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Alaska Training Areas (ATA)

The ATA (Figure 1) includes established inland Military Operations Areas, an overwater Warning Area, and three Restricted Areas (targeted live fire ranges) totaling over 65,000 square miles (mi²) (41,599,999 acres) of training space. A Temporary Maritime Activities Area (TMAA) provides 42,146 square nautical miles (nm²) (144,560 square kilometers (km²)) of surface and subsurface ocean operating area and overlying airspace in the GOA.

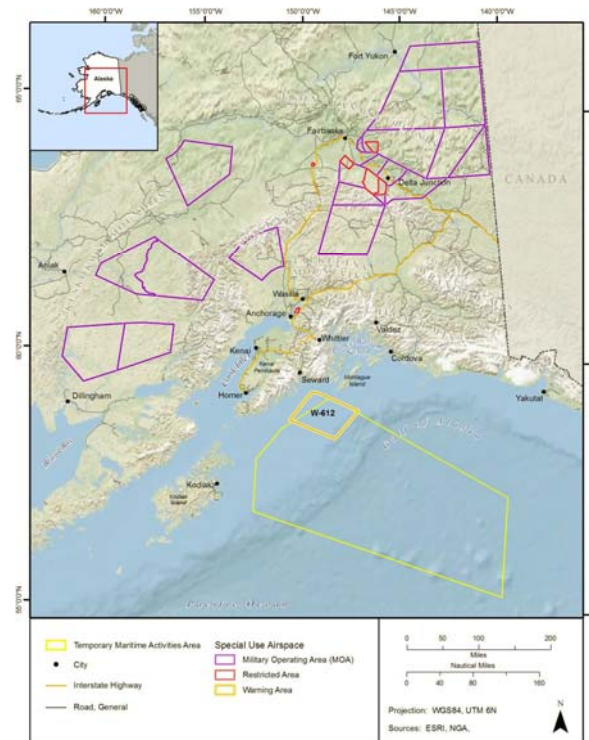


Figure 1. Alaska Training Areas

Background

The ATA offers the U.S. Navy an ideal combination of attributes that make this training venue strategically important. Among these attributes are the size of the training areas, their proximity to other military forces, and the unique oceanographic and environmental conditions of the ocean areas. Within the GOA, the Navy routinely trains in the TMAA to prepare its Sailors to defend our nation. The Navy also conducts air activities in established U.S. Air Force and U.S. Army inland training areas.

The location and size of the various training areas (see Figure 1) allow the Navy to train with other military Services, including the Air Force, Army, and U.S. Coast Guard, in "joint," or multi-Service, training activities. These joint exercises provide Service men and women with the opportunity to practice realistic training scenarios using complex skills required in real-life combat. The air, land, and sea spaces in and around the GOA have and continue to provide a realistic training environment for the men and women in uniform.

Defending the Nation and Protecting the Environment

Defending the United States and protecting military personnel requires rigorous, real-life training in the air, on land, and at sea. Conducting realistic training is one of the most important things the Navy does to ensure its Service men and women are ready and able to respond to national security challenges. Readiness requires specialized locations where military personnel can learn, through practical hands-on experience, the technical skills necessary to effectively plan, conduct, and succeed in combat.

The size, location, and environment of the ATA provide unparalleled and essential training opportunities. The training conducted here ensures Navy personnel can successfully protect the United States and keep its interests safe. While conducting this training, the Navy is committed to protecting the land, air, and marine environments.

Northern Edge Joint Training Exercises

The annual Northern Edge exercise is Alaska's largest joint (multi-Service) training exercise designed to prepare U.S. Service men and women to respond to various natural disasters, global conflicts, and homeland defense/homeland security scenarios, leading to a safer and more secure Alaska and United States overall.

Typically, Northern Edge exercises focus on homeland defense and homeland security activities during odd-numbered years and on joint warfare training during even-numbered years. Northern Edge exercises have a different theme each year, such as peace keeping missions, earthquake response, critical infrastructure protection, harbor defense, combat search and rescue, land invasion prevention, terrorist and bioterrorism attack response, and simulated regional conflicts. Depending on the theme of that year's training, exercises can include 6,000 to 14,000 personnel from the U.S. Navy, U.S. Marine Corps, U.S. Air Force, U.S. Army, U.S. Coast Guard, State of Alaska, federal and local agencies, allied nations, and nongovernmental organizations.

History of Northern Edge

Since 1975, joint training exercises have occurred in Alaska under various names, including Jack Frost, Brim Frost, and Arctic Warrior. The first Northern Edge exercise occurred in 1993. In 1994, Operation Northern Edge was "activated" in response to a simulated mission calling for peace enforcement exercises. This was the first time that joint training activities focused on peace keeping measures. The Red Cross, International Medical Corps, Feed the Children, and other nongovernmental organizations participated to add to the realism of the training exercise.

