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**DRAFT  
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT  
FOR  
ESTUARINE AND RIVERINE AREAS RANGE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

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**RCS 19-006**

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Pursuant to the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations for implementing the procedural provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Title 42 United States (U.S.) Code Section 4321; Title 40 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Sections 1500–1508; and the United States Air Force (USAF) Environmental Impact Analysis Process, 32 CFR Section 989, the USAF, as the lead agency, has prepared this update to the *Estuarine and Riverine Areas Range Environmental Assessment* (REA) to consider the potential consequences to the human and natural environment associated with military activities within the estuarine and riverine areas around Eglin Air Force Base (AFB).

The purpose of the Proposed Action, which is the Preferred Alternative, is to authorize ongoing military training and testing activities occurring in estuarine and riverine areas and approve new dock infrastructure projects. Major activities analyzed in the REA include Special Operations Forces (SOF) training, Air Force swarm missions, Navy Landing Craft Air Cushion and Ship to Shore Connector testing, Navy explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) training, U.S. Marine Corps vehicle testing, maintenance of river waterways, and dock infrastructure repair and upgrades at Site A-10.

**DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES**

Chapter 2 of the REA provides details and descriptions of the Proposed Action and the No Action Alternative.

**Proposed Action (REA Section 2.2, pages 2-1 to 2-19):**

With regard to military training, USAF and Army SOF units continue to be the primary users of Eglin’s estuarine and riverine areas. The different elements or actions that make up SOF military training within the Eglin AFB estuarine and riverine areas include water-to-land transitions (i.e., troops moving ashore), air-to-water transitions (troops dropping or parachuting into the water), and boat operations. Throughout the study area, training may involve the use of blank fire, smokes, flares, and ground-burst simulators in accordance with Eglin AFB guidelines and restrictions. Training can occur day or night. Water-to-land transitions by boat occur at designated boat landing sites (BLS). Unimproved BLS refer to locations where small, low-draft watercraft such as rubber-hulled boats, inflatable boats, and jet skis typically come ashore. During air-to-water transitions, personnel, equipment (simulated munitions, pyrotechnics, weapons), and rubber boats may be dropped from helicopter or CV-22 aircraft onto Lance Drop Zone in Choctawhatchee Bay, the Havoc Drop Zone in Santa Rosa Sound, and Demo Drop Zone in East Bay. Units also use Santa Rosa Sound, Yellow River, East Bay, and Choctawhatchee Bay for scuba training,

1 pararescue training, open-water swims, and combat diving. Open-water swims are also conducted  
2 as part of Navy EOD training.

3 Other major actions included in the Proposed Action are Naval School Explosive Ordnance  
4 Disposal training at inland sites and in-water areas of Choctawhatchee Bay; gun, ammunition, and  
5 electro-optical testing at Test Area A-22 on Choctawhatchee Bay; USAF swarm missions  
6 involving squadrons of vessels traversing the length of the bay while being electronically targeted  
7 by aircraft; Naval Surface Warfare Center (NSWC), Panama City Division (PCD) Landing Craft  
8 Air Cushion (LCAC) and Ship to Shore Connector (SSC) transit, landings, and maneuvers; and  
9 simulated target acquisition and other testing.

10 The USAF proposes to repair and upgrade the Test Site A-10 dock, which consists of a concrete  
11 dock situated along the Santa Rosa Sound and two sets of pilings known as “dolphins.” The  
12 dolphins need to be replaced because the pilings have begun to lean and are narrowing and  
13 deteriorating below the sediment line. Proposed upgrades would shift the location of the west  
14 dolphin out to a point even with the west edge (a shift of about 6 feet to the west) of the A-10  
15 concrete dock. The east dolphin would be in the same location but extended by 20 to 30 feet. A  
16 raised concrete platform on the dock would be resurfaced smooth. The total area affected would  
17 be less than 1 acre.

