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## Department of the Navy

### Notice of Record of Decision on the Realignment of Naval Air Station (NAS) Miramar, San Diego, California

**SUMMARY:** The Department of the Navy has decided to realign NAS Miramar into Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Miramar. This decision is made upon careful consideration of all comments on the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) prepared for the realignment action. After review of the administrative record and information received during the environmental review process, the Department of the Navy has determined that no new significant environmental information or circumstances exist. Consequently, the Department of the Navy has determined that a supplemental EIS is not warranted. It has been decided to implement the realignment action using the West-Ramp configuration (Alternative B), which was both the

preferred alternative and also the environmentally preferred alternative.

**DATES:** This ROD becomes effective December 2, 1996.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Additional information regarding this ROD or the Miramar realignment action may be obtained from Lieutenant Colonel George Martin at (619) 537-6679.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** The text of the entire ROD is provided as follows:

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#### 1. Introduction

The Department of the Navy (DoN) has been studying a proposal to realign Marine Corps Aviation assets from MCAS El Toro and MCAS Tustin to other locations in Southern California. The realignment would include Marine Corps aircraft, their dedicated personnel, equipment and support. The realignment would be undertaken in accordance with the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Act (BRAC) of 1990 (Pub. L. 101-510). The DoN has conducted extensive analysis of the proposal under Section 102(2) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 and the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations implementing NEPA procedures (40 C.F.R. 1500-1508). The process used for the analysis sought the views of the public and those Federal,

State and local agencies with special expertise. As a result of extensive interest shown by the public, the process was extended to provide the public with additional information and an additional opportunity to comment. Their comments have been carefully considered and have helped identify and resolve a number of issues and to sharpen the analysis. A number of the most important issues, and the manner in which they have been resolved, are set out in this Record of Decision.

Having reviewed the Final Environmental Impact Statement, the Supplemental Information Report, and all the comments and the administrative record in this matter, the Department of the Navy (DoN) announces its decision to proceed with the realignment of NAS Miramar to MCAS Miramar.

#### 2. Proposed Action

In compliance with the approved recommendations of the 1993 and 1995 Defense Base Closure Commissions, the proposed action is the relocation of Marine Corps aircraft, along with their dedicated personnel, equipment and support, from MCAS El Toro and MCAS Tustin to NAS Miramar and the conversion of NAS Miramar to MCAS Miramar. The relocation of aircraft and conversion from a Navy to Marine Corps Air Station involves: Replacement of Navy fixed-wing aircraft (including associated maintenance and support functions) designated for realignment to other Naval Air Stations with U.S. Marine Corps fixed-wing aircraft (including maintenance and support functions); the addition of rotary-wing (helicopter) aviation squadrons (including maintenance and support functions); construction of facilities to meet the requirements of the Marine Corps; use and modification of existing fixed-wing flight corridors; designation of new rotary-wing flight corridors, an increase in fixed-wing missions that involve carrying air-to-ground ordnance for use at training ranges; establishment of Confined Area Landing (CAL)/Mountainous Area Landing (MAL) sites; and adoption of Marine Corps flight procedures. Upon full implementation of the proposed action, MCAS Miramar will support approximately 256 aircraft (eight rotary-wing squadrons and nine fixed-wing squadrons), and approximately 11,000 personnel.

#### 3. Purpose and Need

The purpose and need of the proposed action is to comply with the 1993 and 1995 BRAC Commissions' recommendations for the closure of MCAS El Toro and MCAS Tustin and relocation of MCAS El Toro and MCAS

Tustin aircraft, along with their dedicated personnel, equipment, and support, in a manner that supports the Marine Corps force structure.

#### 4. Background

This action was initiated following Congress' approval of the 1993 recommendations of the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission established under the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Act of 1990, Public Law 101-510. Pursuant to that law, recommendations of the Commission become final if the President sends them to Congress and Congress does not reject them within 45 legislative days. Once recommendations become final, 10 U.S.C. 2904 requires that the closures and relocations must be implemented within six years. The 1993 recommendations included the closure of MCAS El Toro and direction to "Relocate its aircraft along with their dedicated personnel, equipment and support to other naval air stations, primarily, Naval Air Station (NAS) Miramar, California, and MCAS Camp Pendleton, California." Included in the same Commission action was a change to the 1991 BRAC Commission's recommendations for MCAS Tustin, which had named Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (MCAGCC) Twentynine Palms as one of the receiving sites for helicopter assets being realigned from MCAS Tustin. The BRAC 93 Commission deleted MCAGCC as a receiving site and directed relocation to "NAS North Island, NAS Miramar, or MCAS Camp Pendleton, California." In BRAC 95, the Commission again altered the receiving site for assets realigned from MCAS Tustin by striking the three potential sites listed in BRAC 93 and substituting "other air stations consistent with operational requirements."

The proposed action is one of several steps to implement the BRAC recommendations. In January 1994, the Marine Corps prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the temporary relocation of eight MCAS El Toro tactical F/A-18 squadrons and certain support elements to Miramar, replacing 12 squadrons of Navy F-14s. The EA concluded that the temporary relocation of the F/A-18s, operating within existing NAS Miramar flight procedures, would have no significant impact on the environment. A Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) was made in July 1994. The temporary relocation that was evaluated by the EA has since been completed. In another interim move subsequent to the BRAC 95 decision, and unrelated to the selection of permanent relocation sites,

all of MCAS Tustin's CH-46Es (medium lift helicopters) were temporarily relocated to MCAS El Toro in order to facilitate placing a significant portion of MCAS Tustin in caretaker status. The relocation of four of these medium lift helicopter squadrons to MCAS Camp Pendleton is the subject of a separate EIS.

