

This LOA modification will have no effect on estimated number of takes or on the findings made for the regulations. It does not change mitigation or related monitoring. The only change is to conform the reporting requirements to those for similar Navy testing and training exercises, which were subject to notice and public comment. Additional public comment for the current LOA modification would not be likely to provide additional relevant information for consideration. The LOA changes are responsive to the Navy's aforementioned explanation for why the requirements would not be feasible, and we have concluded that explanation is reasonable.

Description of the Modified LOA

Based on the foregoing information, NMFS has modified the LOA to remove the requirements in section 7.f.1 of the original LOA. The modified LOA is identical in every other way to the original LOA. It covers the same training and testing activities (categorized as military readiness activities) from (1) the use of at-surface or near-surface explosive detonations in the PMSR Study Area, as well as (2) launch events from SNI as described in the 2022 final rule (87 FR 40888; July 8, 2022) and the original LOA. The required mitigation and mitigation-related monitoring, as well as the total estimated and authorized numbers of takes for the issuance of the regulations and the original LOA, respectively, remain the same. NMFS refers the reader to relevant documents related to issuance of the original LOA, including the Navy's application, the proposed rule and request for comments (86 FR 37790; July 16, 2021) and final rule (87 FR 40888; July 8, 2022), available at <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/action/incidental-take-authorization-us-navy-testing-and-training-activities-point-mugu-sea-range> for more detailed description of the project activities.

The reporting requirements in this modified LOA are consistent with the requirements in other Navy LOAs for similar activities and are feasible for Navy implementation.

NMFS has modified the original LOA to remove section 7.f.1 and renumber section 7.f.2 to section 7.f.1. Modifying this LOA to remove the aforementioned reporting requirements is consistent with 50 CFR 218.17 (b). A copy of the modified LOA can be found at <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/action/incidental-take-authorization-us-navy-testing-and-training-activities-point-mugu-sea-range>.

Endangered Species Act (ESA)

Section 7(a)(2) of the ESA (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*) requires that each Federal agency ensure that any action it authorizes, funds, or carries out is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any endangered or threatened species or result in the destruction or adverse modification of designated critical habitat. To ensure ESA compliance for the issuance of incidental take authorizations, NMFS consults internally whenever we propose to authorize take for endangered or threatened species.

The effects of this Federal action were adequately analyzed in NMFS' Endangered Species Act Section 7 Biological Opinion on (1) U.S. Navy Point Mugu Sea Range (PMSR) Testing and Training Activities; and (2) the National Marine Fisheries Service's Promulgation of Regulations and Issuance of a Letter of Authorization Pursuant to the Marine Mammal Protection Act for the U.S. Navy to "Take" Marine Mammals Incidental to PMSR Activities from February 2022 through February 2029 (2022), which concluded that the take NMFS authorizes through the initial LOA would not jeopardize the continued existence of any endangered or threatened species.

National Environmental Policy Act

To comply with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA; 42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*) and NOAA Administrative Order (NAO) 216-6A, NMFS must evaluate our proposed actions and alternatives with respect to potential impacts on the human environment. NMFS participated as a cooperating agency on the 2022 PMSR Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS)/Overseas Environmental Impact Statement (OEIS), which was published January 2022, and is available at <https://pmsr-eis.com/>. NOAA/NMFS adopted the 2022 PMSR FEIS/OEIS and prepared a Record of Decision. <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/action/incidental-take-authorization-us-navy-testing-and-training-activities-point-mugu-sea-range>. The modification of the initial LOA falls does not have any additional impact on the human environment beyond the impacts of the proposed actions considered in the FEIS/OEIS.

Dated: June 1, 2023.

Kimberly Damon-Randall,

Director, Office of Protected Resources,
National Marine Fisheries Service.

[FR Doc. 2023-12045 Filed 6-5-23; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

Patent and Trademark Office

[Docket No.: PTO-P-2023-0025]

Extension of the Option for Submission of a PDF With a Patent Application Filed in DOCX Format

AGENCY: United States Patent and Trademark Office, Department of Commerce.

ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: The United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) is continuing to modernize and streamline its patent application systems to support robust and reliable patent rights, speed the issuance of patents, and reduce the costs and barriers of global patent protection. The submission of patent applications in DOCX format facilitates the USPTO's ongoing efforts. The USPTO previously announced that, for a temporary period, it was providing patent applicants with the option to submit an applicant-generated PDF version of an application along with the DOCX file(s) when filing the application in Patent Center. This temporary period was scheduled to end on June 30, 2023. In response to stakeholder requests, the USPTO is extending the option until further notice.

DATES: *Duration:* The option to submit an applicant-generated PDF of a patent application along with the validated DOCX file(s) when filing an application in Patent Center, as discussed in this notice, is being extended until further notice.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mark O. Polutta, Senior Legal Advisor, Office of Patent Legal Administration, at 571-272-7709; or Eugenia A. Jones, Senior Legal Advisor, Office of Patent Legal Administration, at 571-272-7727.

For technical questions about submitting documents in DOCX format, please contact the Patent Electronic Business Center (EBC) at 1-877-217-9197 (toll-free), 571-272-4100 (local), or ebc@uspto.gov. The EBC is open from 6 a.m. to midnight ET, Monday-Friday.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Filing in DOCX format eliminates the need for patent applicants to convert structured text to PDF format, improves patent application quality by providing content-based validations prior to submission, provides automated document indexing, allows for future reuse of content, and improves searches for patent applications. DOCX format is also necessary for planned, upcoming USPTO efforts to automate more of the patent application process, including

the pre-examination of the application to ensure it is in good condition for examination by a patent examiner.

