

**Finding of No Significant Impact
For
Eglin Gulf Test and Training Range
Range Environmental Assessment
Eglin Air Force Base, Florida
RCS 20-192**

Pursuant to the Council on Environmental Quality's regulations for implementing the procedural provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (42 *United States Code* Sections 4321–4347 and *Code of Federal Regulations* [CFR] Title 40, Parts 1500–1508), and the U.S. Air Force (USAF) Environmental Impact Analysis Process (32 CFR Part 989), the USAF has prepared this update to the 2015 Eglin Gulf Test and Training Range (EGTTR) Range Environmental Assessment (REA) (USAF 2015b) to analyze the potential effects of Eglin Air Force Base's (AFB's) maritime testing and training operations in the EGTTR identified for the 7-year mission period from 2023 to 2030.

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to continue to conduct testing and training operations in the EGTTR in support of Eglin AFB's mission. The EGTTR provides a readily accessible environment for military operations that is supported by maritime and land-based instrumentation and networking assets; these range attributes are not available to the U.S. military in any other location in the world. EGTTR testing and training operations are critical for achieving military readiness and the overall goals of the National Defense Strategy.

Description of Proposed Action and Alternatives

Proposed Action (REA Section 2.1, page 2-1)

The Proposed Action is to authorize and implement a new level of activity for testing and training operations conducted in the EGTTR. The EGTTR is the airspace controlled by Eglin AFB over the Gulf of Mexico beginning 3 nautical miles (NM) from shore, and the underlying Gulf waters. The EGTTR extends southward and westward off the coast of Florida and encompasses approximately 102,000 square nautical miles (NM²). It is subdivided into blocks of airspace that consist of Warning Areas W-155, W-151, W-470, W-168, and W-174 and Eglin Water Test Areas 1 through 6. The existing Live Impact Area (LIA), which is the portion of the EGTTR where the use of live munitions is currently authorized, lies mostly within W-151. The existing LIA encompasses approximately 940 NM² and includes water depths that range from approximately 30 to 145 meters.

Under the Proposed Action, the EGTTR would continue to be used during the next mission period based on the maritime testing and training requirements of the various military units that use the EGTTR. The next mission period would span 7 years, from 2023 to 2030. Most operations during this period would be a continuation of the same operations conducted by the same military units during the previous mission period. Most missions would continue to be air-to-surface operations that involve firing live or inert munitions, including missiles, bombs, and gun ammunition, from aircraft at targets on the water surface. The types of targets used vary by mission and primarily include stationary, remotely controlled, and towed boats, inflatable targets, and marker flares. Live munitions used in the EGTTR are set to detonate either in the air a few feet above the water surface (airburst detonation), instantaneously upon contact with the water or target (surface detonation), or approximately 5 to 10 feet below the water surface (subsurface detonation).

Alternative 1 (REA Section 2.2.1, page 2-2)

Under Alternative 1, the preferred alternative, the EGTTTR would be used during the 2023–2030 mission period based on the proposed operations of all participating military user groups. In general, the scope of Alternative 1 includes these proposed operations, the continued use of the existing LIA, and the creation and use of a new LIA within the EGTTTR. The new LIA, referred to as the East LIA, would be located approximately 40 NM offshore of Eglin AFB property on Cape San Blas, located on St. Joseph Peninsula in Gulf County, Florida. Eglin AFB facilities on Cape San Blas remotely support EGTTTR operations via radar tracking, telemetry, and other functions. The proposed East LIA would be circular-shaped and have a radius of approximately 10 NM and a total area of approximately 314 NM².

Live missions proposed for the 2023–2030 mission period would be conducted in the existing LIA and potentially in the proposed East LIA, depending on the mission type and objectives. Live missions that involve only airburst or aerial target detonations would continue to be conducted in or outside the LIA in any portion of the EGTTTR; such detonations have no appreciable effect on marine animals because there is negligible transmission of pressure or acoustic energy across the air–water interface. Use of inert munitions and live air-to-surface gunnery operations would also continue to occur in or outside the LIA, with new restrictions to prevent impacts to the Rice's whale.

Most operations proposed for the 2023–2030 mission period would be a continuation of the same operations conducted by the same user groups during the previous mission period. There would be an increase in the annual quantities of all general categories of munitions (bombs, missiles, and gun ammunition), except for live gun ammunition, which is proposed to be used less over the next mission period. The highest net explosive weight (NEW) of the munitions proposed under Alternative 1 would be 945 pounds, which was also the highest NEW for the previous mission period.