The analysis undertaken for relocation of assets and conversion of NAS Miramar to MCAS Miramar in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) assumed that as many as eleven fixed-wing and ten rotary-wing squadrons would be assigned to Miramar (The Supplemental Information Report (SIR), discussed below, contained a typographical error that stated the DEIS and FEIS evaluated the relocation of nine vice ten rotary-wing squadrons to Miramar). The Marine Corps, through force structure decisions, has decommissioned one fixed-wing (F/A-18) squadron previously assigned to MCAS El Toro and transferred another fixed-wing (F/A-18) squadron to MCAS Iwakuni, Japan. In separate actions to implement the overall direction of BRAC and meet force structure requirements, one MCAS Tustin rotary-wing squadron has been relocated to MCAS New River, and another rotary-wing squadron has been relocated to Marine Corps Base (MCB), Hawaii. Thus, realignment will actually include only nine fixed-wing and eight rotary-wing squadrons. Consequently, much of the EIS analysis overstates the projected impacts for this action. Further clarification on the overstatement of impacts was provided in a Supplemental Information Report (SIR).

Although neither addressed by NEPA, nor directed by CEQ Regulations, the Department of the Navy determined that the use of a Supplemental Information Report to address comments on the FEIS would serve as a vehicle for a more thorough discussion of matters over which there remained public concern. The SIR and the public comment it generated would also provide the final decision maker with a more detailed analysis for consideration in coming to a decision, thereby furthering the purposes of NEPA. The SIR was published on September 6, 1996, with a 30 day public comment period.

The Department of the Navy received and has considered 277 letters from the interested public during the comment period on the FEIS. It also received and has considered 825 letters from the interested public during the comment period on the SIR. While the SIR substantially addressed comments

received on the FEIS, some of the primary issues are re-addressed in this Record of Decision.

#### 5. Alternatives

NEPA and the CEQ regulations require the Department of the Navy to study and evaluate a reasonable range of alternatives for accomplishing the purpose and need underlying the proposed action. Because the underlying purpose and need of the realignment of assets from MCAS El Toro and MCAS Tustin is to satisfy BRAC mandates designed to reduce infrastructure, costs, and personnel requirements, alternative sites that did not contribute to such reductions did not fall within the range of reasonable alternatives and did not warrant detailed, comparative analysis. For alternatives that were initially identified but subsequently eliminated from detailed study, regulations require the Department of the Navy only to discuss briefly the reasons for their having been eliminated.

Potential receiving sites for the assets to be realigned from MCAS El Toro and MCAS Tustin were screened on the basis of several criteria: (1) Realignment recommendations approved by the President and accepted by Congress in BRAC 93 and 95; (2) operational requirements; (3) infrastructure required to support the realigned assets; and, (4) personnel requirements.

To achieve the economies that were basic to BRAC, Marine Corps force structure relies on the location of installations to form interdependent, mutually supporting regional complexes on the East Coast, West Coast, and in the Pacific. In order to meet operational and mission requirements, the selected receiving site(s) should be in close proximity to the established regional complex. MCAS El Toro and MCAS Tustin are located within the West Coast regional complex. Receiving sites for the realigned assets therefore need to lie within the West Coast region. The Marine Corps regional complex on the West Coast is centered around MCB Camp Pendleton, CA.

Five possible locations were identified within the West Coast region: MCAS Camp Pendleton, NAS North Island, NAS Miramar, Naval Air Facility (NAF) El Centro, and March Air Reserve Base (March ARB). These five sites were then evaluated based upon operational requirements (including the ability to conduct aircraft carrier landing practice and access to high performance air combat maneuvering airspace), infrastructure (including identification of requirements for runways, hangars, and maintenance and support facilities,

as well as the cost of modernizing or building those facilities), and personnel requirements (including Congressional limitations on end-strength).

All locations except NAS Miramar were determined to be unreasonable and were eliminated from the range of alternatives that would be subjected to detailed study and analysis so that the analysis in the EIS could be focused upon reasonable alternatives. The FEIS discussed why the Department of the Navy determined that locations other than NAS Miramar could not reasonably achieve the purpose and need for the proposal. Further clarifying information on the criteria used to evaluate feasibility and the basis for eliminating alternatives from detailed discussion were provided in the SIR. An independent Department of Defense review also confirmed that locations other than NAS Miramar (specifically March ARB) could not reasonably achieve the purpose and need for the proposal.

The FEIS identified Miramar as the preferred location for the fixed-wing aircraft realigned from MCAS El Toro and most of the rotary-wing aircraft realigned from MCAS Tustin. Three alternative site configurations at MCAS Miramar (East Ramp (A), West Ramp (B), and East Ramp II (C)) were analyzed in detail. A no-action alternative, which would not realign aircraft from MCAS El Toro and MCAS Tustin and thereby prohibit closure, was not evaluated in the EIS because BRAC exempts from consideration under NEPA the need for closing a military installation and the need for realigning functions from closing installations to other receiving installations.