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19 **No Action (REA Section 2.2, page 2-19):**

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21 The No Action Alternative represents the level of training activity described in the Preferred  
22 Alternative of the 2016 REA for estuarine and riverine areas. Representative mission scenarios  
23 and expendables would be the same the Proposed Action. The primary difference between the No  
24 Action Alternative and the Proposed Action is that the No Action Alternative does not include  
25 dock upgrades and maintenance. In addition, the No Action Alternative does not incorporate the  
26 changes in swarm missions and EOD training that are described in REA Section 1.3.1 (Differences  
27 Between the Last Update and Current Iteration). The major groups utilizing Eglin’s estuarine and  
28 riverine areas under the No Action Alternative would be the same as those listed for the Proposed  
29 Action, including SOF, Naval School Explosive Ordnance Disposal, 86th Fighter Weapons  
30 Squadron Maritime Weapons System Evaluation Program, and NSWC PCD.

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32 **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

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34 Analysis was conducted to determine the potential impacts to the human and natural environment  
35 resulting from the Proposed Action and alternatives. Environmental analysis focused on the  
36 following resource areas: biological resources, cultural resources, debris, physical resources, and  
37 safety. No significant impacts to resources were identified (REA Chapter 3, pages 3-1 to 3-53).

38

39 **Biological Resources (REA Section 3.1, pages 3-1 to 3-14):**

40 Operation of boats, amphibious vehicles, helicopters, and other vehicles, troop movement from  
41 shorelines into interstitial areas of Eglin, and infrastructure improvements and maintenance  
42 activities would result in minor impacts to habitats and wildlife species, particularly with

1 implementation of management practices. Potential impact categories include direct physical  
2 impacts, habitat alteration, noise and other disturbance, debris, and chemical materials. The  
3 number and types of test and training missions would not differ substantially from those conducted  
4 under existing conditions. There would be no significant impacts to biological resources.

5

6 **Cultural Resources (REA Section 3.2, pages 3-14 to 3-18):**

7 There would be no significant impacts with regard to cultural resources under the Proposed Action.  
8 Any activities that involve ground disturbance may have the potential to impact cultural resources.  
9 For existing activities, adherence to Eglin Air Force Base Manual (EAFBM) 13-212 and  
10 implementation of the Eglin AFB ICRMP standard operating procedures, in coordination with  
11 Eglin AFB's Cultural Resources Office, are required for completion of the Section 106 process.  
12 If this occurs, adverse effects to cultural resources would not occur or would be resolved through  
13 a memorandum of agreement.

14 As per EAFBM 13-212, avoidance is generally the primary management practice for cultural  
15 resources. In the event of unexpected discovery of cultural resources, all activity in the immediate  
16 vicinity must cease until the proponent makes proper notification to the Base Historic Preservation  
17 Officer and Cultural Resources Office.

18

19 Under the Proposed Action, planned activities would impact 8OK1436, the ferry slip/cargo pier at  
20 Test Site A-10 constructed in 1946. As this structure is considered ineligible for listing on the  
21 National Register of Historic Places, no adverse effects to historic properties would be anticipated.

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23 **Debris (REA Section 3.3, pages 3-18 to 3-24):**

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25 SOF training in estuarine and riverine areas would result in the expenditure of ammunition casings,  
26 chemical light sticks, smoke grenade canisters, and flare cartridges at multiple, undesignated  
27 locations throughout the approximately 146,000 acres of training area. The majority of light sticks  
28 and smoke grenade canisters would be retrieved during post-mission cleanup. Disposal of removed  
29 pilings and soil generated from dredging would be coordinated with 96th Civil Engineer  
30 Group/Compliance and conducted in accordance with applicable permits and hazardous/solid  
31 waste regulations and instructions. Significant impacts with regard to debris would not be  
32 anticipated.

