales and is the IWC's formula for calculating sustainable aboriginal subsistence whaling removal levels, based on the size and productivity of a whale population, in order to satisfy subsistence need. The Strike Limit Algorithm also allows for an inter-annual variation of strikes up to 50 percent of the annual strike limit in order to provide flexibility for the hunt while meeting the Commission's conservation objectives.

#### Alternatives

NMFS preliminarily anticipates four alternatives:

*Alternative 1 (no action):* Do not grant the AEWC a catch limit.

*Alternative 2:* Grant the AEWC an annual strike limit of 67 bowhead whales, not to exceed a total of 336 landed whales over any 6-year period, with no unused strikes from previous years added to a subsequent annual limit.

*Alternative 3:* Grant the AEWC an annual strike limit of 67 bowhead whales, not to exceed a total of 336 landed whales over any 6-year period, with unused strikes from previous years carried forward and added to the annual strike limit of subsequent years (subject to limits), provided that no more than 15 additional strikes are added to any one year's allocation of strikes. This alternative would maintain the *status quo* for any six-year period with respect to management of the hunt.

*Alternative 4:* Grant the AEWC an annual strike limit of 67 bowhead whales, not to exceed a total take of 336 landed whales over any 6-year period, with unused strikes from previous years carried forward and added to the annual strike quota of subsequent years (subject to limits), provided that no more than 50 percent of the annual strike limit is added for any one year. This would maintain the *status quo* for any 6-year period with respect to management of the hunt for landed whales and employ the Commission's 50 percent carryover principle.

NOAA prepared an EIS in 2013 that analyzed issuing annual strike limits to the AEWC for a subsistence hunt on bowhead whales from 2013 through 2018. That analysis concluded that the overall effects of human activities associated with subsistence whaling results in only minor impacts on the western Arctic bowhead whale stock. In

light of the stability of the IWC subsistence harvest allocations and the subsistence bowhead harvests by Alaska Natives, the 2013 EIS estimated environmental consequences for a 25- or 30-year period, recognizing that every 5 or 6 years, when new catch limits are considered by the IWC, NMFS would prepare an Environmental Assessment (EA) to determine whether any new circumstances would result in significant environmental impacts warranting a new EIS.

NMFS decided to prepare an EIS rather than an EA in order to assess the impacts of issuing annual quotas for the subsistence hunt by Alaska Natives from 2019 onward. This decision was not based on any new determination that significant effects occur as a result of the bowhead subsistence hunt, but rather to take advantage of the greater transparency and public involvement in decision-making afforded through an EIS process.

Major issues to be addressed in this EIS include: The impact of subsistence removal of bowhead whales from the Western Arctic stock of bowhead whales; the impacts of these harvest levels on the traditional and cultural values of Alaska Natives, and the cumulative effects of the action when considered along with environmental conditions and past, present, and future actions potentially affecting bowhead whales.

#### Public Comment

We begin this NEPA process by soliciting input from the public and interested parties on the type of impacts to be considered in the EIS, the range of alternatives to be assessed, and any other pertinent information. Specifically, this scoping process is intended to accomplish the following objectives:

1. Invite affected Federal, state, and local agencies, Alaska Natives, and other interested persons to participate in the EIS process.

2. Determine the potential significant environmental issues to be analyzed in the EIS.

3. Identify and eliminate issues determined to be insignificant or addressed in other documents.

4. Allocate assignments among the lead agency and cooperating agencies regarding preparation of the EIS, including impact analysis and identification of mitigation measures.

5. Identify related environmental documents being prepared.

6. Identify other environmental review and consultation requirements.

The official scoping period is from August 15, 2017, until September 14,

2017. Please visit the NOAA Fisheries' Alaska Regional Office's Web page at <https://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/pr/whales-bowhead> for more information on this EIS. NMFS estimates the draft EIS for 2019 onward will be available in May 2018.

#### Authority

The preparation of the EIS for the subsistence harvest of Western Arctic bowhead whales by Alaska Natives will be conducted under the authority and in accordance with the requirements of NEPA, Council on Environmental Quality Regulations (40 CFR parts 1500–1508), other applicable Federal laws and regulations, and policies and procedures of NMFS for compliance with those regulations.

