



MARINE CORPS BASE HAWAII

# **Ground Forces Modernization (GFM) Environmental Assessment (EA) FAQs**

## **Proposed Action**

### **1. What is the Proposed Action in the EA and why is it needed?**

The proposed action is to modernize equipment, infrastructure, and training for Marine Corps ground forces in Hawai'i at MCB Hawaii Kaneohe Bay, Marine Corps Training Area Bellows, and Pu'uloa Range Training Facility in order to enhance the combat capability of Hawai'i-based Marine Corps ground forces.

### **2. Are there alternatives in this EA?**

Yes. The Marine Corps developed alternatives for the proposed action. These alternatives address facilities construction and renovation as well as proposed levels of training activities on Marine Corps training areas on O'ahu - MCB Hawaii Kaneohe Bay, Marine Corps Training Area Bellows, and Pu'uloa Range Training Facility. Alternatives to the proposed action can be found in chapter two of the Draft EA.

### **3. Will this increase military noise at the training areas?**

No. The proposed action modernizes, rather than increases, existing training. A variety of training currently occurs at all three Marine Corps training areas on O'ahu. The proposed action modifies, rather than adds, to existing training. The types of noise and approximate sound levels associated with proposed modernized equipment training is similar to that of existing ground-based training: essentially "swapping out" newer equipment, in the case of new tactical vehicles (Joint Light Tactical Vehicle replacing the High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle) for older equipment. This includes noise from vehicles, generators, and supporting equipment. As result, the noise environment will not change in any substantial way.

Marine Corps Base Hawaii maintains a noise concern hotline and organizational e-mail inbox to receive and respond to community noise concerns. To report a noise concerns, fill out completely and submit the [Sound Reporting Form](#), or call 808-257-8832.

# NEPA

## 1. What is an EA and why is it needed?

Under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), an Environmental Assessment (EA) is prepared in order to determine whether the action will have a significant effect on the environment. The EA analyzes potential environmental effects on a variety of resource areas, including noise, air quality, water resources, cultural resources, biological resources, public health and safety, and transportation. An EA is designed to result in either a requirement for greater environmental analysis – referred to as an Environmental Impact Statement – or a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), which concludes that the proposed action contained in the EA will not have a significant impact to the environment.

**Bottom Line: NEPA requires that we document and analyze potential impacts to the environment from a proposed federal action and an EA is the appropriate NEPA document to conduct the analysis.**

## 2. What is in the Draft EA?

A Draft EA contains a description of the proposed federal action and possible alternatives, an analysis of potential environmental effects associated with the proposed action and alternatives, and any mitigation measures or best management practices that the Marine Corps will (or could) implement with the proposed action. The EA describes the existing environment, characterizing a variety of resource areas including noise, air quality, water resources, cultural resources, biological resources, public health and safety, and transportation. Potential environmental effects and impacts on each of these resource areas are analyzed directly, indirectly, and cumulatively.

**Bottom Line: The Draft EA describes the proposed action – in this case, the modernization of equipment, infrastructure, and training for Marine Corps ground forces in Hawaii – a characterization of the current environment, the potential impacts to the environment because of the proposed action, and a proposed determination regarding the significance of the environmental impacts of the proposed action.**

## 3. Why is an EIS not being prepared?

An EA is prepared to assess environmental impacts to determine whether or not there is a significant impact as a result of the proposed action. An EIS is only required if the EA determines that the environmental impacts of the proposed action are “significant” or if the potential environmental impacts of the proposed cannot be mitigated to a level less than “significant.”. EAs and EISs are similarly structured to include a description of the proposed action; a characterization of the current environment; a full analysis of the potential environmental impacts of a proposed action to include direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions; and a determination regarding the “significance” of the proposed actions potential impact on the environment.

Unlike an EA, the EIS process allows the agency to move forward with proposals that will result in significant impacts to the environment. For this reason, EAs often contain discussions of avoidance and minimization measures, such as the use of shielded lighting, “quiet hours”, or other mitigations that reduce the impact of the proposed action.

Publication of the Draft EA for public comment allows the public to provide input on the proposed action and analysis. All comments are reviewed and considered by the Marine Corps, and the Final EA will contain a description or explanation of how the comments were considered in development of the Final EA.

#### 4. Will a public meeting be held?

No, however, once the Draft EA is publicly released, there will be a 30-day public comment period where people, organizations, and communities can review the Draft EA and provide feedback. The public comment period allows for a more informed Marine Corps decision-making process, with consideration of various perspectives, local knowledge, and individual or community concerns before the EA is finalized. All comments are reviewed and considered by the Marine Corps, and the Final EA will contain a description or explanation of how the comments were addressed.

Since October 2023, Marine Corps representatives have engaged the community at Neighborhood Boards in Kailua, Waimanalo, Kahalu'u, and Kaneohe to announce the forthcoming proposed action and Draft EA, answer questions, and provide resources for the community to conduct research in preparation for the public comment period. Public comment period begins December 26<sup>th</sup>, 2023, and ends on January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2024.

Marine Corps representatives will continue to provide regular updates to the community via attendance at Neighborhood Boards, Town Halls, and other community-centric events. Below is the planned neighborhood board meeting schedule in which MCBH staff will be in attendance. Additional information can also be found at [www.mcbhawaii.marines.mil](http://www.mcbhawaii.marines.mil).