No Action Alternative (REA Section 2.2.2, page 2-25)

The No Action Alternative is to maintain existing conditions. Under the No Action Alternative, the existing LIA would continue to be used and no new additional LIA would be created as proposed under Alternative 1 for the East LIA. Military user groups would continue to conduct operations and use munitions within the overall scope of activity addressed in the 2015 EGTTTR REA. Overall operations and munitions under the No Action Alternative and Alternative 1 would be comparable.

Summary of Findings

Based on the findings of the attached REA, Alternative 1 would have no appreciable effect on air quality, noise (on public), airspace, wetlands, floodplains, groundwater, cultural resources, hazardous materials/waste, geology, utilities, transportation, environmental justice, or protection of children. Alternative 1 would potentially have impacts that range from minor to moderate on physical resources, biological resources, safety, and socioeconomics; the impacts on these resources would not be significant. When combined with past, present, or future actions, Alternative 1 would have no adverse cumulative impacts on these resources.

Air Quality (REA Section 3.3.1, page 3-2)

The counties in which Eglin AFB is located, which include Santa Rosa, Okaloosa, and Walton Counties, as well as all other counties in the Florida Panhandle are currently classified as being in attainment for all criteria air pollutants. Emissions of certain criteria pollutants are generated during EGTTTR testing and

training activities, primarily by aircraft and to a lesser extent by vessels and expended munitions. EGTTTR air emissions are generated seaward of 3 NM from shore, and the majority of the emissions occur well beyond state waters, which extend out to 9 NM from shore in the Gulf of Mexico. Given that EGTTTR emissions are generated offshore in the Gulf of Mexico and are dispersed over a large area, they would have no appreciable effect on regional air quality. Based on these factors and the attainment status of the counties nearest to EGTTTR operations, the Proposed Action would not contribute to a violation of any federal, state, or local air regulations. Lastly, EGTTTR emissions are part of the existing air quality conditions; therefore, any increase in air emissions resulting from changes in EGTTTR testing and training activities under the Proposed Action would be a net increase over existing emissions that would have no discernible effect on regional air quality. For these reasons, the Proposed Action would have no appreciable effect on air quality.

Noise Effects on the Public (REA Section 3.3.2, page 3-2)

The potential effects of noise generated by EGTTTR military operations on marine animals, particularly those protected under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and/or Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), are analyzed as part of the impact analysis conducted for biological resources in the REA. Potential noise effects on the public are not analyzed in detail in the REA because the public is excluded from the mission area during all EGTTTR missions and, therefore, is not exposed to associated high noise levels. The human safety zone that is established for each mission is based on the noise levels, blast effects, and other safety risk factors associated with the types of munitions to be used. Various established measures are implemented to ensure that the public is excluded from the safety zone prior to and during each mission; these measures are discussed in detail in Section 3.7 of the REA. All EGTTTR operations involving the use of live munitions are conducted at least 12 NM from land. At these distances, noise levels may be audible on land but are not high enough to result in noise complaints. Supersonic flights are flights that exceed the speed of sound (Mach 1.0). Supersonic flights by aircraft in the EGTTTR are conducted primarily for air combat training, and supersonic speeds are maintained for relatively short periods of time (less than 5 minutes during a typical sortie). Supersonic flights in EGTTTR airspace occur beyond 15 NM from land at altitudes higher than 10,000 feet above mean sea level. At this distance and altitude, associated noise levels that are audible on land are not high enough to result in noise complaints. For these reasons, the Proposed Action would have no appreciable noise effects on the public.

Airspace (REA Section 3.3.3, page 3-3)

The EGTTTR consists of Special Use Airspace (SUA) over the Gulf of Mexico beginning 3 NM from shore. The individual SUAs include Warning Areas W-155, W-151, W-470, W-168, and W-174; Eglin Water Test Areas 1 through 6 are uncharted airspaces used in conjunction with these Warning Areas. The majority of EGTTTR testing and training missions are conducted in Warning Area W-151. A Warning Area is airspace that contains activity that may be hazardous to non-participating aircraft; Warning Areas warn non-participating aircraft of this potential danger. The EGTTTR SUAs have been established for military use. The Proposed Action would have no effect on the classification or parameters of these SUAs or any other existing airspace. Given that the EGTTTR SUAs have been established to support military testing and training operations, the Proposed Action would have little to no potential to result in airspace restrictions or congestion, or otherwise impact military or non-military use of any airspace. All EGTTTR airspace is used in accordance with established USAF procedures and in coordination with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). For these reasons, the Proposed Action would have no appreciable effect on airspace.