Dated: August 9, 2017.

**John Henderschedt,**

*Director, Office of International Affairs and Seafood Inspection, National Marine Fisheries Service.*

[FR Doc. 2017–17173 Filed 8–14–17; 8:45 am]

**BILLING CODE 3510–22–P**

## DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

### National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[Docket No. 170718681–7735–01]

RIN 0648–XF575

#### Endangered and Threatened Species; Initiation of a Status Review for Alewife and Blueback Herring Under the Endangered Species Act (ESA)

**AGENCY:** National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

**ACTION:** Notice of initiation of a status review; request for information.

**SUMMARY:** We, NMFS, announce the initiation of a new status review of alewife (*Alosa pseudoharengus*) and blueback herring (*Alosa aestivalis*) to determine whether listing either species as endangered or threatened under the Endangered Species Act is warranted. A comprehensive status review must be based on the best scientific and commercial data available at the time of the review. Therefore, we are asking the public to provide such information on alewife and blueback herring that has become available since the listing determination in 2013.

**DATES:** To allow us adequate time to conduct this review, we must receive your information no later than October 16, 2017.

**ADDRESSES:** You may submit information for us to use in our status review, identifying it as “Alewife and Blueback Herring Status Review (NOAA–NMFS–2017–0094),” by either of the following methods:

- *Federal eRulemaking Portal:* Go to [www.regulations.gov/](http://www.regulations.gov/)

- *Comment Now:* Click the “Comment Now” icon, complete the required fields, and enter or attach your comments.

- *Mail or hand-delivery:* Submit written comments to Tara Trinko Lake, NMFS, Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office, 55 Great Republic Drive, Gloucester, Massachusetts 01930.

**Instructions:** Information sent by any other method, to any other address or individual, or received after the end of the comment period, may not be considered by NMFS. All information received is a part of the public record and will generally be posted for public viewing on <http://www.regulations.gov> without change. All personal identifying information (e.g., name, address, etc.), confidential business information, or otherwise sensitive information submitted voluntarily by the sender will be publicly accessible. We will accept anonymous comments (enter “N/A” in the required fields if you wish to remain anonymous).

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Tara Trinko Lake at the above address, by phone at 978–282–8477 or [tara.trinko@noaa.gov](mailto:tara.trinko@noaa.gov), David Gouveia, 978–281–9280 or [david.gouveia@noaa.gov](mailto:david.gouveia@noaa.gov), or Marta Nammack, 301–427–8469 or [marta.nammack@noaa.gov](mailto:marta.nammack@noaa.gov).

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** This notice announces our active review of alewife and blueback herring. On August 12, 2013, we determined that listing alewife and blueback herring as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*) was not warranted (78 FR 48943). However, at that time, we committed to revisiting the status of both species in 3 to 5 years. The 3- to 5-year timeframe equated to approximately one generation time for these species, and allowed for time to complete ongoing scientific studies, including a river herring stock assessment update that was completed by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission in August 2017.

The Natural Resources Defense Council and Earthjustice (the Plaintiffs) filed suit against us on February 10, 2015, in the U.S. District Court in Washington, DC, challenging our decision not to list blueback herring as threatened or endangered. The Plaintiffs also challenged our determination that

the Mid-Atlantic stock complex of blueback herring is not a distinct population segment (DPS). On March 25, 2017, the court vacated the blueback herring listing determination and remanded the listing determination to us. As part of a negotiated agreement with the Plaintiffs, we committed to publish a revised listing determination for blueback herring no later than January 31, 2019. We also agreed to conduct a new status review and publish in the **Federal Register** a notice of the status review, soliciting new information.

Background information about both species, including the 2013 listing determination, is available on the NMFS Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office Web site: [https://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/protected/pcp/soc/river\\_herring.html](https://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/protected/pcp/soc/river_herring.html).

#### **Determining if a Species Is Threatened or Endangered**

Paragraph (a)(1) of section 4 of the ESA (16 U.S.C. 1533) requires that we determine whether a species is endangered or threatened based on one or more of the five following factors: (1) The present or threatened destruction, modification, or curtailment of its habitat or range; (2) overutilization for commercial, recreational, scientific, or educational purposes; (3) disease or predation; (4) the inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms; or (5) other natural or manmade factors affecting its continued existence. Paragraph (b) of ESA section 4 requires that our determination be made on the basis of the best scientific and commercial data available after taking into account those efforts, if any, being made by any State or foreign nation, to protect such species.

