

(71.5 ft) in length by 2.3 m (7.5 ft) in diameter, with the first stage thrust of 500,000 lbs. The Peacekeeper, unlike other silo launch missiles, is "cold launched," initially propelled out of the silo with pressurized gas. The first stage rocket motor is ignited once the vehicle is approximately 20 m (65.6 ft) above the ground. The Peacekeeper missile is being phased out and only a few launches remain.

The Minuteman III missile is an ICBM that was also developed as part of the United States strategic deterrence force. Similar to the Peacekeeper, the Minuteman III is launched from underground silos but is not cold launched. The Minuteman III is composed of three rocket motors and is 18.0 m (59.1 ft) in length by 1.7 m (5.6 ft) in diameter, with a first stage thrust of 202,600 lbs.

The Missile Defense Agency (MDA) is developing the Ground-based Midcourse Defense (GMD) element of the conceptual Ballistic Missile Defense System (BMDS). The BMDS concept is to defend against threat missiles in each phase or segment of the missile's flight. There are three segments of this conceptual system in various stages of technology development: Boost Phase Defense, Midcourse Defense, and Terminal Defense. Each segment of the BMDS is being developed to destroy an attacking missile in the corresponding boost, mid-course, or terminal phase of its flight. The GMD element is designed to protect the United States in the event of a limited ballistic missile attack by destroying the threat missile in the mid-course phase of its flight. During the mid-course phase, which occurs outside the earth's atmosphere for medium and long-range missiles, the missile is coasting in a ballistic trajectory.

A variety of small missiles under 13 m (42.7 ft) including the Hera, Lance, Patriot As A Target, ERINT, Black Brant, Terrier, SRTYPI II, Castor I, Storm, ARIES, and Hermes are also included in the application because of the new harbor seal pupping site that was established in 2002 at Lion's Head. Those missiles, in addition to missiles already included in previous NMFS authorizations for VAFB (Minuteman and Peacekeeper missiles and missiles from the Ground Based Interceptor programs), and the new generation of missiles from the MDA will be covered by these regulations and annual LOAs. Several types of missiles will be used for target and interceptor test and evaluation; some of these missiles are being used currently (Booster Verification Test) and the remainder will not be used until 2004 or later. All of the target and interceptor missiles are

smaller than the Minuteman III or Peacekeeper missiles that are currently launched from VAFB. Many of the different missile types have interchangeable first or second stage motors; therefore, most of the missiles may have similar noise characteristics, depending on their configuration.

The Ground Based Interceptors (GBI) are approved for launchings at VAFB (12 May 2003, 68 FR 25347). The GBI Booster Verification and the uncanisterized Orbital Booster Vehicle will be flight tested from LF-21 and LF-23. The missiles would be comprised of a commercially available, solid propellant booster consisting of three stages and an exo-atmospheric kill vehicle emulator.

Aircraft Activities

VAFB is also a site for limited flight testing and evaluation of fixed-wing aircraft. Three approved routes are used that avoid the established pinniped haul-out sites. A variety of aircraft, including the B1 and B2 bombers, F-14, F-15, F-16, and F-22 fighters, and KC-135 tankers may use the test and evaluation routes.

Various fixed-wing aircraft (jet and propeller aircraft) use VAFB for a variety of purposes including delivery of space or missile vehicle components, launching of launch vehicles at high altitude, such as the Pegasus, and emergency landings. VAFB has approximately 120–fixed-wing flights per year and 10,000 take offs and landings (training operations), which occur mostly on north VAFB (U.S. Air Force 2003). All aircraft are required to remain outside of an established 1,000–ft (304.8 m) bubble around pinniped rookeries and haul-out sites, except when performing a life-or-death rescue mission, when responding to a security incident, or during an aircraft emergency.

The VAFB helicopter squadron uses a UH-1N helicopter and provides support for launch operations, security reconnaissance, aerial photography, training, transport, and search and rescue. VAFB has approximately 75 helicopter sorties per month (U.S. Air Force 2003). All helicopters are required to remain outside of the 1,000–ft (304.8 m) bubble around pinniped rookeries or haul-out sites, except when performing a life-or-death rescue mission, when responding to a security incident, or during an aircraft emergency.

Description of Habitat and Marine Mammals Affected by the Activity

VAFB is composed of 99,000 acres of land and approximately 65 km (39 mi) of coastline on the coast of Central

California within Santa Barbara County. The northern Channel Islands are located 72 km (44.7 mi) south of VAFB and consist of San Miguel Island (SMI), Santa Cruz Island (SCI), and Santa Rosa Island (SRI). The northern Channel Islands are part of the Channel Islands National Park and the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary.

The most common marine mammal inhabiting VAFB is the Pacific harbor seal (*Phoca vitulina richardsi*). Harbor seals are local to the area, rarely traveling more than 50 km (31.1 mi) from their haul-out sites. They haul-out on small offshore rocks or reefs and sandy or cobblestone cove beaches. Although harbor seals can be found along much of the VAFB coastline, they congregate in the areas of Oil Well Canyon to South Rocky Point and near the boat harbor on south VAFB. The haul-out site on south VAFB has the largest population of harbor seals on VAFB, with up to 515 seals surveyed, and has been growing at an average annual rate of 12.7 percent since 1997 while the California population has remained stable. At least 700 harbor seals used SMI, 1,000 used SCI and 900 used SRI during the 2002 aerial counts (Lowry and Caretta 2003).

Less than 200 California sea lions (*Zalophus californianus*) are found seasonally on VAFB. Sea lions may sporadically haul-out to rest when in the area to forage or when transiting the area, but generally spend little time there. Sea lions may haul-out in the area of Rocky Point, Point Arguello, Point Pedernales, and Point Sal, just north of VAFB. In 2003, at least 142 sea lions and 5 pups were hauled out at Rocky Point. This was the first reported occurrence of sea lions being born at VAFB but may be a result of the El Nino conditions that existed at that time. SMI is one of the major California sea lion rookeries, along with San Nicolas Island, with about 23,000 pups born each year. Launches from VAFB will only affect SMI.

Approximately 150 northern elephant (*Mirounga angustirostris*) seals may be found seasonally on VAFB. Weaned elephant seal pups making their first foraging trips occasionally haul-out for 1 to 2 days at VAFB before continuing on their migration. In April 2003, approximately 88 juveniles and young adult females began to haul-out at South Rocky Point to molt. The nearest elephant seal haul-out point is at Point Conception, 25 km (15.5 mi) south of VAFB. Elephant seals primarily use SMI and SRI for breeding and hauling out to rest or molt. Up to 12,000 elephant seal pups are found on SMI and up to 1,500 on SRI (Lowry 2002).