

Navy's operational mission and will assist the local communities in land use planning decisions.

The Navy will develop and implement a Bird/Animal Strike Hazard (BASH) reduction plan for the OLF similar to those that are effectively utilized at various East Coast Navy installations to manage the bird-aircraft collision risk. Use of bird detection radar to evaluate bird movements prior to scheduled FCLP operations will be considered. A BASH reduction plan will be prepared in conjunction with an Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan for the undeveloped portions of Site C.

The Navy will work with Washington and Beaufort counties to minimize the impact of the potential loss of property tax revenue to the greatest extent possible. The Navy will explore strategies for contracting with the local jurisdictions for the provision of necessary services such as utility support and/or maintenance. The Navy will also consider development of mutually beneficial partnerships with Washington and Beaufort counties to enhance the provision of mutually required utility services.

Response to Comments Received Regarding the Final Environmental Impact Statement

The Navy received comments on the FEIS from 3 Federal agencies, 2 members of Congress and elected state officials, 11 state agencies, 6 local governments, and numerous citizen groups and private citizens. Many of these comments simply stated support for or opposition to the preferred home basing alternatives and the preferred OLF site. Others reiterated comments that were received on the DEIS and responded to in the FEIS. Comments of general support or opposition and comments not raising new substantive issues are not addressed in the ROD. New issues raised in comments received during the 30-day public review period are addressed below.

Several commentators suggested that a supplemental EIS was necessary to address new home basing alternatives and new sites for a new OLF, or to address perceived changes in the scope of the proposed action. The range of home basing alternatives and alternative sites for a new OLF that were analyzed in the EIS represented a reasonable range of alternatives as required by NEPA, allowed the Navy to take the requisite hard look at environmental impacts, and provided a logical basis for a reasoned decision. The purpose and need for the proposed action remained constant—provide facilities and

functions to support homebasing and operation of Super Hornet aircraft assigned to the Atlantic Fleet. Therefore, supplemental analysis is unnecessary.

Many of the comments received suggested that an OLF at Site C in Washington County would be damaging to the environment. To the contrary, Federal ownership and management of up to 30,000 acres of land that is currently an agricultural monoculture will create significant opportunities to enhance the environment in and around Site C. The FEIS clearly lays out all anticipated environmental impacts from construction and operation of an OLF.

Several of the comments received suggested that the FEIS understated impacts on wildlife at Site C, including impacts on the nearby Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge (NWR). Specific concerns raised in comments included impacts from the exclusion of animals/birds on the approximately 30,000-acre area the Navy would acquire, impacts on foraging and roosting waterfowl from aircraft overflights/noise, and overall impacts on the Pocosin Lakes NWR. While these issues were fully addressed in the FEIS, they are summarized here to help ensure the public has a better understanding of the issues.

Because Site C is located in a non-urbanized area within the Atlantic Flyway, the site will have an elevated BASH risk level during the fall and winter months. However, the BASH risk level will be similar to that which is currently being effectively managed at other East Coast military installations.

Significant concentrations of migratory waterfowl occur within five miles of Site C in the vicinity of the Pungo Unit of Pocosin Lakes NWR. The results of a bird radar survey completed at the site indicate that periods of time exist during which a significant number of bird species move through the airspace that will be used by aircraft operating at Site C. However, the overall amount of time when bird concentrations will cause an elevated bird/aircraft strike risk is minimal in comparison to low-risk periods. In addition, the radar survey indicated that daily peaks in bird movements and hourly trends in bird concentrations were easily detectable. Based on these factors, the use of bird detection radar at Site C will greatly reduce the risk posed by birds.

A relatively small portion of the low-level flight tracks at Site C, where flight altitudes will range from 2,000 to 2,500 feet AGL, will be located above or adjacent to significant snow goose and tundra swan loafing and foraging areas located outside of the Pocosin Lakes

NWR boundary. Although flight altitudes along this portion of the flight tracks indicate that the BASH risk will not be considered severe, overflights down to 2,000 feet AGL may cause snow geese to flush more frequently from their loafing and feeding sites. The Navy will work with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and state resource agencies to evaluate site-specific mitigation measures to reduce potential impacts to snow goose populations.

There is a misconception that the Navy would attempt to manipulate land use to discourage waterfowl foraging, loafing, nesting and roosting within all of the approximately 30,000-acre area proposed for acquisition. The Navy has no such intent. As stated in the FEIS, the Navy plans to out-lease significant portions of the land at Site C to allow for continued agricultural production. As clearly evidenced by such use at other military air stations, farming activities are compatible with aircraft operations. The FEIS states that management activities to discourage bird/animal foraging, loafing, nesting and roosting would be implemented in areas immediately adjacent to the airfield and not on the entire 30,000 acres. It is anticipated that the majority of the land acquired at Site C will be out-leased and that there will be no restrictions on the types of crops that can be grown. There are 215,000 acres of agricultural foraging habitat potentially available to waterfowl within 15 miles of the Pocosin Lakes NWR. The construction and operation of an OLF at Site C will directly impact less than 5% of available foraging habitat within 15 miles of the Pocosin Lakes NWR.

The Navy would develop an Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan (INRMP) for Site C. Preparation of the INRMP requires coordination with the USFWS and the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC). The INRMP will outline the overall natural resource management objectives of the OLF and ensure that these objectives are designed to protect and preserve the mission of the OLF and all on-station natural resources such as wetlands, water quality and plant and animal species. Cooperation between the USFWS, NCWRC, the Navy and other resource agencies will help to ensure effective management of wildlife and other natural resources at Site C. The INRMP would serve as a guide to maximize natural resources management opportunities consistent with the OLF mission. INRMPs have proven to be effective natural resources management