Wetlands, Floodplains, and Groundwater (REA Section 3.3.4, page 3-3)

The EGTTT consists of approximately 102,000 NM² of airspace and underlying Gulf of Mexico waters beginning 3 NM off the northern and western coasts of Florida. Based on the location of the EGTTT, the Proposed Action would have no effect on wetlands, floodplains, or groundwater. The potential impacts of the Proposed Action on water quality and sediments in the Gulf of Mexico are assessed as part of the impact analysis conducted for physical resources in the REA.

Hazardous Materials and Waste (REA Section 3.3.5, page 3-3)

Hazardous materials have been declared hazardous through federal listings, including Extremely Hazardous Substances listed in Appendix A of 40 CFR 355, *Emergency Planning and Notification*; substances listed as hazardous if released, under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA) in 40 CFR 302.4, *Designation of Hazardous Substances*; and substances designated by definition as hazardous chemicals by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration in 29 CFR 1910.1200, *Hazard Communication*. Hazardous waste is any solid, liquid, or contained gas waste that is dangerous or potentially harmful to human health or the environment. Hazardous wastes are classified under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) in 40 CFR 261, *Identification and Listing of Hazardous Waste*.

Under the Military Munitions Rule (40 CFR Parts 260–270), a military munition is not a solid waste according to RCRA regulations and, consequently, cannot be a hazardous waste if it is used for its intended purpose on a military range. However, if a military munition lands off-range and is not promptly rendered safe and/or retrieved, it would be considered solid waste and potentially subject to corrective action under RCRA. Likewise, CERCLA does not apply directly to unexploded ordnance (UXO) sites because UXO is considered a solid waste but not hazardous waste under most conditions. Based on these regulations, remains of spent munitions and UXO in the EGTTT are not hazardous waste and are not subject to the regulatory requirements pertaining to the cleanup or management of hazardous waste under RCRA or CERCLA. The potential impacts that hazardous materials released during EGTTT testing and training operations, such as munitions constituents, have on physical resources (sediments and water quality) and biological resources are assessed in the REA as part of the impact analyses for those resources. The potential impacts of UXO generated by EGTTT operations are assessed as part of the impact analysis conducted for safety in the REA.

Geology (REA Section 3.3.6, page 3-3)

The Proposed Action would not involve any intrusive activity either on land or at sea that would affect subsurface geological formations. Anchoring the Gulf Range Armament Test Vessel (GRATV), other instrumentation platforms, and targets in the EGTTT is conducted using bulk anchors and cables. The weight of the anchors holds the item in place, so no drilling or other intrusion into the seafloor is conducted for the anchoring. Therefore, the Proposed Action would have no effect on geology. The potential impacts of the Proposed Action on marine sediments are assessed as part of the impact analysis conducted for physical resources in the REA.

Utilities and Transportation (REA Section 3.3.7, page 3-4)

The Proposed Action would not involve construction on land or modification of any utilities or transportation systems. The Proposed Action would also not involve permanent personnel relocations, permanent employee hires, or other changes in the number of persons working or conducting operations

at Eglin AFB or living in the local area. For these reasons, the Proposed Action would have no appreciable effect on energy consumption/distribution, potable water consumption/distribution, domestic wastewater distribution/treatment, or traffic levels/flow.

Environmental Justice and Protection of Children (REA Section 3.3.8, page 3-4)

On February 11, 1994, the President issued Executive Order (EO) 12898, *Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority and Low-Income Populations*. This EO requires federal agencies to address disproportionate environmental and human health impacts from federal actions on minority populations and low-income populations. The USAF's *Guide for Environmental Justice Analysis Under the Environmental Impact Analysis Process (EIAP)* provides guidance on how environmental justice should be analyzed in conjunction with EIAP, in accordance with NEPA (USAF 2014c). Guidelines for the protection of children are specified in EO 13045, *Protection of Children from Environmental Health Risks and Safety Risk*. EO 13045 requires that federal agencies make it a high priority to identify and assess environmental health and safety risks that may disproportionately affect children and ensure that policies, programs, and standards address disproportionate risks to children that result from environmental health or safety risks.

Based on the analysis conducted in the REA, the Proposed Action would not result in any impacts that would have a negative effect on human health or the environment that is significant, unacceptable, or above generally accepted norms. Potential impacts to minority or low-income populations under the Proposed Action would be limited to temporary closures of areas within the EGTTT where missions would be conducted through the establishment of human safety zones. These access restrictions are enforced indiscriminately on the entire public population. For these reasons, the Proposed Action would not have disproportionately high or adverse human health or environmental effects on minority or low-income populations. Implementation of the Proposed Action would not result in increased exposure of children to environmental health or safety risks because the safety zones established in the EGTTT for military testing and training operations would prevent any associated impacts to children.

