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What is a Range Complex?

Ranges and operational areas (OPAREAs) are locations where Navy personnel train to accomplish their mission of national defense. The Navy has geographically grouped its ranges and OPAREAs to form range complexes, which are organized and managed to optimize training opportunities in a safe and controlled environment. The ranges and facilities of the Navy Cherry Point (Navy CP) Range Complex are unique and provide training opportunities essential for the safety and readiness of military personnel and the success of the military mission. The protection of natural and cultural resources is also an integral component of this training. Navy training activities incorporate protective measures as standard operating procedures to promote environmental conservation.

Navy Cherry Point Range Complex

The Navy Cherry Point Range Complex is a three dimensional training area that includes sea space, undersea space and Special Use Airspace (SUA). The range complex also includes facilities and instrumentation areas that support the training conducted there. For nearly six decades the area has supported Navy training activities, and is now host to a wide range of training every year to ensure the nation's military is fully prepared when in harm's way.

The Navy Cherry Point Range Complex (see map above) includes offshore areas of North Carolina, incorporating air and sea spaces that extend 120 nautical miles into the Atlantic Ocean. The Navy CP Range Complex is host to activities for research, development, testing, and evaluation of emerging maritime combat technologies.

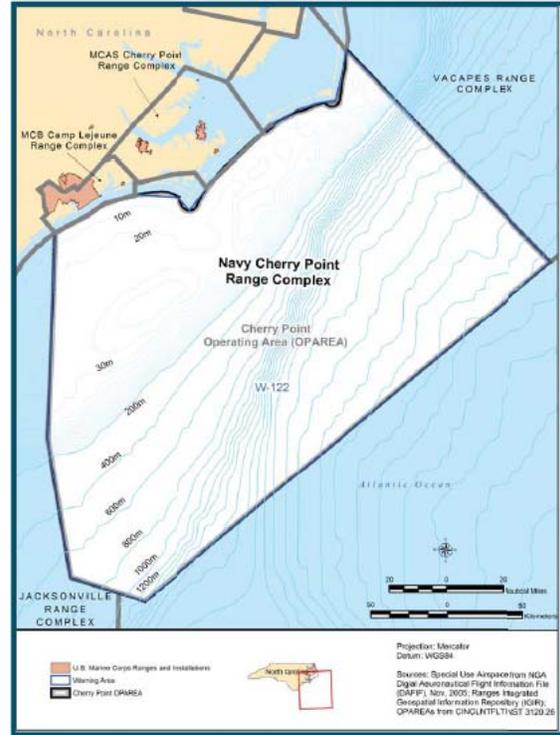
Background

The Navy Cherry Point Range Complex is a combination of sea and airspace where Navy and Marine Corps training is conducted. The Navy prepared an Environmental Impact Statement/Overseas Environmental Impact Statement (EIS/OEIS) to comprehensively evaluate effects of current and future Naval activities within the Navy CP Range Complex on the natural, cultural, and socioeconomic resources. This comprehensive evaluation is part of a larger Navy program, the Tactical Training Theater Assessment and Planning (TAP) Program. Under the TAP Program, the Navy for the first time manages its training areas within broad geographic locations known as range complexes. The Navy CP Range Complex is one of several range complexes on the east coast.

Why is this needed?

Realistic training is the single greatest asset the military has in preparing and protecting Navy and Marine Corps personnel. "Train As We Fight" is not just a phrase - it is a statement of the absolute necessity to realistically train Naval personnel for the conditions in which they may find themselves while protecting the nation.

International events, changes in technology, base closures, and population growth are increasing the challenges the Navy faces in training its personnel to be prepared to defend our nation. To face these challenges and continue to provide combat capable forces that are ready to deploy worldwide, the Navy is comprehensively evaluating and planning activities at the range complex level. The purpose for the proposed action is to:



Achieve and maintain Fleet readiness using the Navy Cherry Point Range Complex to support and conduct current, emerging, and future training operations and Research, Development, Test and Evaluation (RDT&E) operations;

Expand warfare missions supported by the Navy Cherry Point Range Complex; and

Upgrade and modernize existing range capabilities to enhance and sustain Navy training and RDT&E.

The need for the proposed action is to provide range capabilities for the training and equipping of combat-capable naval forces ready to deploy worldwide. In this regard, the Navy Cherry Point Range Complex furthers the Navy's execution of its Congressionally mandated roles and responsibilities under Title 10 U.S.C. § 5062.

What is proposed?

The Navy proposes to:

Maintain baseline training and testing operations at current levels, plus sufficient additional operations to support a surge capability in compliance with the Fleet Response Plan (FRP).

Provide flexibility to respond to real-world situations with increased training operations, and to accommodate mission expansion, emerging force structure changes, and new range capabilities.

Eliminate High Explosive bombing exercises and implement enhanced mine warfare training capability within the range complex.

What was evaluated?

The Navy understands and recognizes training activities may have potential effects on the environment, as well as to the community and the stakeholders that rely on these resources. The Navy analyzed several alternatives to determine the effects of potential actions on natural, cultural and socioeconomic resources. Additionally, public input received during the scoping phase and Draft EIS public comment period has been carefully considered in the environmental analysis. Three alternatives have been identified and analyzed:

No Action Alternative:

The No Action Alternative analyzed a variety of training and testing activities that occur within the Navy Cherry Point Range Complex. Under the No Action Alternative, training and testing operations would continue at current levels. No new or additional training and testing operations or infrastructure improvements would be implemented. Current operations include surge level operations consistent with the Fleet Response Training Plan.

Alternative 1:

Includes all operations under the No Action Alternative, plus a 10% increase in most training and testing operations, plus changes in type and quantity of operations and tactical employment of forces to accommodate expanded mission areas, force structure changes, and new range capabilities. These would include:

- a) Using more commercial aircraft to serve as oppositional forces rather than using Navy aircraft for air-to-air missile exercise, surface-to-air gunnery exercises, air intercept control exercises, and detect-to engage exercises;
- b) Incorporating anti-terrorism training into existing training events;
- c) Adjusting training levels to ensure that deployment can be stepped up quickly and at multiple locations in response to world events; and
- d) Conducting new or modified training associated with the introduction of the new MH-60 helicopter variants, and new organic mine countermeasure systems.

Alternative 2 (The Preferred Alternative):

This alternative includes all operations under Alternative 1 with the exception that all High Explosive Bombing Exercises (BOMBEX) would be eliminated. This alternative would also include implementing an enhanced mine warfare training capability to improve training and testing realism and quality. The Navy proposes to conduct mine hunting and sweeping operations in the same general area used for other major exercise events. Since water depth there is too deep for routine retrieval of submerged objects, these operations would take place without target mineshapes. The Navy further proposes to conduct mine neutralization operations in the areas currently designated for underwater detonation training. The water depth is suitable in these areas for the placement of expendable inert mineshapes, which are used to simulate a mine threat environment.

Under Alternative 2, the Navy proposes to eliminate all bombing exercise training events that involve dropping explosive (live) ordnance on targets at-sea. The at-sea target in these exercises is usually a flare or smoke float.