Some comments asserted that a no-action alternative should have been used to establish baselines for the proposed action. The suggested no-action alternative would consist of operating NAS Miramar at the reduced levels it has operated while the Navy realigns assets elsewhere. This no-action alternative would ignore the reasons for the reduced Navy operations. The Department of the Navy did develop and use a no-action alternative for NAS Miramar. Because the BRAC recommendations relocated Navy aircraft from NAS Miramar to make way for realigned Marine Corps aircraft, the no-action alternative considered the environmental impacts associated with operating NAS Miramar as if no Marine Corps aircraft were realigned there and it continued to operate entirely with Navy aircraft, using Navy procedures and operating at its historical usage levels. This no-action alternative was used as the basis against which to

measure the impacts of the proposed action.

A number of comments addressed the Department of the Navy's screening of potential sites other than NAS Miramar that might receive assets relocating from MCAS Tustin and MCAS El Toro, asserting that alternative locations should have been examined in depth. Most of these comments focused on the relocation of Marine Corps rotary-wing aircraft and recommended that the Department of the Navy relocate these aircraft to March ARB. Some of these comments referred to a December 12, 1994 study from the Commander, Marine Corps Air Bases Western Area (COMCABWEST). That study suggested that relocating the helicopters to March ARB would be cheaper than jointly relocating fixed-wing and rotary-wing aircraft to Miramar.

In response to these public comments, I carefully reviewed the selection and screening of feasible sites for the relocation of Marine Corps fixed-wing and especially rotary-wing aircraft. In particular, I reviewed the 1994 COMCABWEST cost study that was cited in several of the comments. I concluded that the 1994 COMCABWEST study was limited in scope, failed to include costs in both dollars and personnel that would be required to run an additional Marine Corps Air Station, and was based on assumptions that are now invalid due to closure and realignment decisions resulting from BRAC 95. The COMCABWEST study assumed that the majority of facilities at March ARB would be available to the Marine Corps. In fact, most facilities are not available to the Marine Corps and significant new construction, in particular hangars and pavement, would be required. It also assumed that the Navy would remain at Miramar, however, in accordance with BRAC, most Navy units have already relocated to various other sites. Finally, it assumed that the Marine Corps would be operating at March ARB as a tenant unit, not a host command. However, Air Force officials have stated that reserve forces cannot host large numbers of active duty forces and the active force would have to take control of the base with the reserve unit becoming a tenant.

In response to the public concern expressed about the extent of the alternatives analysis in the FEIS, the Deputy Secretary of Defense undertook an independent review of the resource implications of relocating Marine Corps helicopters. I have carefully studied that independent review, which concluded that the proposed relocation of fixed- and rotary-wing aircraft to Naval Air Station Miramar is significantly more

cost effective than relocating rotary-wing aircraft to March ARB. This independent review established that the non-recurring Department of Defense construction costs for relocating Marine Corps rotary-wing assets to March ARB exceed the costs of the proposed collocation at Miramar of the rotary-wing and fixed-wing by approximately \$250 million. After proponents of moving to March ARB questioned some portions of the analysis, additional review determined that the Marine Corps could avoid an estimated \$3 million annually in housing and subsistence allowances by moving the realigning rotary-wing squadrons to March ARB. The findings of the original OSD review, however, remain sound and the cost avoidance associated with housing and subsistence allowances did not alter the conclusion that annual recurring costs associated with the March ARB scenario are significantly higher than the recurring costs of collocating the rotary-wing squadrons with the fixed-wing squadrons at Miramar. As demonstrated in the SIR, comparing the costs of constructing the infrastructure and operating March ARB with Marine Corps rotary-wing aircraft over 20 years shows that it would cost between approximately \$430 and \$870 million more than if the rotary-wing assets are collocated with the fixed-wing squadrons at Miramar. The SIR also indicates that the relocation of rotary-wing aircraft to March ARB would trigger a net increase in Marine Corps requirements for approximately 780 military personnel as compared to the Miramar alternative. Since Marine Corps end-strength levels are fixed, this increase would have to come by drawing down other units, and would have an adverse effect on Marine Corps operations and readiness.

Some comments state that because March ARB is closer to MCAGCC Twentynine Palms than NAS Miramar, locating Marine Corps rotary-wing aircraft to March ARB is more advantageous to the Marine Corps for operational reasons. Predominately the rotary-wing aircraft that use MCAGCC Twentynine Palms do so as a deployment exercise in support of combined arms exercises, rather than as individual aircraft transiting to the area for routine training. During such exercises, the aircraft transit to MCAGCC, operate there for several days or weeks, then return to their home base. As such, there are no substantial savings or advantages to being closer to MCAGCC Twentynine Palms. Although March ARB is closer to MCAGCC Twentynine Palms, it is farther than

Miramar from the amphibious forces that the rotary-wing aircraft also support.

Several comments also suggested that there is a continuing need to conduct substantial training of Navy (as opposed to Marine Corps) pilots at NAS Miramar in support of the aircraft carriers homeported in San Diego. They state that this ongoing Navy training requirement would operationally preclude realignment of all of the currently proposed MCAS Tustin and MCAS El Toro assets to Miramar. These comments argue that these operational requirements can only be met using NAS Miramar and thus bar a realignment proposal that would use substantially all of Miramar's capacity for Marine Corps operations, particularly rotary-wing operations. As explained in the SIR, the Navy has determined that it can train its fleet aviation assets without relying on MCAS Miramar. Most of the individual squadron training, including practice carrier landings, is conducted in the vicinity of the Navy home bases (such as NAS Oceana and NAS Lemoore). To the extent that additional shore-side training is required after units deploy to the carriers, it can be accomplished using Navy air stations and air fields in California. Navy use of MCAS Miramar will be minimal, and has been accounted for in the analysis in the FEIS.

