

**DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE  
DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY**

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT FOR THE EAST COAST HOME BASING OF THE  
MQ-4C TRITON UNMANNED AIRCRAFT SYSTEM**

Pursuant to Section 102(2) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended; Council on Environmental Quality regulations (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] parts 1500-1508) implementing NEPA; U.S. Department of the Navy (Navy) Regulations (32 CFR part 775); and the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations Instruction (OPNAVINST) 5090.D, CH-10; the Navy gives notice that an Environmental Assessment (EA) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) were prepared for the establishment of facilities and functions to operate and maintain the MQ-4C Triton unmanned aircraft systems (Triton UAS) on the East Coast. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) is a cooperating agency for this action.

**Purpose and Need**

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to locate an East Coast home base in order to enhance maritime intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities as part of the Navy's Maritime Patrol and Reconnaissance Force in the Atlantic Fleet's area of operations. The Proposed Action is needed to provide continuous maritime ISR capabilities in support of national defense objectives and policies. The program of record for the Triton UAS requires the establishment of two locations in the continental United States (U.S.) and three locations outside the United States to provide persistent maritime ISR capabilities. A West Coast home base location was previously selected at Naval Base Ventura County Point Mugu, California in 2013.

**Description of the Proposed Action**

The Proposed Action provides the facilities and functions to operate and maintain the Triton UAS on the East Coast. Under this Proposed Action, the Navy plans to establish a launch and recovery site for four home-based Triton UAS and support a consolidated maintenance hub for up to four additional aircraft undergoing maintenance. The East Coast home base location will be a permanent duty station for up to 400 personnel, plus family members, and support rotational deployments outside the continental United States. Triton UAS flight operations would begin in 2019. It is assumed that a maximum of eight Triton UAS will be at the East Coast Home Base at any given time: four that are assigned for operational missions and four that have been transferred to the home base from another location to receive consolidated maintenance. The additional 400 personnel and their family members would gradually relocate to the home base and the surrounding areas in phases (from FY 2019 to FY 2023).

Construction, demolition, and/or renovation activities would take place over a 2-year period, from Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 to FY 2019. Except as otherwise described in the EA, construction elements (as needed to support the home basing) would consist of the following: hangar, aircraft parking apron, taxiway, control facility, power check pad, launch/recovery pad, wash rack, automobile parking, and storage facilities.

### **Alternatives Considered**

All airfields operated by the Department of Defense and NASA were screened using a multiple-tier analytical process to determine which airfields would be reasonable for home basing and maintaining the Triton UAS on the East Coast. Upon completion of the screening process, the Navy identified three home basing alternatives to be analyzed:

- Alternative 1 at Naval Air Station (NAS) Key West in Florida,
- Alternative 2 at Naval Station (NS) Mayport in Florida, and
- Alternative 3 at NASA's Wallops Flight Facility (WFF) in Virginia.

### **Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Analysis**

The Navy considered four other alternative home basing locations: Patrick Air Force Base, Cape Canaveral Air Force Station, NAS Jacksonville in Florida, and NAS Patuxent River in Maryland. Each of these locations was ultimately eliminated from further detailed analysis as they did not meet the screening factors for a home basing location.

### **No Action Alternative**

Under the No Action Alternative, the Navy would not establish facilities or functions to support the East Coast home basing and maintenance of the Triton UAS. The No Action Alternative does not meet the purpose of and need for the Proposed Action. However, it does serve as a baseline against which the impacts of the Proposed Action were evaluated. Under the No Action Alternative, the Navy would not achieve the required levels of operational readiness for the Triton UAS.

## **Environmental Effects and Mitigation Measures Associated with the Proposed Action**

The following is a summary of the environmental consequences under all alternatives.

Noise: No significant impacts on the existing noise environment would be expected at the home base installation or in the surrounding area under the Proposed Action. Most of the construction, demolition, and renovation activities would take place on-installation, in industrial areas or adjacent to the airfield. The noise from construction equipment would be localized, short-term, and intermittent. The addition of approximately five Triton UAS flight operations per day would represent a negligible increase in flight operations at each installation. This increase in flight operations would create a less than 1-decibel (dB) increase in Day-Night Average Sound Levels (DNL), a barely noticeable change to the human ear. The small increase in operations when compared to the total existing operations at each airfield would not result in significant changes to the existing noise environment.

Air Quality: No significant impacts on local or regional air quality would be expected under the Proposed Action. The Air Quality Control Regions in which alternative installations are located are in attainment for all criteria air pollutants. Construction, demolition, and renovation activities would take place over two years and associated emissions would be short-term and temporary in nature. In 2019, Triton UAS flight operations would begin and personnel would continue relocating to the installation and the surrounding areas. Emissions from the Proposed Action would represent a negligible percentage of the air emissions inventoried locally in each county and the Air Quality Control Regions. None of the potential emissions would cause or contribute to a violation of any National Ambient Air Quality Standards. Therefore, no significant impacts on local or regional air quality are expected, and a formal conformity determination is not required.

