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Articles 2009 August 13th Jacksonville lands undersea Navy training project

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### Jacksonville lands undersea Navy training project

08/13/2009 by Mike Sharkey Staff Writer

The United States isn't at war on the domestic front, but its military will use an area just offshore of Jacksonville to simulate various naval warfare scenarios.

Recently, the Department of the Navy made it official when it announced it had reached a Record of Decision (ROD) on its proposed undersea warfare training range (USWTR). Three other sites — Cherry Point in North Carolina, Charleston, S.C. and Wallops Island, Va. — were considered.

According to the Navy, the site will be known as the Jacksonville Operating Area. It will be 50 nautical miles offshore and cover an area of 500 square nautical miles. Before the ROD could become official, the Navy had to complete an environmental impact statement and gather public input. Environmentalists were concerned the training range could impact right whale migration in the waters of Northeast Florida. Donald Schregardus, deputy assistant secretary of the Navy for environment, said he's satisfied the environment would not be adversely affected.

"The Department of the Navy is committed to protecting the ocean while maintaining readiness in this critical mission," he said in a story about the training range on the Navy's Web site.

Because the Navy doesn't need the training range immediately, it won't complete installation until 2014. Once installed, the range will gather data on a real-time basis through sensors placed throughout the range. That data will allow the Navy to analyze its anti-submarine warfare training scenarios, tactics and procedures and improve where necessary. The range will allow ships, aircraft and submarines to train.

Ted Brown, media relations officer for the U.S. Fleet Forces Command in Norfolk, Va., said Jacksonville provided the best location of the four.

"The Jacksonville site was picked as the preferred alternative over the other three alternatives for a variety of reasons," said Brown. "This site replicates the potential threat environment and is closest to the principle range users, anti-submarine warfare (ASW) aircraft based in Jacksonville, Florida that are projected to account for approximately 75 percent of the training.

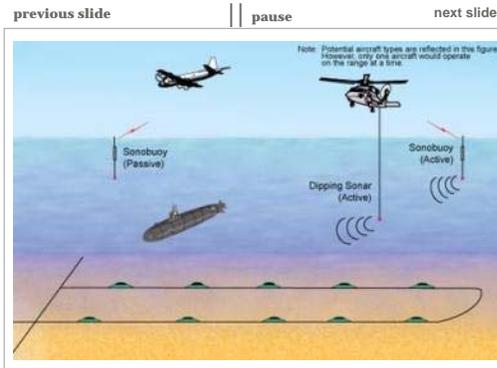
"Based on the evaluation parameters of air station proximity, good weather for much of the year and shore landing site infrastructure (location to put the cable termination facility), the location off the coast of Florida provides the best training opportunities when coupled with the area's bathymetric and water column characteristics. Additionally, the area is a reasonable distance from the major commercial shipping traffic."

Brown said the current cost estimate for the project is \$100 million, but that could change as the project moves along. He also said it could mean some extra Navy personnel for the area, but that too will change over the years. Brown did say the project will assure the Navy stays up-to-date on warfare tactics and strategies.

"The proposed USWTR range is necessary to train in the use of Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) tactics, techniques and procedures to locate modern submarines," said Brown. "Both submarine and sonar technology is constantly improving and the Navy needs to train using the latest technology in real-world situations, including the complex shallow-water environment. Construction and use of a range will improve ASW training."

Bob Buehn, chief of the City's Military Affairs Division, said the project is good for Jacksonville from a military importance perspective.

"It's a good thing. It fits with Jacksonville being a training complex as a whole," he said. "All divisions of training are here in the Jacksonville military complex. Ships from all over the East Coast will come here."



This image shows how different Navy aircraft and submarines will use the training range.

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WEEKLY POLL

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Question for the week of: Monday 08/17 - Sunday 08/23

What's your opinion on the issues? The Daily Record will have a question each week and it's your chance to make yourself heard.

Poll Results The City Council Finance Committee budget hearings start Thursday. Do you plan to attend any of the sessions?

Yes - 36.7% No - 63.3%

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**Why is the USWTR necessary?**

The proposed USWTR range is necessary to train in the use of Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) tactics, techniques and procedures to locate modern submarines. Both submarine and sonar technology is constantly improving and the Navy needs to train using the latest technology in real-world situations, including the complex shallow-water environment. Construction and use of a range will improve ASW training. Additional information is presented in Chapter 1 of the Final OEIS/EIS.

**When is the Final OEIS/EIS released?**

The Final OEIS/EIS was released on June 26, 2009.

**What happens after the release of the Final OEIS/EIS?**

After the notice of availability for the Final OEIS/EIS was published in the Federal Register, a Record of Decision (ROD) was prepared and a notice was published in the Federal Register. These documents are available on the USWTR Web site.

**When will construction begin?**

Construction will begin after all required permits have been obtained.

**I submitted a comment to the DOEIS/EIS. How can I view the response?**

Comments were considered in preparation of the Final OEIS/EIS. Responses to public comments are included in the Appendix H of the Final OEIS/EIS.

**I wish to make a comment on the USWTR OEIS/EIS.**

The comment period for the USWTR Draft OEIS/EIS has ended.

**I am interested in a reference cited in the Final OEIS/EIS but can't find it. How can I access it?**

Most references cited in the FOEIS/EIS are available publicly. Several reports are available within the Library section of this Web site. Some additional references are considered classified by the Navy and are not available for public access.

**How will the USWTR training impact fishing, boating, and diving activities in the range?**

The range will remain open to all recreational and commercial activities.

**How can I get more information?**

This Web site (<http://projects.earthtech.com/us...>) contains all of the publicly released information related to the project, and is updated as the project progresses.

Source: Department of the Navy

[msharkey@baileypub.com](mailto:msharkey@baileypub.com)

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