Very late in the process, the Department of the Navy received a comment on the independent review performed by the Deputy Secretary of Defense. The comment enclosed a report that purported to show that moving the rotary-wing assets to March ARB would be less expensive than realigning them to MCAS Miramar as proposed. Careful review of this report showed it is generally based on incorrect data, inaccurate assumptions, and inappropriate cost allocations and therefore results in faulty conclusions. For example, the report relies heavily on generalized ratios developed from personnel or aircraft loading and not on specific requirements and thus incorrectly assumes that a high percentage of new construction at MCAS Miramar can be attributed to the inclusion of rotary-wing aircraft. The Department of the Navy's cost estimates for MCAS Miramar, by way of contrast, are based on detailed project plans.

In consideration of the public comments received on the FEIS, the SIR and the independent review by the Deputy Secretary of Defense, I took a hard look at sites other than Miramar as receiving sites for realigning Marine Corps aircraft. I have concluded that no

other site is operationally preferable to Miramar and that detailed analysis of other receiving sites clearly would have been inconsistent with BRAC and Marine Corps force structure plans designed to reduce infrastructure, costs and personnel requirements. The locations other than Miramar could not reasonably achieve the purpose and need for the realignment. Collocation of fixed-wing and rotary-wing aircraft at Miramar best reduces excess infrastructure; reduces construction and base operating costs; and makes use of common support assets, thereby reducing personnel requirements.

#### 6. Implementation

Implementation of the proposed action at Miramar would include the conversion of aviation operations from Navy procedures to Marine Corps procedures, construction of necessary facilities to support Marine Corps operations, and establishment of remote landing sites in East Miramar.

##### *a. Changes to Aviation Operations and Practices Used by the Navy*

Implementation of the proposed action will involve changes in aviation operations at Miramar, beyond the simple addition of Marine Corps fixed-wing and rotary-wing aircraft and the associated personnel and maintenance and support facilities. The NW/SE runway (Runways 6L/24R) will remain the principal runway for take-off and landing. The proposed action will also allow for restricted use of the East/West runway (Runway 10/28) by rotary-wing and some fixed-wing aircraft. Although no departures for fixed-wing aircraft will be allowed on this runway, it will still be available for rotary-wing operations as a helicopter landing pad and for fixed-wing arrested gear landings only. Changes to flight corridor parameters are also planned. Aircraft departing to the north/northeast using the Julian corridor will increase altitude after takeoff at a faster rate. The fixed-wing usage rate for the Seawolf corridor will decrease from approximately 75% to 50% of total fixed-wing departures while the fixed-wing usage rate for the Julian corridor will increase from approximately 25% to 50% of total fixed-wing departures.

The following rotary-wing flight corridors will be added: Seawolf, IFR Racetrack, Yuma, I-15, GCA Box, north touch and go, and south touch and go. Based on the original proposal for realigning eleven fixed wing squadrons and ten rotary wing squadrons, the average daily use of these corridors (in operations per day) was projected to be approximately 26 for Seawolf, 3 for IFR

Racetrack, 14 for Yuma, 23 for GCA Box, 14 for I-15, 36 for north touch and go, and 87 for south touch and go. The rotary-wing assets will be serviced at the West end of the airfield facilities and the fixed-wing assets will be at the East end of the airfield facilities.

##### *b. Construction*

Implementation of the proposed action will require a reconfiguration and expansion of existing aircraft aprons and pavements, flightline facilities, and associated support facilities to meet mission requirements. Major flightline expansion will occur at the west end of the hangar complex where the helicopter squadrons will be located, while moderate flightline expansion will occur to the east with the construction of a new hangar and apron for the single squadron of KC-130 aircraft. The Marine Corps plans to use the existing ground training areas, consistent with current NAS Miramar training area guidelines and procedures. A Mountainous Area Landing (MAL) site and Confined Area Landing (CAL) site will be located in East Miramar, in disturbed areas currently supporting various training and maintenance facilities. Under the proposed action, helicopter landing, takeoff and hovering activities will occur at these locations and represent a new land use.

Several construction projects have been proposed to accommodate assets relocating to MCAS Miramar from MCAS Tustin and MCAS El Toro. These projects include a new Air Traffic Control Tower, Airfield Parking Pavement (Aprons), Bachelor Enlisted Quarters, Administration and Training Facilities, Community Support and Dining Facilities, Aircraft Maintenance Complex, Ordnance Storage Facilities, Operational Support Complex, Utilities Improvements, Base Maintenance Facilities, Storage Facilities, and Tactical Van Pad Facilities.

In addition to the facilities proposed at the Main Station, the proposed action will also involve the construction of facilities defined as remote facilities, located at both the Main Station and East Miramar. Remote facilities that will be located at the Main Station include the heavy lift pad, Crash Fire Rescue training (to be conducted at the existing facility), Direct Support Stock Control, and the Defense Reutilization Marketing Office. Remote facilities that will be located in East Miramar include the ordnance facilities (ordnance complex and Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) training facilities), Mountainous Area Landing site, Confined Area Landing site, and the Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical training site. The Marine

Corps plans to use the existing ground training areas in East Miramar in a manner consistent with current NAS Miramar training area guidelines and procedures.

#### 7. Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures

The impacts analyzed in the EIS are grouped according to their degree of significance: residual significant impacts (those that cannot be mitigated below the threshold of significance); impacts mitigated below the threshold of significance; and impacts that are not significant. As discussed below, the Marine Corps will implement a number of mitigative measures to avoid or minimize environmental harm from the proposed action.