Physical Resources (REA Section 3.4, page 3-4)

Metals, explosives, and other materials associated with EGTTT debris are released into the marine environment at low concentrations, are readily diluted, and have negligible potential to adversely impact water or sediment quality. Flare and chaff expenditures under Alternative 1 would be substantially lower than previously authorized expenditures and would have no appreciable effect on water or sediment quality.

Overpressures from detonations under Alternative 1 would not reach the seafloor and, therefore, do not have the potential to impact marine sediments. Mission-related debris that would sink and settle on the seafloor under Alternative 1 would primarily include casing fragments of detonated live munitions, intact live munitions that failed to detonate (UXO), intact inert munitions, and fragments of targets used during missions. The overall level of physical disturbance to marine sediments in the EGTTT from mission-related debris under Alternative 1 is expected to be negligible based on the quantity of debris that would be deposited on the seafloor and the expected behavior of the debris in the marine environment over time.

Anchoring the GRATV, other instrumentation platforms, and certain targets to the seafloor under Alternative 1 would result in small-scale sediment disturbance. All anchoring sites will be remotely surveyed using side-scan sonar and underwater remotely operated vehicles (ROVs) to ensure that anchoring is conducted in sandy sediments that are free of hardbottom or other structured benthic habitat. The overall impact to marine sediments from any increase in anchoring activity under Alternative 1 would be negligible.

The sinking of vessels for SINKEX exercises under Alternative 1 would result in sediment disturbance within the footprints of the sunken vessels. Specific sites within the LIA for SINKEX exercises will be remotely surveyed to verify that no structured habitat exists at the sites. Vessels to be sunk for SINKEX exercises will be prepared and cleaned to remove materials of environmental concern in accordance with U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) requirements and guidance provided by the Eglin Compliance Office (96 CEG/CEIEC). Based on review of the draft REA, EPA indicated that it “does not have significant environmental concerns regarding the proposed action.”

Biological Resources (REA Section 3.5, page 3-11)

EGTTR operations under Alternative 1 would have a negligible impact on marine invertebrates, fish, and birds. The federally listed oceanic whitetip shark and giant manta ray have low potential to occur in the existing LIA or proposed East LIA, and lack a swim bladder, which make them much less susceptible to both tissue damage and hearing impacts from underwater explosions than fish with a swim bladder, sea turtles, or marine mammals. The USAF has concluded that Alternative 1 may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect, the oceanic whitetip shark and giant manta ray. The USAF consulted with Protected Resources Division (PRD) of the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) under the ESA on the Proposed Action's potential impacts to the oceanic whitetip shark and giant manta ray, and submitted the associated Biological Assessment (BA) to NMFS PRD for review. Formal ESA Section 7 consultation with NMFS PRD on the Proposed Action's potential impacts on these species was initiated on September 19, 2022, and culminated in the issuance of the Biological Opinion (BO) by NMFS, which indicated that NMFS concurred with the USAF's effect determinations for the species.

Potential impacts to marine mammals from EGTTR operations under Alternative 1 would primarily result from detonations of live munitions at or near the water surface. Based on the underwater acoustic modeling and associated analyses conducted for this REA, a total of 9 Level A harassment takes and 1,136 Level B harassment takes of the common bottlenose dolphin, and 1 Level A harassment take and 139 Level B harassment takes of the Atlantic spotted dolphin are requested annually for EGTTR operations during the next 7-year mission period. Actual impacts to dolphins are expected to be less than predicted by acoustic modeling based on the conservative assumptions applied and the monitoring and mitigation measures that are implemented for the protection of dolphins during EGTTR missions. Based on the low number of injurious takes estimated to result from EGTTR operations and implementation of the established monitoring and mitigation measures, associated impacts to the applicable bottlenose and Atlantic spotted dolphin stocks in the Gulf of Mexico are expected to be minor. The USAF consulted with NMFS PRD under the MMPA on the Proposed Action's potential impacts to these two dolphin species, and submitted the associated Letter of Authorization (LOA) Request to NMFS PRD for review. NMFS served as a cooperating agency for the preparation of this REA and adopted its findings for its rule-making process under the MMPA. NMFS conducted a public review of its proposed rule for LOA issuance and subsequently issued the LOA. Issuance of the LOA by NMFS for the Proposed Action authorizes the estimated incidental takes of dolphins presented in the REA and associated LOA Request.