#### **Application of the Distinct Population Segment Policy**

In the application of the DPS policy, we are responsible for determining whether species, subspecies, or DPSs of marine and anadromous species are threatened or endangered under the ESA. If we are petitioned to list populations of a vertebrate species as DPSs, or if we determine that identifying DPSs may result in a conservation benefit to the species, we use the joint U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service–NMFS DPS policy (61 FR 4722; February 7, 1996) to determine whether any populations of the species meet the DPS policy criteria. Under this policy, in order to be considered a DPS, a population must be discrete from other conspecific populations, and it must be significant to the taxon to which it belongs. A group of organisms is

discrete if physical, physiological, ecological or behavioral factors make it markedly separate from other populations of the same taxon. Under the DPS policy, if a population group is determined to be discrete, the agency may then consider whether it is significant to the taxon to which it belongs. Considerations in evaluating the significance of a discrete population include: (1) Persistence of the discrete population in an unusual or unique ecological setting for the taxon; (2) evidence that the loss of the discrete population segment would cause a significant gap in the taxon’s range; (3) evidence that the discrete population segment represents the only surviving natural occurrence of a taxon that may be more abundant elsewhere outside its historical geographic range; or (4) evidence that the discrete population has marked genetic differences from other populations of the species.

#### **Public Solicitation of New Information**

With this notice, we commence a status review of alewife and blueback herring to determine whether listing the species as endangered or threatened under the ESA is warranted. To ensure that our review of alewife and blueback herring is informed by the best available scientific and commercial information, we are opening a 60-day public comment period to solicit information to support our status review.

For the status review to be complete and based on the best available scientific and commercial information, we request information on these species from governmental agencies, Native American Tribes, the scientific community, industry, and any other interested parties. We seek information on: (1) Species abundance; (2) species productivity; (3) species distribution or population spatial structure; (4) patterns of phenotypic, genotypic, and life history diversity; (5) habitat conditions and associated limiting factors and threats; (6) ongoing or planned efforts to protect and restore the species and their habitats; (7) the adequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms and whether protections are being implemented and are proving effective in conserving the species; (8) data concerning the status and trends of identified limiting factors or threats; (9) information concerning the impacts of environmental variability and climate change on survival, recruitment, distribution, and/or extinction risk; and (10) other new information, data, or corrections including, but not limited to, taxonomic or nomenclature changes, identification of erroneous information in the previous listing determination, and improved

analytical methods for evaluating extinction risk.

In addition to the above requested information, we are interested in any information concerning protective efforts that have not yet been fully implemented or demonstrated as effective. Our consideration of conservation measures, regulatory mechanisms, and other protective efforts will be guided by the Services "Policy for Evaluation of Conservation Efforts When Making Listing Decisions" (PECE Policy) (68 FR 15100; March 28, 2003). The PECE established criteria to ensure the consistent and adequate evaluation of formalized conservation efforts when making listing decisions under the ESA. This policy may also guide the development of conservation efforts that sufficiently improve a species' status so as to make listing the species as threatened or endangered unnecessary. Under the PECE the adequacy of conservation efforts is evaluated in terms of the certainty of their implementation, and the certainty of their effectiveness. Criteria for evaluating the certainty of implementation include whether: The necessary resources are available; the necessary authority is in place; an agreement is formalized (*i.e.*, regulatory and procedural mechanisms are in place); there is a schedule for completion and evaluation; for voluntary measures, incentives to ensure necessary participation are in place; and there is agreement of all necessary parties to the measure or plan. Criteria for evaluating the certainty of effectiveness include whether the measure or plan: Includes a clear description of the factors for decline to be addressed and how they will be reduced; establishes specific conservation objectives; identifies necessary steps to reduce threats; includes quantifiable performance measures for monitoring compliance and effectiveness; employs principles of adaptive management; and is certain to improve the species' status at the time of listing determination. We request that any information submitted with respect to conservation measures, regulatory mechanisms, or other protective efforts that have yet to be implemented or show effectiveness explicitly address these criteria in the PECE.