##### *a. Residual Significant Impacts*

###### *i. Noise*

I have taken a very close look at the issue of noise, recognizing that many members of the public are concerned about the noise of helicopter operations at a future MCAS Miramar. Although Miramar has operated as a busy master jet base for decades and has successfully managed the attendant noise, the introduction of substantial numbers of helicopter operations has raised some additional concerns among some members of the public. These concerns arise from the perceived differences in the noise and the addition of new flight corridors. As discussed below, the Department of the Navy has worked hard to assess the impact of noise and to mitigate it as much as practical. Although the mitigation measures should reduce noise impacts, the noise from aircraft operations cannot be eliminated entirely.

Noise impacts were assessed using the State of California's standard, the Community Noise Equivalent Level (CNEL), expressed in units of decibel (dB). The State of California's Title 21, Subchapter 6, Section 5006 states: "The level of noise acceptable to a reasonable person residing in the vicinity of an airport is established as a community noise equivalent level (CNEL) value of 65 dB for purposes of these regulations. This criterion level has been chosen for reasonable persons residing in urban residential areas where houses are of typical California construction and may have windows partially open. It has been selected with reference to speech, sleep and community reaction." Section 5014 describes the land uses that are incompatible within the noise impact boundaries. It provides that noise exposure levels less than 65 dB CNEL are generally compatible for noise

sensitive land uses, including residential areas and schools. Even after mitigation, the proposed action will result in significant on-base and off-base noise impacts related to fixed-wing aircraft operations. Noise contours defining the areas of impact in 5 dB increments were developed using the NOISEMAP model and projected operational tempo data.

The outer limits of the mapped noise contours are related to fixed-wing aircraft. Rotary-wing (helicopter) aircraft noise contours fall entirely within fixed-wing aircraft CNEL noise contours. Noise impacts based upon the 65 dB CNEL standard are therefore associated with fixed-wing aircraft. Noise contours that will result from the realignment action for only rotary-wing aircraft are provided on page F-71 of Appendix F, Volume I of the FEIS.

Further reductions in noise levels compared to the noise levels that were calculated originally (and set out below) will result from the disestablishment of one F/A-18 squadron and the transfer of another to Japan. Elimination of the CH-53D operational squadron (realigned to MCB Hawaii) and the CH-53 FRS squadron (realigned to MCAS New River, NC and MCBH, HI) will also result in a substantial reduction in touch and go operations, and consequently in the projected noise levels attributable to those aircraft.

Specific areas of concern are:

(a) *Noise Impacts to Housing.* The total acreage within the 65 dB Community Noise Equivalent Level (CNEL) contour will decrease by approximately 305 acres; however, the majority of the 65 dB CNEL acreage decreases will occur in East Miramar where no homes are located. Approximately 43 homes currently located within the existing 65 dB CNEL contour will fall outside that contour after the realignment action and will experience a decrease in noise. Conversely, approximately 128 homes currently located outside of the existing 65 dB CNEL contour will fall within that contour after the realignment action and will experience an increase in noise. Overall, the realignment action will result in a net increase of approximately 85 homes within the 65 dB CNEL contour. Even though the California CNEL is not exceeded, the Department of the Navy will continue to assess noise impacts in affected housing areas to determine what future mitigation measures may be necessary.

(b) *Noise Impacts to Schools.* The Department of the Navy has looked carefully at potential noise impacts to schools. No public school will fall within the 65 CNEL contour as a result

of the realignment action. However, various San Diego area school districts commented that the increased noise from aviation operations could require sound attenuation. The California requirement for sound attenuation is based on the CNEL noise standard rather than proximity to a flight corridor. I reviewed these comments, carefully considering the importance of schools to our communities. As described above, the State of California Code of Regulations, Title 21, provides that noise exposure levels less than 65 CNEL are compatible for noise sensitive land uses, including schools. Noise levels below 65 dB CNEL do not automatically trigger a requirement for sound attenuation. Nonetheless, the Department of the Navy is fully committed to continuing to work closely with the Miramar Technical Advisory Committee. The Advisory Committee, consisting of representatives of communities surrounding Miramar, works with the Marine Corps to mitigate and/or reduce impacts from Marine Corps aviation operations on areas surrounding Miramar. The Advisory Committee is ideally suited to review Miramar's operational impacts on schools. The Advisory Committee has been meeting regularly since May 1996, and has already successfully achieved noise mitigation measures such as increasing the altitudes of Marine Corps rotary-wing air routes.

(c) *Noise Impacts to Sleep and Speech.* A concern was raised in public comments that the EIS section regarding sleep and speech disturbance did not include mitigation measures. In addition to analyzing noise impacts under the CNEL standard, the Department of the Navy also measured noise impacts using Sound Exposure Level (SEL) metrics. SEL can be used as an indicator of annoyance factors such as sleep disturbance and speech interference, but cannot be used to "predict long-term human health impacts." ("Federal Agency Review of Selected Airport Noise Analysis Issues", Federal Interagency Committee on Noise, August, 1992). There are no established noise thresholds of significance for sleep disturbance and speech interference. Unlike the case with the CNEL standard, judging sleep disturbance and speech interference is subjective. Nonetheless, the Department of the Navy recognizes that sleep disturbance and speech interference may occur in some residential areas outside the boundary of MCAS Miramar. In an effort to more fully inform the public and ensure the impacts were fully considered in the

decision-making process, the Department of the Navy voluntarily collected SEL data to provide additional analysis on sleep disturbance and speech interference. Information on the impacts to the 17 representative test locations is presented in Table 4.11-9 of the FEIS. The Marine Corps has continued to study the impacts of rotary-wing operations and to meet with community representatives to understand their concerns better. The Marine Corps has modified its procedures to accommodate these concerns. For example, as discussed below, the altitude of some flight corridors has been raised. The Marine Corps will continue to meet with community leaders and elected officials to seek ways in which noise impacts may be further reduced.

