

was not eliminated from serious consideration as an OLF site.

Some of the comments received suggested that the Navy failed to meet its obligations under Executive Order 12898, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority and Low-Income Populations. Executive Order 12898 requires that disproportionately high and adverse impacts to minority and low-income populations be clearly identified and considered by Federal agencies as they propose and execute actions. The Navy did identify and consider environmental justice issues as required by Executive Order 12898. The Navy used data from census tracts and compared race and income data for the entire census tract against regional information in an effort to present a conservative analysis of impacts to minority and low-income populations.

Some of the comments received suggested that the cumulative impacts analysis in the EIS is flawed because the cumulative effects section did not include the environmental impacts on several bombing ranges, such as Piney Island, Brant Island Shoal, Dare County, and Tyrell County, and on airspace designated as a Military Operating Area (MOA). The FEIS analyzed whether the basing of the Super Hornets would change the existing use of those ranges. The conclusion reached in the FEIS was that use of these ranges would remain approximately the same or decrease. Similarly, the Navy does not anticipate any increase in the use of the MOAs because of Super Hornet home basing or a new OLF. Therefore it was not necessary to include those impacts in the cumulative effects analysis.

One of the comments received suggested that an OLF at Site C is inconsistent with the North Carolina Coastal Zone Management Plan. The enforceable policies of the Washington County Coastal Area Management Plan were analyzed in the EIS. The Navy concluded that construction and operation of an OLF at Site C was consistent to the maximum extent practicable with the enforceable policies of the North Carolina Coastal Zone Management Plan. The North Carolina Department of Environmental and Natural Resources concurred with the Navy's determination.

Conclusions

In determining where to base F/A-18E/F Super Hornet aircraft on the East Coast in support of the Atlantic Fleet and where to site an OLF, I considered the following: Operational and readiness requirements; costs associated with the construction, operation, and

maintenance of aircraft and facilities; manpower requirements and costs; the analysis of environmental and socioeconomic effects contained in the EIS; relevant federal and state statutes and regulations; and the comments received on the EIS from federal, state, and local agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and individual members of the public. After carefully weighing all of these factors, I have determined that ALT 6, dual-siting Super Hornet aircraft at NAS Oceana (eight fleet squadrons and the FRS) and MCAS Cherry Point (two fleet squadrons) with a new OLF sited in Washington County will best meet the needs of the Navy while minimizing the environmental impacts associated with basing the Super Hornet.

Dual-siting the Super Hornet squadrons between NAS Oceana and MCAS Cherry Point effectively uses the Navy's infrastructure at NAS Oceana, taking advantage of and using the capacity created with the transitioning of the Tomcat and older Hornet aircraft currently stationed there. The geographic proximity of aircraft at NAS Oceana and MCAS Cherry Point allows for the most efficient use of training ranges and OLF capacity by all the Super Hornet squadrons, as well as other aircraft based at both NAS Oceana and MCAS Cherry Point.

ALT 6 will maximize use of existing facilities and limit capital investment requirements at both NAS Oceana and MCAS Cherry Point. Construction at NAS Oceana will involve installation of a Flight Line Electrical Distribution System (FLEDS) on the existing parking apron, reconfiguration of Building 240, and internal renovations to 3 hangars. Construction at MCAS Cherry Point will include installation of a FLEDS, internal renovations to two hangars, and a new training facility, ordnance magazine, and combined medical/dental clinic. ALT 6 provides the lowest one-time construction costs and 30-year life cycle costs of any of the dual-siting alternatives considered.

Implementation of ALT 6 provides some mitigation of noise impacts at NAS Oceana and NALF Fentress. The net impact of aircraft inventory reductions and dual-siting is a 29% reduction in the number of aircraft stationed at NAS Oceana (91 fewer aircraft) compared to baseline year 2000 conditions. The number of aircraft operations at NAS Oceana is projected to decrease by 37%, and the number of operations at Naval Auxiliary Landing Field (NALF) Fentress is projected to decrease by 58%. While homebasing two Super Hornet fleet squadrons at MCAS Cherry Point will increase the

number of aircraft stationed at MCAS Cherry Point by 16% (24 additional aircraft) over baseline year 2000 conditions, the number of operations is projected to increase by only 6%.

A new OLF in Washington County is essential not only for support of the Super Hornet operations under ALT 6 but also for surge conditions and future operational needs. As a result of Carrier Strike Group and Expeditionary Strike Group operational requirements generated during operations Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan and Iraqi Freedom, we now understand the critical need for surge capacity for training of multiple carrier air wings. The capacity at NALF Fentress is insufficient to accommodate FCLP requirements of more than one carrier air wing and an FRS simultaneously. The new OLF will enhance the fidelity and quality of carrier landing training under all circumstances and ensure that the Navy's Fleet Response Plan, developed to institutionalize a continuous surge capability of up to six to eight carriers in reaction to world events, can be fully carried out.

The new OLF will accommodate the FCLP operations of the Super Hornet squadrons homebased at both NAS Oceana and MCAS Cherry Point. An estimated 31,650 FCLP operations will be conducted at the new OLF annually. None of the Super Hornet squadrons or personnel will be stationed at the OLF. The facility will be operated primarily through contract personnel. Navy will acquire approximately 23,000 acres in Washington County and 7,000 acres in Beaufort County for construction and operation of a new OLF. An 8,000-foot runway and ancillary facilities will be constructed within a core area. Land surrounding the core area will be owned and controlled by the Navy and managed to promote development and land uses that are compatible with airfield operations. Any resident or business required to relocate will receive relocation assistance as provided for by Federal law and regulations. By acquiring the property, the Navy will be able to ensure that FCLP training can take place in an environment free from limitations due to surrounding populations, thereby providing superior training for Navy aircrews. This is in contrast to the pressure from residential encroachment around NALF Fentress that has resulted in deviations from standard FCLP training. While FCLP training will continue to be conducted at NALF Fentress, encroachment pressures are going to increase, as evidenced by the 44% growth in population within a 5-