In terms of greenhouse gases, implementing the Proposed Action would contribute directly to emissions of GHGs from the combustion of fossil fuels. Depending on the extent of construction, during demolition, construction, and clearing activities, between 539 and 731 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO<sub>2</sub>e) would be produced; once the home basing action is completed and all aircraft and personnel are at the station, about 740 metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions would be produced annually. Emissions of GHGs from the Proposed Action are similar among action alternatives and do not conflict with DoD, Navy, NASA, state, or local GHG goals and programs.

Climate change has important implications for Navy operations. Factors driving this include the potential impact of sea level rise on installations, operations, and plans; changing storm patterns and severity; and water and resource challenges. The potential effects of

the GHG emissions from the Proposed Action are by nature global and cumulative, as individual sources of GHG emissions are not large enough to have an appreciable effect on climate change. None of the action alternatives would introduce significant emissions to affect climate change. The DoD is planning to meet GHG reduction targets by developing energy efficiency in facilities, identifying new strategies to minimize GHG emissions, and using innovative approaches and renewable energy. As climate science advances, DoD, the U.S. Navy, and NASA will regularly evaluate climate change risks and opportunities in order to develop policies and plans to manage its effects on the DoD operating environment, missions, and facilities.

Public Health and Safety: No significant impacts on airfield safety or from Bird/Wildlife Aircraft Strike Hazard (BASH) would be expected under the Proposed Action. Triton UAS flight operations would be conducted in accordance with Federal Aviation Administration regulations and directives, specific operating manuals, and DoD Flight Information Publications. The Triton UAS flight operations would be conducted in existing controlled airspace; therefore, there would be no change in the existing accident potential zones. Each alternative location was selected based on criteria that included access to special use airspace and overwater operating areas that minimizes the potential for overflights of populated areas. Installation BASH plans include procedures to identify increased risks and provide decision aids to aircrews in judging whether to alter or discontinue flying operations as necessary. These measures minimize aircraft mishap risk.

Socioeconomics: No significant impacts on the socioeconomic environment would be expected under the Proposed Action. No significant impacts on housing or schools would be expected, although housing impacts would be more acute at NAS Key West where there is limited available affordable housing as discussed below. There would also be minor, beneficial impacts on the local economy from each action alternative. The addition of about 900 people would not cause significant changes to the existing local populations, although again, these impacts would be most pronounced at NAS Key West. The Triton personnel dependents who seek employment would contribute to the regional workforce and directly stimulate the local economy. Furthermore, the Proposed Action would result in beneficial impacts on the construction industry from increases in payroll, taxes, and the indirect purchase of goods and services. The current available capacity of the surrounding school districts would support the additional 184 school-aged children (i.e., ages 5-18) that would move to the area around each installation. Childcare services to support the approximate 110 pre-school children associated with Triton UAS personnel may be obtained through Navy Child Development Centers, which are available at NAS Key West and NS Mayport, or privately in the community.

Alternative 1 (NAS Key West) would have the greatest housing impacts of all the alternatives. Housing units (owner-occupied and rental)

may not be readily affordable given the Basic Allowance for Housing [BAH] for the area, especially for junior enlisted personnel. In addition, alternative 1 has the most limited housing availability. Under Alternative 2 (NS Mayport), area housing units (owner-occupied and rental) are affordable, but units may not be immediately available for purchase given the 2.6 percent owner-occupied vacancy rate. Rental units would be available for personnel based on the 10.6 percent rental vacancy rate. Under Alternative 3 (NASA WFF), an unaccompanied housing facility would need to be constructed in order to accommodate the approximate 116 unaccompanied junior enlisted personnel associated with Alternative 3. Area housing units (owner-occupied and rental) are affordable and available (22 percent) when considering the five surrounding counties. However, rental units may not be immediately available in the three counties closest to WFF because seasonal or recreational rentals appear to constrict long-term rental availability, and result in a 1.0 percent rental availability. Therefore, while not significant, there is potential for housing impacts at each location. Given that the personnel transition would occur in phases over a five-year period, the Navy would continue to assess any potential impacts to area housing markets throughout the transition.

Transportation: No significant impacts on local transportation networks would be expected under the Proposed Action. Construction vehicles and equipment would use commercial traffic entrances under each alternative. Once the home basing is completed, personnel traveling to and from the installation would not cause the level of service on local transportation networks to deteriorate. Additionally, with varying work schedules, deployment schedules, ride-sharing, and other traffic management initiatives, no significant transportation impacts are anticipated.