The USAF has determined that Alternative 1 may affect, and is likely to adversely affect, the Rice's whale. Potential effects to the Rice's whale would be limited to non-injurious, Level B harassment only, estimated as a total of 2 TTS takes and 4 behavioral disturbance takes annually for all EGTTR missions combined. The requested takes are overestimates because they represent the maximum Level B harassment scenario for all missions and assume that all proposed detonations would occur at or just below the water surface instead of a portion occurring upon impact with targets. As a new mitigation measure to prevent any permanent threshold shift (PTS) impacts to the Rice's whale from detonations during the next mission period, the USAF will restrict the use of live munitions in the western part of each LIA based on the setbacks from the 100-meter isobath presented in the REA. The USAF will also prohibit the use of inert munitions in Rice's whale habitat during the next mission period. Under this new mitigation measure, inert

munitions use will be prohibited between the 100-meter and 400-meter isobaths throughout the EGTR. To minimize potential behavioral disturbance to Rice's whale from Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) gunnery operations, gunnery missions during the next mission period will be conducted at least 500 meters landward of the 100-meter isobath instead of landward of the 200-meter isobath. The takes requested for the Rice's whale, although being overestimates of actual takes, avoid injury and would result in insignificant impacts to the Rice's whale population in the Gulf of Mexico. The requested takes have been minimized by the USAF to the greatest extent possible based on the new mitigation measures proposed. The USAF consulted with NMFS PRD under the ESA and MMPA on the Proposed Action's potential impacts to the Rice's whale, and submitted the associated BA and LOA Request to NMFS PRD for review. NMFS conducted a public review of its proposed rule for LOA issuance and subsequently issued the LOA and the BO. Issuance of the BO and LOA by NMFS for the Proposed Action authorizes the estimated incidental takes of Rice's whales presented in the REA and associated BA and LOA Request.

The USAF has determined that Alternative 1 may affect, and is likely to adversely affect, the loggerhead, Kemp's ridley, leatherback, and green sea turtle. Munitions use under Alternative 1 has the potential to impact sea turtles. There is potential for sea turtles to be also impacted by mission-related boat activity and debris; however, the overall potential for associated significant impacts is low. A total of 9 mortality takes, 32 injury takes (slight lung injury, gastrointestinal tract injury, and/or PTS), and 56 disturbance takes (TTS and/or behavioral disturbance) of sea turtles are requested annually for EGTR operations during the next 7-year mission period. Impacts to each sea turtle species under Alternative 1 would not be significant and would not adversely affect the ability of any sea turtle population to maintain its optimum sustainable level. Actual impacts to sea turtles are expected to be less than predicted by acoustic modeling based on the conservative assumptions applied and the monitoring and mitigation measures that are implemented for the protection of sea turtles during EGTR missions. EGTR operations under Alternative 1 would be conducted outside the terrestrial and marine components of loggerhead sea turtle critical habitat. Based on the findings of the Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) Assessment, Alternative 1 would not result in destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat designated for the loggerhead sea turtle. The USAF consulted with NMFS PRD under the ESA on the Proposed Action's potential impacts to sea turtles, and submitted the associated BA to PRD for review. Formal ESA Section 7 consultation with NMFS PRD on the Proposed Action's potential impacts on sea turtles was initiated on September 19, 2022, and culminated within the issuance of the BO by NMFS. Issuance of the BO by NMFS for the Proposed Action authorizes the estimated incidental takes of sea turtles presented in the REA and associated BA.

Based on the findings of the EFH Assessment, the USAF has determined that Alternative 1 would not adversely affect EFH or federally managed fisheries. Potential impacts from munitions use, anchoring, mission-related debris, and vessel sinking would not result in any appreciable reduction in EFH quantity or quality or adversely affect the growth or reproduction of any federally managed fishery. Potential impacts to EFH and managed fisheries would be comparable to the previous 5-year mission period and would continue to be insignificant. Based on their review of the EFH Assessment prepared for the Proposed Action, the Habitat Conservation Division (HCD) of NMFS stated that "any adverse effects that might occur on marine and anadromous fishery resources would be minimal" and "no further consultation with NMFS HCD is required for this action unless proposed EGTR mission activities are revised."

Cultural Resources (REA Section 3.6, page 3-74)

None of the known submerged cultural resources in the existing LIA or proposed East LIA are listed in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). Specific sites within the existing LIA and proposed East LIA considered for live munitions and anchoring will be remotely surveyed using side-scan sonar and underwater ROVs to ensure that no shipwrecks or other submerged cultural resources would be impacted. These procedures will also be applied to identify suitable sites within the LIA for SINKEX exercises. All

underwater video and other data collected during remote sensing surveys of candidate sites will be reviewed by a qualified maritime archaeologist. Implementation of these procedures would ensure that EGTTTR operations under Alternative 1 would have no effect on submerged cultural resources. If submerged cultural resources are identified during an EGTTTR mission, Eglin AFB will consult with the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP), and affiliated Native American tribes in compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), EO 13175, and applicable procedures in the Programmatic Agreement developed with the agencies and tribes. During consultation on the Proposed Action, the SHPO indicated that it concurs with the USAFs finding that "no historic properties listed, or eligible for listing, in the NRHP will be affected by the proposed undertaking."