(d) *Mitigation for Noise Impacts.* A primary consideration for the Department of the Navy was to configure operations to promote land use compatibility, as defined under California CNEL standards, consistent with the City of San Diego's Comprehensive Land Use Plan (CLUP) for Miramar. In order to minimize noise exposure from aviation operations to the surrounding communities, the Marine Corps will incorporate the following noise mitigation measures into its aircraft operations procedures: (1) Reduce aircraft power settings for Ground Control Approach operations for F/A-18s (refer to Figure 4.10-4 in the FEIS); (2) discontinue use of afterburners by departing aircraft upon reaching the MCAS Miramar boundaries whenever possible; (3) limit repetitive "pattern" work to normal operating hours, except where necessary to meet operational requirements; (4) increase the altitude at which the aircraft are held in the Julian Standard Instrument Departure from 3,000 to 6,000 feet MSL; (5) divert some helicopter flights from neighboring communities through a flight corridor (Yuma Corridor) south of the runways to reduce the effects of helicopter noise; (6) eliminate a departure route (SVFR Yuma departure route) from the I-15 corridor to the east; (7) raise the outbound altitude on the Yuma departure from 2,600 feet to 3,000 feet and the inbound altitude from 2,100 feet to 3,500 feet; (8) raise the outbound altitude of the Interstate 15 corridor from 2,600 feet to 3,000 feet and the inbound altitude from 2,100 feet to 3,500 feet MSL; and (9) relocate the primary route between MCAS Miramar and MCAS Camp Pendleton further offshore, at a minimum distance of one mile from the coast.

These mitigation measures have already been approved by the FAA. The

Marine Corps will continue to attempt to mitigate noise impacts by working with the FAA on further changes to the air routes, including a request to raise the altitude of the Seawolf corridor.

(e) *Additional Testing and Future Analysis.* Several comments requested that additional testing and future noise monitoring be accomplished. The Marine Corps will continue to examine all operational activities for ways to minimize noise impacts to the surrounding communities, perform a new noise analysis in the year 2000, and maintain a noise complaint hotline for the public. The noise analysis in the year 2000 will come shortly after the realignment of MCAS Miramar is completed.

I recognize that because noise perception is subjective and models are imperfect, some households will perceive more noise as a result of the proposed realignment regardless of what the models may indicate. Some individuals may even perceive this noise as significant. But, as explained above and discussed with the public in several meetings, the Department of the Navy recognizes these concerns, has already taken significant steps to mitigate the noise impacts, and will continue to analyze noise impacts and work with the public to mitigate any future problems.

ii. *Biology (Vernal Pools—Habitat).* Vernal pools consist of three distinct resources: the habitat (watershed), which is addressed here, the basins (wetlands), and the species associated with vernal pools. Both the basins and the associated species are addressed in section 7.b.(iii), below. Vernal pool habitat is the only biological resource that will be significantly impacted. The proposed action will result in the loss of approximately 4.7 acres of vernal pool habitat, which cannot be fully mitigated. Less than three percent of historical vernal pool habitat remains in San Diego County. The proposed action will result in further depletion of vernal pool habitat. The amount of habitat being impacted is considered to be significant. Mitigation measures are discussed in paragraph 7.b.(iii).

iii. *Community Services and Utilities (Schools).* Of the projected net increase of 3,875 personnel associated with the proposed action, approximately 197 will be civilians who will be housed off-base, independent of military personnel. The resulting net increase will be 3,150 enlisted and 528 officers. It is estimated that a net increase of 1,698 school-aged dependents at MCAS Miramar will be introduced to the schools of San Diego County upon implementation of the proposed action. Insofar as these

additional personnel choose to purchase or rent existing homes or apartments in the local community, no impacts will occur since developer impact fees, which are used to fund school districts, were or will be paid at the time of construction.

The Department of the Navy Military Family Housing in the greater San Diego region is managed under a shared-pool system, whereby the Marine Corps will compete on an equal basis with Navy for available units in that pool, regardless of actual location within the region. If military personnel associated with the proposed action choose to live in existing Military Family Housing, their school-aged dependents will not impact the San Diego school system as these children have already been factored into the capacity of the school district. A proposal is being considered as part of the Fiscal Year 1998 budget to construct approximately 166 units of Military Family Housing on or near MCAS Miramar. This proposal is part of a regional housing plan and is not a component of the conversion of NAS Miramar to MCAS Miramar. If these 166 units of Military Family Housing are constructed on-base, up to approximately 80 school-aged dependents could be added to the schools in San Diego County. Most of the schools in the vicinity of NAS Miramar are operating either at or near enrollment capacity. Even adding only 80 children could be significant. To reduce potential cumulative impacts to school capacity, the Marine Corps will apprise potentially affected schools of any military family housing construction programs approved in the vicinity of MCAS Miramar in an effort to assist the schools in planning for an increase in student population. Any proposal to construct military family housing at MCAS Miramar will be evaluated in separate NEPA documentation.