Biological Resources: No significant impacts on biological resources (wildlife, vegetation, or special status species) would be expected for Alternatives 2 (NS Mayport) and 3 (NASA WFF).

Endangered Species Act (ESA) consultations with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are complete for Alternatives 2 (NS Mayport) and 3 (NASA WFF). For Alternative 1 (NAS Key West), consultations have not been completed with U.S. Fish and Wildlife; however, the Navy's assessment is that Alternative 1 (NAS Key West) would not adversely affect protected species.

Under Alternative 1 (NAS Key West), the Navy determined that, pursuant to the ESA, federally listed species (i.e., Lower Keys marsh rabbit, American crocodile, silver rice rat, green sea turtle, hawksbill sea turtle, leatherback sea turtle, loggerhead sea turtle, piping plover, red knot, and roseate tern) may be affected, but are not likely to be adversely affected by this alternative. Under Alternative 2 (NS Mayport), the Navy determined that, pursuant to the ESA, federally listed species (i.e., green sea turtle, leatherback sea turtle, loggerhead sea turtle, piping plover, red knot, and wood stork) may be

affected, but are not likely to be adversely affected by this alternative. On 14 July 2016, U.S. Fish and Wildlife concurred with this determination. Under Alternative 3 (NASA WFF), the Navy and NASA determined that, pursuant to the ESA, the Proposed Action under Alternative 3 would have no effect on the federally listed northern long-eared bat.

Construction, demolition, and renovation activities would be conducted in industrial, developed areas of the installation, or adjacent to the airfield under each action alternative. Noise from the Proposed Action could result in short-term impacts on wildlife, migratory birds, and protected species; however, species using nearby habitat are expected to have become habituated to noise.

For construction and non-military readiness activities, no takes of migratory birds are anticipated. For operations, which are military readiness activities, the Navy has determined that the Proposed Action at any alternative location may result in takes of migratory birds, incidental to military readiness activities via aircraft strike. Based on previous statistics, bird aircraft strike incidents can be anticipated even with rigorous implementation of the BASH program. These takes would not result in a significant adverse effect on a population of a migratory bird species. Therefore, these takes comply with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA). No significant impacts on migratory birds or violations of the MBTA would be expected.

At each alternative location, no suitable bald or golden eagle habitat exists in the area proposed for construction. While bald eagles may be sighted in each alternative region, noise from flight operations would not be anticipated to adversely affect bald eagles because there would be an imperceptible increase in noise levels (less than 1 dB DNL). Additionally, the species is likely habituated to the noise associated with aircraft operating from each airfield. Implementation of each airfield's robust BASH plan minimizes the risk of an aircraft strike on the species. The Proposed Action would not result in a "take" of bald or golden eagles. The Proposed Action at any location would have no significant impact on bald eagles based on the short-term and localized nature of the construction activities and the lack of breeding, nesting, roosting or foraging habitat available within the project footprint. As a result, no permit is required under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act.

No impacts would be expected to coastal or aquatic species because this action does not involve activities on the shoreline or on/in the water.

Water Resources: No impacts on water resources (groundwater or surface water) would be expected under the Proposed Action. The Proposed Action would not result in significant impacts to groundwater as activities would not involve significant vegetation removal, soil compaction, or alter the natural drainage flow. No significant impacts on water quality, surface water bodies, wetlands, or floodplains would be expected. Localized increases in stormwater runoff could

potentially occur; however, any possible increases would not exceed the current capacities of stormwater systems at all alternative installations. Retention structures would be provided to collect stormwater from the newly developed area. A variety of stormwater management practices often referred to as "green infrastructure" or "low impact development," would be adopted to minimize stormwater effects.

Cultural Resources: No significant impacts on archaeological resources, historic properties, or traditional cultural properties would be expected under the Proposed Action. No traditional cultural properties have been recognized within the area for potential effects. After National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 consultations, state historic preservation officers concurred with Navy findings of "No Historic Properties Affected" for each action alternative. In the event that intact subsurface cultural resources are inadvertently discovered during construction or demolition activities, work would cease, the cultural resources would be evaluated for tribal interest and notification of the appropriate tribe(s), and National Register for Historic Places eligibility, and consultation would continue per 36 CFR parts 800.4 to 800.6.

Hazardous Materials and Wastes: No significant impacts on hazardous material and waste management would be expected under the Proposed Action. All hazardous wastes generated by construction and demolition activities would be handled under the existing Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA)-compliant waste management programs. Once operational, Triton UAS activities would be managed in accordance with installation Hazardous Materials Management Plans and Hazardous Waste Management Plans. For any restoration program sites coinciding with proposed construction, close coordination among the installation's Environmental Restoration Program leadership, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and state environmental protection offices would occur to avoid significant impacts.