In April 2022, the USPTO announced that, for a period of time ending December 31, 2022, it was providing patent applicants with the option to submit a back-up, applicant-generated PDF version of the application along with the DOCX file(s) when filing an application in Patent Center. See Filing Patent Applications in DOCX Format, 87 FR 25226 (April 28, 2022) (April 2022 Notice). The goal of providing such an option was to encourage more applicants to begin filing patent applications in DOCX format. In particular, the USPTO anticipated that allowing applicants to submit a back-up PDF version of the application—without incurring additional fees—for a temporary period would encourage applicants to file in DOCX while ensuring that if any discrepancies were discovered, the back-up version could be used to correct the discrepancies. In December 2022, the USPTO extended this temporary period through June 30, 2023. See Extension of Period To Allow Submission of a PDF With a Patent Application Filed in DOCX Format, 87 FR 77812 (December 20, 2022).

In response to stakeholder requests, the USPTO is extending, until further notice, the option to submit an applicant-generated PDF of the application along with the validated DOCX file(s) when filing an application in Patent Center.

The April 2022 Notice stated that the “applicant-generated PDF . . . will not become part of the permanent record unless a petition is filed requesting the USPTO to correct the record in view of the applicant-generated PDF” and that “[i]n the absence of such a petition, the USPTO will dispose of the applicant-generated PDF, and all copies thereof, after a retention period of at least three years after the patent grant or abandonment of the application.” However, in view of stakeholder requests, the USPTO will now keep copies of the applicant-generated PDF as part of the permanent record, regardless of whether a petition is filed. For example, for granted patents, the USPTO will keep copies of the applicant-generated PDF for at least 25 years after the patent grant before transferring it to the National Archives and Records Administration.

With the changes detailed above, patent applicants choosing to submit an applicant-generated PDF with the validated DOCX file(s) when filing an application in Patent Center will have an ongoing safeguard should any unexpected conversion discrepancies

occur during the filing process. The USPTO reminds applicants that the option to submit an applicant-generated PDF version of the application is not available for applications filed via EFS-Web. Applicants are also reminded that they can file test submissions through the Patent Center Training Mode to practice filing in DOCX. Information on filing application documents in DOCX and a link to the DOCX training sessions are available at www.uspto.gov/patents/docx.

As discussed in the April 2022 Notice, patent applicants who choose to submit an applicant-generated PDF with the validated DOCX file(s) when filing an application in Patent Center will not have to pay additional fees, such as an application size fee, as a result of filing the applicant-generated PDF and, on petition, will be able to rely on the applicant-generated PDF if a discrepancy occurs during the filing process. To avoid incurring additional fees for the PDF, applicants must follow the process for submitting an applicant-generated PDF (Auxiliary PDF) set forth in the quick reference guide available at www.uspto.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Aux_PDF_QRG_Final_2022.docx. The USPTO will continue to waive the petition fee under 37 CFR 1.17(f) for a petition under 37 CFR 1.182 that relies on an applicant-generated PDF that was filed in Patent Center as the source to make a correction to the record.

For more information regarding the filing of an applicant-generated PDF in Patent Center, including the options available for making corrections to the record, please review the guidance in the April 2022 Notice.

Katherine K. Vidal,

Under Secretary of Commerce for Intellectual Property and Director of the United States Patent and Trademark Office.

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

Patent and Trademark Office

[Docket No. PTO-C-2023-0022]

Request for Comments on Southeast Regional Office and Community Outreach Office Locations

AGENCY: United States Patent and Trademark Office, Department of Commerce.

ACTION: Request for comments.

SUMMARY: The United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO or Office) is seeking information to inform the

planning and design of the USPTO satellite offices (regional offices) and newly-authorized community outreach offices (COOs). The USPTO is also seeking information on potential locations for a future USPTO regional office in the southeast region of the United States (Southeast Regional Office or SERO) and a COO in the northern New England (NNE) region (Northern New England Community Outreach Office) that the USPTO was directed to establish under the Unleashing American Innovators Act of 2022 (UAIA), signed into law as part of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023 on December 29, 2022.

DATES: To ensure consideration, written comments must be received by 5 p.m. ET on or before July 11, 2023 and should be submitted in accordance with the instructions in the **ADDRESSES** and **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION** sections. No public hearing will be held.

ADDRESSES: For reasons of government efficiency, comments must be submitted electronically by completing the form at https://iqconnect.iqfed.com/iqextranet/EForm.aspx?_cid=USPTO&_fid=100155. Complete the required fields using the pre-formatted response form that will allow you to comment on each topic of interest or question you choose to address. You may enter your responses directly into the form or cut and paste your responses from a MICROSOFT WORD® or ADOBE® portable document format (PDF) document into the field provided for each question. You must submit any attachments that provide additional support to a question through the electronic form. Attachments to the form will be accepted as ADOBE® PDF or MICROSOFT WORD® documents. To be considered, comments must be submitted through the electronic form. Because comments will be made available for public inspection, information that the submitter does not desire to make public, such as an address or phone number, should not be included in the comments.

If submission of comments through the electronic form is not feasible due to a lack of access to a computer and/or the internet, please contact the USPTO using the contact information below for special instructions regarding how to submit comments by mail or by hand delivery, based on the public's ability to obtain access to USPTO facilities at the time.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Shirin Bidel-Niyat, Chief of Staff, Office of the Under Secretary of Commerce for Intellectual Property and Director of the USPTO, at 571-272-8600 or NewOffices@uspto.gov.