#### *b. Mitigated to Below the Threshold of Significance*

##### *(i) Geology and Soils*

As discussed in the FEIS, the proposed action will include incorporating appropriate erosion control measures and proper excavation techniques to ensure protection of soil resources. The proposed action will not affect geologic resources as the facilities will be designed to reduce the potential for land slides and other adverse geological activities. No significant impacts to soil will occur as a result of implementing the proposed action.

### (ii) Water Quality

As discussed in the FEIS, appropriate measures will be implemented to ensure that potential releases of fuels are minimized. The installation spill response plan will be updated to cover the new facilities. No significant impacts to water quality will occur as a result of implementing the proposed action.

### (iii) Biology

The Department of the Navy has carefully studied the potential impacts of the proposed action on endangered species and wetlands and in consultation with the requisite agencies, has developed and will implement appropriate measures to protect these sensitive resources. As discussed in section 7.a.(ii), above, vernal pools consist of three distinct resources: The habitat (watershed) discussed in section 7.a.(ii), the basins (wetlands), and the species associated with the basins. This section discussed the basins and the associated species. The proposed action will impact vernal pool wetlands and species because of the loss of the basins. The Department of the Navy will take a number of actions to mitigate these impacts below a level of significance.

Based upon consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), three federally-listed endangered/threatened species and two species proposed for listing as endangered/threatened were identified as present on NAS Miramar. These endangered species that are included are the California gnatcatcher (gnatcatcher), the endangered San Diego button-celery (button-celery), and the endangered San Diego mesa mint (mesa mint). The San Diego fairy shrimp (fairy shrimp) and the quino checkerspot butterfly (butterfly), both of which are proposed for listing as endangered, were also included in the consultation.

The Department of the Navy prepared a Biological Assessment on these five species and other biological resources. Information provided to USFWS in the Biological Assessment is summarized in the DEIS, FEIS, and SIR. Specifically, the DEIS, FEIS, and SIR discussed the existing condition of these threatened and endangered species as well as other sensitive species and their habitat in considerable detail. The DEIS, FEIS, and SIR identified the impacts associated with the proposed action and discussed mitigation measures that would reduce the potential for adverse impacts on the threatened and endangered species and their habitat.

During consultation with USFWS, the Marine Corps provided a list of 20

species and habitat conservation measures that were incorporated into the proposed action. Six measures dealt with general conservation measures (e.g., hiring a qualified project biologist, marking sensitive habitat areas, prohibiting entry into sensitive areas, conducting surveys for other species). Nine measures dealt with protecting vernal pools (e.g., seasonal restrictions on construction during the rainy season, mitigation ratios, development of plans). Five protective measures dealt with protection of the gnatcatcher and the coastal sage scrub where it lives (e.g., seasonal restrictions on clearing gnatcatcher habitat during the breeding season, mitigation ratios, revegetation, a study of the potential impact of helicopter noise, and an explicit commitment to re-initiate formal consultation if the helicopter study finds significant impacts).

On April 11, 1996, the USFWS issued a Biological Opinion in which it concluded that the proposed action is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the gnatcatcher, button-celery, mesa mint, or fairy shrimp. The USFWS also concluded that the quino checkerspot butterfly is unlikely to occur on the Station and therefore any adverse effect on the butterfly is unlikely. The USFWS Biological Opinion describes the potential effects, direct and indirect, that the proposed action would have on the species. In rendering the Biological Opinion, the USFWS determined that the Marine Corps will undertake the mitigation measures described in the FEIS and the Biological Opinion and that the Marine Corps has committed to developing and implementing a Multi-Species Habitat Management Plan (MHMP) for MCAS Miramar consistent with the requirements of the Sikes Act. The MHMP, which the Marine Corps will develop in conjunction with the USFWS, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE), and the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG), will be designed to conserve natural resources onboard MCAS Miramar on a day-to-day basis. The MHMP will deal with all natural resources, but is especially concerned with threatened and endangered species and their habitat. The MHMP is to be submitted to the USFWS, ACOE and CDFG by October 1998. The MHMP is designed to enhance biological diversity on the Station, while simultaneously supporting the Marine Corps mission at MCAS Miramar.

The Biological Opinion also includes an Incidental Take statement which describes taking that is incidental to and not intended as part of the agency

action. The Incidental Take statement includes three Reasonable and Prudent Measures that the USFWS determined are necessary and appropriate to minimize incidental take: (i) The Marine Corps shall minimize destruction of gnatcatcher and fairy shrimp habitat and provide compensation for unavoidable impacts; (ii) the Marine Corps shall minimize impacts to occupied gnatcatcher territories during construction activities; and (iii) the Marine Corps shall obtain a permit from the ACOE, pursuant to section 404 of the Clean Water Act, prior to any filling of vernal pools. The Marine Corps will comply with all terms and conditions associated with this permit.

The Incidental Take statement also contains detailed terms and conditions that implement the Reasonable and Prudent Measures. These parallel and sometimes strengthen the mitigation measures described in the FEIS. The terms and conditions will be incorporated into the final Biological Mitigation and Monitoring Plan, which must be approved by the USFWS and the ACOE. The list of terms and conditions is set out in the Incidental Take statement, which is part of the Biological Opinion. The Marine Corps will comply with all terms and conditions articulated in the Biological Opinion.

