

Draft Finding of No Significant Impact

Proposed Action: Construction of an Urban Close Air Support Range and an Aviation Bulls-Eye Range at Pohakuloa Training Area, Hawaii

The United States Marine Corps (USMC) proposes to construct and operate an Urban Close Air Support (UCAS) Range and an Aviation Bulls-Eye Range at the US Army's Pohakuloa Training Area (PTA) in order to provide comprehensive and realistic aviation training for rotary and fixed wing Marine aviators in Hawaii.

The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) requires federal agencies to consider potential environmental impacts prior to undertaking a course of action. Within the USMC, NEPA is implemented through regulations promulgated by the Council of Environmental Quality [40 CFR Parts 1500 – 1508], with supplemental guidance provided by Marine Corps NEPA regulations (Chapter 12 of Marine Corps Order P5090.2A).

Description of Action and Alternatives:

Alternative 1 - Proposed Action. Under the proposed action, the USMC would construct and operate an UCAS Range and an Aviation Bulls-Eye Range within the southern portion of the PTA impact area south of the Hilo-Kona Road and adjacent to the mock airfield.

The UCAS Range will consist of 185 sea/land shipping containers arranged over a 10 acre site. The containers will be arranged, and in some instances stacked to replicate a small urban environment. The Aviation Bulls-Eye Range will consist of a series of concentric circles visible from the air and ground that allows both an air or ground observer to judge the accuracy of aviation delivered ordnance. Painted automobile tires will be brought in to create the series of concentric circles at various distances from the center target.

Three Observation Points consisting of stacked sandbags would be located at various distances around the newly established facilities in order to observe and score rotary and fixed wing aviators training at PTA.

Alternative 2 – No Action. Under the no action alternative these ranges would not be constructed or used at PTA. If this were the case, the required training would either not take place, or would be conducted at locations outside the local training area.

Alternatives Considered but not Carried Forward. An alternative location within the PTA impact area was eliminated from consideration because of its proximity to other recently constructed ranges, the difficulty in working with the substrate, the excessive costs associated with crushing and hauling aggregate, and the difficulty in accessing the site.

Environmental Effects: The environmental assessment (EA), which is incorporated by reference into this Finding of No Significant Impact (FNSI), analyzed the potential direct and cumulative impacts of the proposed action and alternatives in the following resource areas:

Air Quality. Fugitive dust is an inevitable consequence of construction and training at PTA. The impacts associated with the proposed action are expected to be small and localized as the fugitive dust created during construction will fall out quickly. Further reduction of this dust can be mitigated through the use of water. Research has shown that the air quality at PTA is some of the best throughout the state.

Geology and Soils. Impacts to soil will be non-existent as the proposed ranges are located entirely within a barren lava flow. The construction footprints of the ranges are small and the resultant flattening and leveling will have little impact on geologic features.

Biological Resources - Vegetation. The ranges are located entirely within a barren lava flow that is virtually void of any vegetation, while the surrounding terrain is sparsely vegetated. There will be no impacts to any federally-listed or candidate plant species, and little to no impacts to common native vegetation during construction.

Biological Resources - Wildlife. It has been determined that the proposed action is not likely to adversely affect the endangered Hawaiian Petrel (*Pterodroma sandwichis*) and the Band-Rumped Storm Petrel (*Oceanodroma castro*), which is a candidate species for federal listing. It has also been determined that the proposed action will have no sustained detrimental effect on the endangered Hawaiian Hoary Bat (*Lasiurus cinereus semotus*), and avifauna protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

Cultural Resources. No cultural resources will be impacted or affected by this action. A Section 106 Consultation was undertaken. The State Historic Preservation Officer failed to respond within the comment period.

Wildfire. The proposed action area is located entirely within a barren lava flow and the surrounding plant community is sparsely vegetated. A fire starting through the use of these ranges is extremely unlikely. In the small chance that a fire is started it will likely burn itself out fairly quickly.

Water Resources. No water resources will be impacted, as water resources are not present on the installation. A storm water runoff permit has been applied for and advertised in the West Hawaii Today newspaper.

Visual Resources. The viewshed of Mauna Loa for those looking south from the saddle region will be impacted by the placement of the containers that will make up the village. This action can be mitigated by painting the containers that will be visible from the Saddle Road. Colors that match the surrounding terrain may be used to lessen the impact.

Noise Quality. Noise during construction will be localized and short term. Use of the range will generate more noise going down range but the remote location of the ranges and unpopulated surroundings will mean little if no noise being heard by surrounding communities. Impacts to the various bird species that may reside or transit through the area are considered negligible. Literature supports that many bird species live, breed and raise young in noisy areas. Birds may flush from nests when sounds are high but generally return to their nests after the disturbance abates.

Airspace. Airspace will not be affected by the proposed action as the airspace is currently restricted.

Human Health and Safety. The proposed action area lies within the PTA impact area and as a result, short-term human health and safety risks will exist while undertaking the construction phase of the project. The project's footprints will be swept by explosive ordnance disposal teams prior to the start of any ground disturbance. If any unexploded ordnance is found, it will be removed. During construction, the work crews will adhere to the standard operating procedure to ensure that they are safe and are working towards minimizing impacts; including the creation of fugitive dust.

Land Use and Recreation. Land use will not change nor be impacted by the proposed action as the proposed action area lies entirely within the impact area. Access for recreational activities, including public hunting, is strictly prohibited.

Socioeconomics and Environmental Justice. Implementation of the proposed action will not affect any of the sociological and economic conditions at PTA.

Cumulative Impacts. The remote location, small footprint size and general lack of activity in the area are not likely to cause any significant unmitigatable cumulative impacts.

Public Comment. A notice of availability of the EA and Draft FNSI was published in the State of Hawaii Department of Health, Office of Environmental Quality Control Publication "The Environmental Notice", Hawaii Tribune Herald, and West Hawaii Today. The EA and Draft FNSI were posted on the Marine Corps Base Hawaii website, <http://www.mcbhawaii.marines.mil/>, during the comment period. The deadline for comments is 30 days from the date of publication. Comments can be submitted to Ms Tiffany Patrick Tiffany.Patrick@usmc.mil (808 257-8815) or Daniel S Geltmacher, Daniel.Geltmacher@usmc.mil (808 257-8884).

Conclusions: The EA has determined that the proposed action (Alternative 1) will not have any unmitigable, or significant direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts. As such, the actions proposed under this EA does not require the completion of an environmental impact statement, as defined by the Council on Environmental Quality regulations (40 CFR 1500-1508) and 32 CFR Part 651.

APPROVED BY:

Daniel W. Whitney
Colonel, US Army
Commanding

Date