If you wish to provide your information for this status review, you may submit your information and materials electronically via email (see **ADDRESSES** section). We request that all information be accompanied by: (1) Supporting documentation such as maps, bibliographic references, or reprints of pertinent publications; and

(2) the submitter's name, address, and any association, institution, or business that the person represents.

**Authority:** The authority for this action is the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*).

Dated: August 10, 2017.

**Samuel D. Rauch, III,**

*Deputy Assistant Administrator for Regulatory Programs, National Marine Fisheries Service.*

[FR Doc. 2017-17218 Filed 8-14-17; 8:45 am]

**BILLING CODE 3510-22-P**

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## DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

### Department of the Navy

#### **Notice of Availability of Record of Decision for the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Disposal and Reuse of Surplus Property at Naval Station Newport, Rhode Island**

**AGENCY:** Department of the Navy, DoD.

**ACTION:** Notice.

**SUMMARY:** The U.S. Department of the Navy (Navy), after carefully weighing the environmental consequences of the proposed action, announces its decision to implement Alternative 1, the Navy's preferred alternative as described in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Disposal and Reuse of Surplus Property at Naval Station (NAVSTA) Newport, Rhode Island. This decision will make 158 acres of former NAVSTA Newport property available to the local communities of Aquidneck Island for economic redevelopment.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** Disposal and reuse under the chosen alternative is consistent with the Aquidneck Island Reuse Planning Authority's "Redevelopment Plan for Surplus Properties at NAVSTA Newport" (Redevelopment Plan) and Public Law 101-510, the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Act of 1990, as amended in 2005 (BRAC Law). The complete text of the Record of Decision (ROD) is available for public viewing on the project Web site at <https://www.BRACPMO.Navy.mil> along with the Final EIS and supporting documents. Single copies of the ROD will be made available upon request by contacting: Mr. Gregory Preston, BRAC Program Management Office East, 4911 South Broad Street, Building 679, Philadelphia, PA 19112-1303, telephone 215-897-4900, facsimile 215-897-4902, email [gregory.preston@navy.mil](mailto:gregory.preston@navy.mil).

Dated: August 7, 2017.

**A.M. Nichols,**

*Lieutenant Commander, Judge Advocate General's Corps, U.S. Navy, Federal Register Liaison Officer.*

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**BILLING CODE 3810-FF-P**

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## DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

### Department of the Navy

#### **Notice of Redesignation of the Environmental Impact Statement To Transition FA-18C Strike Fighter Squadrons to FA-18E Strike Fighter Squadrons at Naval Air Station Oceana, Virginia, as an Environmental Assessment and Announcement of Public Meetings**

**AGENCY:** Department of the Navy, DoD.

**ACTION:** Notice.

**SUMMARY:** The Department of Navy's (DoN) intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the transition of the remaining F/A-18A/C/D (Hornet) aircraft, based at Naval Air Station (NAS) Oceana, to the F/A-18E/F (Super Hornet), published in the **Federal Register** on September 10, 2015 (80 FR 175), is hereby modified. The DoN is redesignating the EIS as an Environmental Assessment (EA). The DoN will hold public meetings on August 29 and 30, 2017, to inform the public and answer questions about the Draft EA and the proposed action as well as provide opportunities for the public to comment on the Draft EA.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 and regulations implemented by the Council on Environmental Quality, the DoN published a Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS to transition Hornet aircraft to Super Hornet aircraft at NAS Oceana on September 10, 2015, in the **Federal Register** (80 FR 175). The majority of aircraft based at NAS Oceana transitioned to Super Hornet over a decade ago (as part of a separate proposed action), and are currently conducting flight training operations at NAS Oceana and Naval Auxiliary Landing Field (NALF) Fentress. The purpose of transitioning the remaining Hornet aircraft to Super Hornet aircraft is to provide newer, more capable, and more reliable aircraft to the NAS Oceana-based strike fighter community, which are needed to support the Navy's national defense requirements under Title 10 U.S. Code Section 5062.

During the development of the EIS, the DoN's analysis showed no