##### **Kailua – First Thursday**

- 7 December
- 4 January 2024
- 1 February 2024

##### **Waimanalo – Second Monday**

- 13 November
- 11 December
- 8 January 2024
- 12 February 2024

##### **Kahalu'u – Second Wednesday**

- 8 November
- 13 December
- 10 January 2024
- 14 February 2024

##### **Ewa – Second Thursday**

- 9 November
- 14 December
- 11 January 2024
- 8 February 2024

##### **Kaneohe – Third Thursday**

- 16 November
- 21 December
- 18 January 2024
- 15 February 2024

#### 5. Will I get an answer to my comment on the Draft EA?

All public comments will receive a reply confirming the Marine Corps' receipt of the information. At the conclusion of the public comment period, all public comments will be organized by topic and type for review and consideration in the development of the Final EA and rendering of a decision on the proposed action. The Final EA will include a detailed summary of public comments, revisions made to the Draft EA in response to public comments, and the Marine Corps' responses to public comments. This detailed summary will be found in Appendix B of the Final EA.

## **6. We are aware of many NEPA documents being done for many projects; why aren't they done in a single document?**

Each Marine Corps project proceeds on its' own timeline for funding and execution. Where projects are interrelated and reasonably likely to proceed within the same geographic area or time period, they are ripe for NEPA analysis in a single NEPA document. Other proposals that are not quite ready for environmental analysis - long-term plans that are uncertain to occur, or plans that haven't been finalized, for example, preclude the Marine Corps from conducting a thorough and meaningful analysis of multiple proposals in a single document. In addition to this practical problem, the statute requires agencies to articulate a "purpose and need" for each proposed action. Aggregating disparate proposed actions (for example, building modernization, aircraft basing, and utility upgrades) into one document would make it impossible to articulate a single meaningful "purpose and need" for the NEPA document. However, the Marine Corps evaluates the cumulative effects of the proposed action in combination with all reasonably foreseeable actions in the region where the proposed action will occur. This analysis is included in Chapter 4 (*Cumulative Effects*) of the Draft EA.

## **7. Does use of radar systems near communities create a public safety concern or effect?**

No. The proposed radar systems discussed in this EA operate on the same frequencies as existing radar systems used in training areas – in Oahu generally - and, in any case, would be operated onboard Marine Corps installations, well away from the public. The G/ATOR system radar uses identical frequencies to current radars used throughout Hawaii. These radar systems would continue to be used at minimum prescribed distances from military personnel, ordnance, fuel, and wildlife pursuant to existing and well-understood safety and environmental requirements. These radar systems do not use new frequencies or operate at a greater intensity than existing radars used by the military and civilian communities on Oahu, and they will not be operated off installation.

## **8. How much will traffic increase in our communities?**

Construction traffic would be less than 1% of Average Annual Daily Traffic on H-3 and would only minimally affect traffic entering the base. Construction vehicles and equipment would be limited to entering the installation through the main gate, so project construction would not impact the off-base neighborhood near Mokapu gate. Proposed training associated with modernized equipment would also represent less than 1% of the Average Annual Daily Traffic on local roadways. Convoys traveling to support training areas would follow MCB Hawaii Order 3060.1 (*Tactical Vehicle Driving in Hawaii*), which establishes approved routes and prohibits convoys from using off-base public highways or neighborhood streets during peak traffic hours to minimize impacts to roadways off-base. Neither construction nor operations would affect bikeways, bus routes, or community traffic patterns.

# Agency Consultations

## 1. What agency coordination and consultation will occur?

The Marine Corps will undertake any coordination and consultation activities required by the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), Endangered Species Act (ESA), Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA), Clean Water Act (CWA), Clean Air Act (CAA), and other federal laws.

## 2. What is SHPD's role in this project?

The Hawai'i State Historic Preservation Division assists the Marine Corps in the review of proposed facilities construction and renovation projects associated with proposed action (known as the proposed "undertaking" in Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act); the review of proposed training changes on Marine Corps ranges; and serves as our primary consultation partner regarding Section 106 of the NHPA.

## 3. How are the NHPA 106 and ESA Section 7 processes different than NEPA?

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is a different law than the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) and the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). The NHPA includes a process for how adverse impacts to historic properties should be addressed, and the ESA addresses how impacts to federally threatened and endangered species should be addressed. The NEPA process functions as an "umbrella" that looks at potential impacts to all resources, and, where necessary, documents NHPA consultation for historic properties and biological assessments for ESA-listed plant and wildlife species. The NHPA and ESA consultations are expected to be complete and documented in the Final EA.

## 4. Is the project in the coastal zone?

Yes, the project is located within the coastal zone.

## 5. Will a coastal consistency review be completed?

The Marine Corps is assessing the project for impacts to the coastal zone per the Coastal Zone Management Act [CZMA §307(c)(1) 15 CFR §930.30]. The proposed action falls under the Marine Corps' Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA) De Minimis Activities List (State of Hawai'i CZMA letter, 9 July 2009). The Marine Corps will notify the State of Hawai'i Office of Planning and Sustainable Development, Planning Division.

## 6. Does the coastal consistency review process require a public hearing?

A coastal consistency review is conducted by the State of Hawai'i Office of Planning and Sustainable Development, Planning Division to evaluate if a proposed activity is consistent with established coastal policies and procedures. Public meetings are not part of this process.