Safety (REA Section 3.7, page 3-80)

Under Alternative 1, human safety zones will continue to be monitored by vessels, aircraft, and video depending on their size and the type of missions being conducted. Other related safety measures such as distributing flyers and issuing a Notice to Mariners (NOTMAR) to notify the public of area closures will continue to be implemented. Range clearance procedures implemented by AC-130 and CV-22 aircrews during AFSOC gunnery training missions in the EGTTTR are not expected to change under Alternative 1.

Long-range flights associated with Patriot and hypersonic missile tests under Alternative 1 would require additional surveillance and coordination to ensure the flight corridor is free of non-participating aircraft. These tests would require additional coordination with the FAA and potentially with local air traffic control centers, depending on the test flight corridor. A combination of fighter aircraft and unmanned aerial vehicles would provide airborne telemetry, radar, flight termination, range clearance, and communications relay for these tests. The Eglin Safety Office would determine the safety footprint around the target area for these tests based on munition criteria, flight profile, and other factors evaluated for all live missions. The associated human safety zone for these tests is expected to be cleared using a combination of mission-support vessels and aircraft, as described for other missions.

Vessels to be sunk for SINKEX exercises will be prepared and cleaned to remove potentially hazardous materials and loose, readily detachable, and floatable items that may pose a navigational hazard. Following each sinking exercise, the USAF will survey the mission site to ensure the vessel sank to the seafloor and that no associated debris that would pose a navigational or public safety hazard remains at the site.

Eglin AFB will continue to implement the 96th Test Wing (96TW) UXO policy memorandum (USAF 2018) to minimize the accumulation of UXO in the EGTTTR. All sites proposed to be used for live missions in the existing LIA and proposed East LIA will be evaluated in accordance with this policy memorandum. Creation and use of the East LIA under Alternative 1 would increase the overall area in which the generated UXO could be spread out in the EGTTTR.

The overall potential for public encounters with UXO under Alternative 1 would continue to be relatively low based on the locations where live munitions would be primarily used in the EGTTTR, which would be in the existing and East LIAs in waters that are at least 120 feet, which is the minimum depth required for live missions per the 96 TW UXO policy memorandum. There is potential for UXO to be encountered by non-military users in these portions of the Gulf of Mexico, such as by commercial fisherman using trawling, longline, or vertical line equipment.

Socioeconomics (REA Section 3.8, page 3-86)

Potential socioeconomic impacts under Alternative 1 would primarily result from temporary closures of mission areas in the Gulf of Mexico to the public. Mission-related closures in the existing LIA are expected

to potentially increase by 30 to 50 percent relative to the previous baseline, which would result in up to approximately 90 days of closures per year, with daily closures typically lasting for 5 to 6 hours from sunrise to noon. A portion of the total missions proposed by certain user groups may be conducted in the proposed East LIA instead of the existing LIA. The extent of mission-related closures in the East LIA is expected to be less because of lower expected mission activity compared to the existing LIA.

For missions in the existing LIA that require area closures, maps of the safety zone with latitude and longitude coordinates will be distributed to vessel operators, marinas, and other businesses in Destin Pass in advance of the mission. Two range-clearing boats may also be stationed in Destin Pass to distribute flyers and maps to civilian boaters as they exit the pass and enter the Gulf of Mexico, informing them of the area closure. For certain missions that require area closures, the Eglin Safety Office may request that the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) issue a NOTMAR in advance of the mission that notifies the public of the location and restrictions of the closed area. Overall impacts to the public from mission-related closures under Alternative 1 are expected to be relatively minor and largely limited to temporary public annoyance.

Based on the measures taken to minimize mission-related debris and the limited distribution of the sunken debris within the Gulf of Mexico, overall impacts from mission-related debris on recreational and commercial uses under Alternative 1 are expected to be negligible.

Management Actions (REA Section 4, page 4-1)

The following management actions focus on avoidance and minimization of impacts to the resources analyzed in detail in the REA. They do not address all the range operation procedures required to be followed in the EGTR, which include those specified in Eglin Air Force Base Instruction (EAFBI) 13-212, *Range Planning and Operations*; EAFBI 13-204, *Air Operations*; and other applicable regulations and guidance documents. Proponents are responsible for implementing these management actions to comply with the commitments the USAF has made regarding the Proposed Action and to not exceed the levels of impact determined for the resources analyzed in the REA.