In 2005, Northern Edge was combined with the State of Alaska's homeland security exercise called Alaska Shield for a larger simulated training experience. This combined exercise included personnel from the Department of Defense, the State of Alaska, other local government agencies, and nongovernmental organizations. The goal of the combined Alaska Shield/Northern Edge exercise was to promote a cooperative, interagency response to various natural and human-made disaster and terrorist-related scenarios. Designed to train military and civilian "first responders" and test organizational and integration skills at all levels of government, the exercise provided participants with a wide range of training opportunities that included simulated natural disasters and terrorist events in 21 communities throughout Alaska. The Alaska Shield/Northern Edge exercise was considered a capstone event for Alaska's three-year Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Plan and was listed as an exercise of "national relevance" by the Department of Homeland Security.

Northern Edge 2006 focused on honing military combat and support units' war fighting skills. Approximately 5,000 Service men and women from the U.S. Services participated in the exercise, which showcased and tested the nation's newest combat capabilities, including the F-22A Raptor.

Sponsored by the U.S. Northern Command, Northern Edge 2007 focused on protecting the energy sector, evacuation planning, and responding to maritime and airborne threats. Participants of Northern Edge 2007 included representatives from the Department of Defense, the Department of Justice, the Department of Homeland Security, Alaska state agencies, local agencies, and private energy sector organizations.

Northern Edge 2008 was held for two weeks from May 5 - 16, 2008. Participants included approximately 9,000 personnel from the Navy, Army, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, and various contracted vessels. Sponsored by the U.S. Pacific Command, Northern Edge 2008 involved joint tactical exercises to train, evaluate, investigate, and assess various concepts of warfare, both on land and at sea.

Proposed Action

To keep up with advances in global defense technology and new national security challenges, the Navy must reassess and enhance its training activities and capabilities to prepare its Sailors for combat. The Navy must also periodically reassess and alter how it trains with other military and civilian organizations in conducting its homeland security/homeland defense mission. The Navy's proposed changes in the level and type of training activities in Alaska and in the Gulf of Alaska are called the Proposed Action.

Prior to undertaking the Proposed Action, the Navy will complete the Environmental Impact Statement/Overseas Environmental Impact Statement (EIS/OEIS). In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 and Executive Order 12114, *Environmental Effects Abroad of Major Federal Actions*, the EIS/OEIS evaluates the potential environmental effects associated with the Proposed Action.

The Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action

The purpose of the Navy's Proposed Action is to ensure Navy personnel and other military forces are ready to respond to challenges to our nation's security by maintaining the continued vitality of the ATA as an essential training venue. The Proposed Action is necessary because it will allow the Navy to:

- Maintain current levels of military readiness by training in the ATA;
- Accommodate future increases in training tempo in the ATA;
- Accommodate mission requirements associated with force structure changes;
- Maintain the long-term viability of the ATA as a premiere Navy training area while protecting human health and the environment and, enhancing the quality, capabilities, and safety of the training areas;
- Be able to bring Army, Navy, Air Force, and Coast Guard assets together into one geographic area for joint training.

What will be evaluated?

The EIS/OEIS will evaluate three alternatives to help determine the appropriate level and type of training activities for the Navy to accomplish the needs outlined above.

No Action Alternative:

Under the No Action Alternative, training activities within Alaska and the GOA would continue at current levels. This alternative includes one annual training exercise and excludes the use of mid-frequency active sonar. This alternative provides a baseline for assessing the potential environmental effects of the other alternatives.

Navy training activities currently conducted in the GOA can be divided into the following primary mission areas:

- Anti-air warfare
- Anti-surface warfare
- Electronic combat
- Naval special warfare
- Strike warfare
- Deck Landing Qualifications

Alternative 1:

Alternative 1 is a proposal designed to meet Navy and Department of Defense current and near-term training requirements. In addition to training activities currently conducted, this alternative proposes an increase in the number of training activities, including the use of active sonar, and force structure changes associated with the introduction of new weapon systems, vessels, aircraft, and training instrumentation into the Fleet. Specifically, Alternative 1 proposes to:

- Increase current levels of training activities; and
- Implement training activities associated with proposed force structure changes for:
 - New platforms and vehicles, including:
 - EA-18G Growler Aircraft
 - Guided Missile Submarine
 - P-8 Multi-mission Maritime Aircraft
 - DDG-1000 Zumwalt Class Destroyer
 - Unmanned Aerial Systems
 - New weapon systems, including the Multi-Static Active Coherent System (MAC sonobuoy)
 - Improved Extended Echo Ranging Sonobuoy
 - Advanced Extended Echo Ranging Sonobuoy
 - New training instrumentation:
 - Portable Undersea Tracking Range (PUTR)

Alternative 2 (Preferred Alternative):

Alternative 2 is the Navy's preferred alternative because it would fully support the Navy's requirements to achieve complete Fleet readiness while allowing the greatest flexibility for the Navy and joint participants to benefit from the unique training environment in the ATA. Alternative 2 is designed to meet current and near-term training requirements and proposes to:

- Include all elements of Alternative 1; plus
- Increase the number of training activities over levels identified in Alternative 1 by adding a second annual summertime training exercise and one Sinking Exercises during each summertime exercise (maximum of two annually).