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34 **Physical Resources (REA Section 3.4, pages 3-25 to 3-49):**

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36 No significant impacts to physical resources are expected under the Proposed Action. With some  
37 exceptions, the types of SOF training missions, number of expendables, and resources potentially  
38 affected under the Proposed Action would be similar to those analyzed for the Preferred  
39 Alternative of the 2016 *Estuarine and Riverine Areas Range Environmental Assessment*.

40 Air Force swarm missions would result in negligible impacts to physical resources. LCAC and  
41 SSC missions would involve moderate use of waters around Santa Rosa Island and would be  
42 expected to result in little to no impacts to sediments at the land-water interface.

1 The USAF does not anticipate any impacts to groundwater. There are no plans to withdraw  
2 groundwater for the Proposed Action. The ground disturbances for the Proposed Action activities  
3 are at the surface and not expected to impact groundwater in any way. Under the Proposed Action,  
4 the potential for indirect impact of sediment transport would be low, particularly with  
5 implementation of management practices. No permits are required, and no significant impacts to  
6 water resources would be expected.

7 Potential impacts to physical resources resulting from dock upgrades and maintenance activities  
8 would generally consist of sediment disturbance; turbidity; resuspension of nutrients or  
9 contaminants; and spills of debris, fuel, or other contaminants, but these would not be significant.

10 Based on analysis in Section 4.3 of the REA, the Proposed Action would not be expected to violate  
11 applicable state or federal water quality standards or result in any other significant impacts to  
12 physical resources. Implementation of standard construction and water quality best management  
13 practices would further reduce or eliminate impacts to estuarine waters.

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15 **Safety (REA Section 3.5, pages 3-49 to 3-53):**  
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17 There would be no significant impacts with regard to safety or restricted access, either to the units  
18 that train or to the public. Sufficient safeguards are in place to identify and avoid incidents and  
19 unsafe situations. For some operations, such as paradrops or equipment drops, safety vessels are  
20 on site during the drop to ensure the safety of trainees and retrieve leftover items from the water  
21 upon completion of the training event. Swarm missions employ a captain and an observer to  
22 maintain a lookout for other vessels; thus, significant safety impacts from vessel operations and  
23 swarm missions are not anticipated. Dock infrastructure improvement and maintenance operations  
24 would not affect public safety and would have positive benefits on the safety of military operators  
25 who use these facilities.

26 Eye-safe lasers, pyrotechnics, and other training items are used in accordance with EAFBM 13-  
27 212 and with adherence to Eglin AFB Natural Resources Office's fire condition protocols.  
28 Significant safety impacts to the public would not be anticipated.

29 Infrastructure improvement and maintenance operations, which include repair and upgrade of the  
30 Test Site A-10 dock, and maintenance of other boat ramps and docks would serve to enhance the  
31 safety of the military operators who frequently utilize these facilities. Therefore, there would be  
32 an overall positive impact on safety.  
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35 **PUBLIC REVIEW**  
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37 The USAF prepared a Draft REA to inform the public of the Proposed Action and allow the  
38 opportunity for public review and comment. The Draft REA 30-day review period began with a  
39 public notice published in the *Northwest Florida Daily News* on **TBD**. The notice described the  
40 Proposed Action, solicited public comments on the Draft REA and Draft Finding of No Significant  
41 Impact, provided public comment review dates, and announced that a copy of the REA would be  
42 available for review on the Eglin Air Force Base website: [https://www.eglin.af.mil/About-  
43 Us/Eglin-Documents/](https://www.eglin.af.mil/About-Us/Eglin-Documents/).  
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1 **FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

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Based on my review of the facts and analyses contained in the attached REA, conducted under the provisions of NEPA, CEQ regulations, and 32 CFR Part 989, I conclude that implementation of the Proposed Action would not have a significant impact on the human or natural environment. Accordingly, an Environmental Impact Statement is not required. The signing of this Finding of No Significant Impact fulfills the requirements of NEPA, CEQ regulations, and 32 CFR Part 989.

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Commander, 96th Civil Engineer Group

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