Some of the management actions identified in this section pertain to the mitigation and monitoring measures specified in the BO and LOA issued by NMFS for the Proposed Action; however, the management actions do not address all the measures and conditions required by the BO and LOA. Mission personnel are responsible for complying with all the measures and conditions specified in the BO and LOA, in addition to the management actions identified in this section.

Biological Resources

- EGTR missions will comply with the mitigation and monitoring measures and other required conditions specified in the BO and LOA issued by NMFS for the 2023-2030 period.
- Pre- and post-mission monitoring for protected marine species will be conducted for all missions in the EGTR.
- All personnel who conduct protected species monitoring will complete Eglin's Marine Species Observer Training Course.
- Any person who will serve as a marine species observer for a particular mission must complete the training within a year prior to the mission.
- Missions will be delayed or rescheduled if conditions exceed sea state 4, which is defined as moderate breeze, breaking crests, numerous white caps, wind speed of 11 to 16 knots, and wave height of 3.3 to 6 feet. Refer to the sea state scale used for EGTR missions.
- When aerial monitoring is conducted by aircraft, a minimum ceiling of 305 meters (1,000 feet) and visibility of 5.6 kilometers (3 NM) are required for effective monitoring efforts and flight safety.

- For missions other than gunnery missions, the dolphin threshold distances for the mission-day category that best corresponds to the mission will be used to determine the size of the pre-mission survey area. Dolphin threshold distances are greater and, therefore, more conservative than sea turtle threshold distances. The pre-mission survey area will extend out to, at a minimum, double the Level A PTS threshold distance that applies to both dolphin species for the corresponding mission-day category. The Level A PTS threshold distance to be doubled and used for the survey area will be either the distance based on the 185 decibel (dB) sound exposure level (SEL) metric or the 230 dB sound pressure level (SPL) metric, whichever is greater for the mission-day category.
- The mission will be postponed if a sea turtle, marine mammal, oceanic whitetip shark, or giant manta ray is visually detected within the zone of influence (ZOI) (mitigation zone). The postponement will continue until one of the following criteria are met:
 - The animal is confirmed to be outside of the ZOI on a heading away from the target.
 - The animal is not seen again for 30 minutes and is presumed to be outside the Level A PTS ZOI and swimming out of the range.
- The mission will be postponed if large aggregations of jellyfish or large floating mats of *Sargassum* are observed within the ZOI. Postponement will continue until these potential indicators of sea turtle presence are confirmed to be outside the ZOI.
- The mission will be postponed if large schools of fish or large flocks of birds feeding at the surface are observed within the ZOI. Postponement will continue until these potential indicators of dolphin presence are confirmed to be outside the ZOI.
- Vessels conducting pre-mission marine species surveys will run predetermined line transects or survey routes that will provide sufficient coverage of the survey area. Monitoring will be conducted from the highest point feasible on the vessels. There will be at least two observers on each vessel, and they will each use professional-grade binoculars.
- When authorized, live video feeds will be transmitted from the GRATV or other instrumentation platforms to the Central Control Facility. These video feeds will be monitored by a trained marine species observer from Eglin Natural Resources.
- Mitigation measures for AFSOC gunnery training will include pre- and post-mission surveys: using only the 105 mm Training Rounds for nighttime missions; using ramp-up procedures that begin with the smallest round and proceed to increasingly larger rounds; and conducting all gunnery missions at least 500 meters landward of the 100-meter isobath.
- Each user group will conduct each mission behind the Rice's whale setback determined for the mission-day category that best corresponds to the mission in terms of total cumulative energy. The setback is the distance from the 100-meter isobath in either the existing or East LIA.
- Inert munitions will not be used in Rice's whale habitat, which are waters between the 100-meter and 400-meter isobaths.
- Any missions proposed to be conducted at nighttime will be required to be supported by AC-130 aircraft with night-vision instrumentation or other platforms with comparable nighttime monitoring capabilities. The pre-mission survey area will extend out to, at a minimum, double the Level A PTS threshold distance that applies to both dolphin species for the corresponding mission-day category. The Level A PTS threshold distance to be doubled and used for the survey area will be either the distance based on the 185 dB SEL metric or the 230 dB SPL metric, whichever is greater for the mission-day category.