Coastal Zone: No significant impacts to coastal zone resources would be expected under the Proposed Action. The Navy determined that the Proposed Action would be consistent, to the maximum extent practicable, with enforceable policies under each state coastal zone management program. Federal consistency determinations were prepared and delivered to the respective state agencies, and state concurrence was received for all three alternative locations.

Cumulative Impacts: Under the Proposed Action, no significant cumulative impacts would be expected from other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable Navy and non-Navy projects. Resource areas that would be impacted include noise, air quality, public health and safety, socioeconomics, transportation, biological resources, water resources, and hazardous materials and wastes. However, these cumulative impacts would not be considered significant because the impacts are minor, short-term, and/or temporary.

Under Alternative 1 (NAS Key West), the Navy reviewed past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions in the study area including ongoing airfield operations at Boca Chica Airfield, NAS Key West improvement projects, Key West International Airport flight operations, general population growth and the potential for increased tourism. The Navy determined that no significant cumulative impacts would be expected from other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable Navy and non-Navy projects. Specifically as to housing, an increase in Triton UAS personnel would likely add cumulative impacts to the tight market for owner-occupied homes when considered in conjunction with the other projects.

Under Alternative 2 (NS Mayport), the Navy reviewed past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions in the study area including homeporting actions, NS Mayport improvement projects, and general population growth in the region. The Navy determined that no significant cumulative impacts would be expected from other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable Navy and non-Navy projects. Specifically as to housing, an increase in Triton UAS personnel could add minor cumulative impacts to a tight market for owner-occupied homes when considered in conjunction with the other projects such as a potential aircraft carrier homeporting.

Under Alternative 3 (NASA WFF), the Navy reviewed past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions in the study area including ongoing E-2/C-2 airfield operations at the Main Base airfield, Wallops Research Park development, restricted airspace expansion, WFF Main Base improvement projects, and general population growth in the five county area around NASA WFF. The Navy determined that no significant cumulative impacts would be expected from other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable Navy and non-Navy projects. Specifically as to housing, an increase in Triton UAS personnel would likely add minor cumulative impacts to the rental market when considered in conjunction with the other projects. These impacts would be felt most in the three counties closest to WFF where seasonal rentals are less available. This is offset by a housing market that is comparatively open in counties located further from WFF but still within a 60 minute commuting distance.

### **Mitigation**

Based on the analysis contained in this EA, the Navy has determined that implementation of the Proposed Action would not result in significant impacts; therefore, there are no proposed mitigation measures except for those measures, programs, and procedures already in place to minimize environmental impacts from Navy activities and to comply with environmental requirements.

### **Public Outreach**

The Navy published a Draft EA Notice of Availability (NOA) in seven newspapers local to alternative home basing locations. Copies of the Draft EA were made available at nine local libraries on September 1, 2016, and the Draft EA was posted on <http://www.public.navy.mil/usff/>

environmental/Pages/NEPAprojects.aspx. Additionally, letters were mailed to stakeholders and a press release was issued to announce the Draft EA availability and the onset of the public review period. A 30-day comment period ran from September 1 to October 1, 2016. During the review period, 98 comments were received by email and U.S. Postal Service. Approximately ninety percent of the comments were in support of the Proposed Action. Remaining comments expressed concerns with the Proposed Action, and involved the following topics: socioeconomics (9 comments), noise (1 comment), cumulative effects (1 comment), and the role of the Triton UAS in the global war on terrorism (1 comment). The comments made on socioeconomics were in regard to housing availability and affordability in the Lower Florida Keys. Section 4.6 of the Final EA was revised in response to these comments. The one comment made regarding airfield noise is addressed in Section 6.1. As presented in the EA, there would be a barely noticeable, less than 1 dB DNL increase in noise levels with the addition of the Triton UAS at any of the three alternative airfields. Next, the Final EA was revised in response to the one comment made regarding proposed expansion of restricted airspace R-6604 C/D/E at NASA WFF. It was explained that the proposed expansion of restricted airspace at NASA WFF began in 2008 and was not associated with the home basing of the Triton UAS. Finally, in response to a comment made, it was reiterated in the Final EA that the Triton UAS does not carry weapons.

**Finding**

Alternative 2 (NS Mayport) is the preferred alternative. Based on the analysis presented in the EA, the Navy finds that implementation of Alternative 2 (NS Mayport) will not significantly impact the quality of the human or natural environment. Therefore, preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement will not be required.

The EA prepared by the Navy is on file and interested parties may obtain a copy via download from the project website:

<http://www.public.navy.mil/usff/environmental/Pages/NEPAprojects.aspx>

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Date

Elizabeth A Nashold  
Elizabeth Nashold  
U.S. Fleet Forces Command