- Candidate sites within the LIAs for live missions and anchoring will be surveyed using side-scan sonar and underwater ROVs to verify that no hardbottom habitat, shipwrecks, or sunken artificial structures exist at the sites.
- Post-mission cleanup crews will recover target-related debris to the extent practicable. Any debris remaining from EGTR activities conducted in the interest of national security is not considered dumping or disposal and is not subject to the cleanup criteria and procedures under the Marine Protection, Research, and Sanctuary Act.
- Vessels to be sunk for SINKEX exercises will be prepared and cleaned to remove materials of environmental and safety concern in accordance with EPA requirements and guidance provided by the 96 CEG/CEIEC.
- Candidate sites within the LIA for SINKEX exercises will be surveyed using side-scan sonar and underwater ROVs to verify that no hardbottom habitat, shipwrecks, or sunken artificial structures exist at the sites.
- Permitting and stakeholder coordination requirements for SINKEX missions will be identified through the Air Force Form 813 process.

Cultural Resources

- Candidate sites within the LIAs for live missions and for anchoring throughout the EGTR will be surveyed using side-scan sonar and underwater ROVs to verify that no shipwrecks or other submerged cultural resources exist at the sites.
- All underwater video and other data collected during remote sensing surveys of candidate anchoring sites will be reviewed by a qualified maritime archaeologist.
- If submerged cultural resources are identified during an EGTR mission, Eglin AFB will consult with the SHPO, ACHP, and affiliated Native American tribes in compliance with Section 106 of the NHPA, EO 13175, and applicable procedures identified in the Programmatic Agreement with the agencies and tribes.

Safety and Socioeconomics

- For missions in the existing LIA that require area closures, maps of the safety zone with latitude and longitude coordinates will be distributed to vessel operators, marinas, and other businesses in Destin Pass in advance of the mission. Two range-clearing boats may also be stationed in Destin Pass to distribute flyers and maps to civilian boaters as they exit the pass and enter the Gulf of Mexico, informing them of the area closure.
- For certain missions that require area closures, the Eglin Safety Office may request that the USCG issue a NOTMAR in advance of the mission that notifies the public of the location and restrictions of the closed area. The NOTMAR will be broadcast on Channel 16 by the USCG.
- The Eglin Safety Office will determine the human safety zone for each mission based on the munition type, delivery method, and other factors evaluated for weapon safety footprints. The safety zone must be clear of non-participating aircraft and vessels during military operations.
- The methods and platforms used to monitor the human safety zone, which include vessels, aircraft, and video, will be based on the size of the safety zone and type of mission to be conducted.
- Tests that involve long-range flights in the EGTR will require additional coordination with the FAA and potentially with local air traffic control centers, depending on the test flight corridor. Examples of long-range tests in the EGTR include launches of PAC-2 and PAC-3 Patriot missiles and Precision Strike Missile (PrSM) hypersonic missiles from Santa Rosa Island and air launches of Hypersonic Attack Cruise Missile (HACM) hypersonic missiles.

- For AFSOC gunnery training missions, AC-130 aircrews will conduct a search out to 5 NM from each potential target area to ensure it is clear of non-participating vessels prior to gun firing. Range clearance for CV-22 training will be conducted out to 3 NM from the target area.
- Vessels to be sunk for SINKEX exercises will be prepared and cleaned to remove materials of environmental and safety concern in accordance with EPA requirements and guidance provided by the 96 CEG/CEIEC.
- Following each sinking exercise, the site will be surveyed to ensure the vessel sank to the seafloor and that no associated debris that would pose a navigational or public safety hazard remains at the site.
- Permitting and stakeholder coordination requirements for SINKEX missions will be identified through the Air Force Form 813 process.
- Post-mission cleanup crews will recover target-related debris to the extent practicable.
- All missions will be implemented in accordance with the 96 TW *Memorandum: Policy for Eglin Gulf Test and Training Range (EGTTR) Live Ordnance Employment* (USAF 2018) to minimize the accumulation of UXO in the EGTTR.

Public Review and Stakeholder Consultation

A Notice of Availability was published in five separate newspapers to invite the public to review and comment on the draft REA and this proposed Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). Copies of the draft REA and proposed FONSI were made available for public access on the Eglin AFB public website. The Florida State Clearinghouse coordinated state review of the draft REA to determine consistency of the Proposed Action with the Florida Coastal Management Program. Consultation with NMFS on the Proposed Action included consultation with NMFS PRD for potential impacts to species protected under the ESA and/or MMPA, as well as consultation with NMFS HCD for potential impacts to EFH, protected under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act.

Finding of No Significant Impact

Based on my review of the facts and analysis in the attached REA, I conclude that Alternative 1 would not have a significant impact on the natural or human environment, either by itself or considering cumulative impacts. The requirements of NEPA, the President's Council on Environmental Quality, and 32 CFR Part 989 have been fulfilled. An Environmental Impact Statement is not required and will not be prepared.

JEREMIAH J. HAMMILL, Colonel, USAF
Commander, 96th Civil Engineer Group

Date