Two comments addressed the reduction in the width of the wildlife corridor in Rose Canyon as a result of sewer line installation as part of the proposed action. After review of a number of factors, the Department of the Navy determined that the impact will not be significant. Corridors narrower than 400 feet are less likely to be used by wildlife, as indicated by the Baldwin Otay Ranch Wildlife Corridor Studies prepared by Ogden. The portion of Rose Canyon that may be affected is toward the head of the canyon. Wildlife that utilize this canyon must cross Kearny Villa Road and go underneath Interstate 15 (via a tunnel). The current corridor width of 250 feet provides limited habitat opportunities to wildlife. Reduction of Rose Canyon is not expected to adversely affect wildlife. In accordance with the Biological Opinion, the Marine Corps is considering construction methods to reduce impacts to Rose Canyon.

Some comments suggested the discussion of the potential effects of the proposed action on endangered and threatened species was deficient because the FEIS did not include the biological information in the Biological Opinion and the MHMP. These comments expressed concern that the decision maker should have the

information in the Biological Opinion and MHMP before reaching a final decision. The Marine Corps received a draft Biological Opinion prior to publishing the FEIS, and consequently the FEIS contained all of the significant biological impacts and a majority of the mitigation and monitoring requirements contained in the Final Biological Opinion issued by the USFWS on April 11, 1996. The Biological Opinion was discussed in the SIR and I have fully considered it in making the decision on realigning Marine Corps aviation assets.

Some comments suggested that the study of effects of helicopter noise on gnatcatchers should be completed before a decision to proceed is made. Given the information already known, the USFWS no jeopardy determination, and the mitigation agreed upon and set out in the USFWS Biological Opinion, I have concluded that the proposed action can safely proceed pending further study. As set out in the SIR, the Marine Corps is committed to studying the effects of noise on gnatcatchers and has already begun the research. The study is expected to last five years and will cost approximately \$600,000. Given the commitment of the Marine Corps to immediately undertake formal consultation if significant impacts are discovered, the incomplete information is not essential to a reasoned choice among the alternatives at this time.

#### (iv) Traffic

One off-base intersection and five on-base intersections will experience higher traffic volumes resulting in a significant impact as a result of the proposed action. Increases in off-base traffic will occur at the intersection of Miramar Road and Mitscher Way at the North Gate, which will worsen the Level of Service (LOS) rating from D to E in the evening peak hours.

The Department of the Navy will implement the traffic mitigation measures discussed in the FEIS (4.12–9 & 10) and SIR to mitigate the impacts to below the threshold level of significance. The Department of the Navy has decided to install a traffic signal without the delay associated with conducting further studies. Construction traffic represents a temporary and nominal increase in traffic volumes; therefore, impacts to the off-base and on-base circulation system will not occur during construction.

The California Department of Transportation's comments to the FEIS included a request for additional traffic studies. The technical traffic study, as discussed in Section 4.12 of both the DEIS and FEIS, was conducted using the most current traffic counts available,

approved trip generation and trip distribution assumptions, and the Highway Capacity Manual methodology for intersection analysis. The study was sufficient to determine the proposed action's off-base impacts. Although one comment on the SIR suggested that another computerized study of traffic is necessary, I have concluded that the methods the Department of the Navy used, which were specifically tailored to the Miramar area, were more accurate than the suggested study would be and thus additional traffic studies are not warranted.

#### (v) Community Services and Utilities (Potable Water)

The demand on the potable water distribution system is expected to increase as a result of the proposed action. The existing system is not adequate to accommodate the demands of the proposed action. To provide an adequate water supply, the Marine Corps will use the backup connection from the San Diego water system as a full-time connection. The City of San Diego has not stated a concern regarding the use of this connection.

#### c. Impacts That Are Not Significant

##### i. Air Quality

The San Diego Air Basin is federally classified as a serious ozone non-attainment area and a moderate carbon monoxide (CO) non-attainment area. Pursuant to Section 176(c) of the Clean Air Act, US EPA promulgated a final rule "Determining Conformity of General Federal Actions to State or Federal Implementation Plans" (General Conformity rule), 58 F.R. 63214 (Nov 30, 1993) (40 C.F.R. Parts 51 and 93). A conformity applicability analysis of the air emissions associated with the proposed action was conducted. As elaborated on in the SIR, the conformity applicability analysis determined that air emissions associated with the proposed action (reduced by the amount of emissions associated with the departing U.S. Navy aircraft) are: (1) Below de minimis levels (i.e., the net changes in emissions of criteria pollutants do not exceed threshold levels established in the General Conformity Rule); and, (2) not regionally significant (they do not exceed 10% of the San Diego Air Basin's total emissions inventory for any applicable criteria pollutant). Consequently, the proposed action is not subject to the General Conformity Rule. (FEIS, § 4.2 and FEIS Appendix B)

Although the General Conformity rule does not require publication of an applicability analysis that demonstrates

emissions are de minimis, the Department of the Navy published a summary of its conformity applicability analysis in both the DEIS and FEIS to more fully inform the public. (DEIS/FEIS, § 4.2 and DEIS/FEIS Appendix B).

Several comments expressed concerns regarding the Department of the Navy's conformity applicability analysis and air quality impact analysis under NEPA. Particular issues of concern included: (1) The selection of 1990 for use in calculation of the net emissions for the conformity applicability analysis; (2) why the emissions in the FEIS differed from the emissions budget in the San Diego State Implementation Plan (SIP); (3) why emission estimates in the DEIS and the FEIS for helicopter emissions differed; (4) whether all appropriate types of emission sources were included in the applicability analysis; and (5) whether the methodologies used to calculate emissions were proper. In its comments on the SIR and in response to a public inquiry, EPA Region 9 requested additional information to resolve several issues on how the total of the direct and indirect emissions for the proposal were calculated.

*Use of 1990 to determine net emissions.* In conducting a conformity applicability analysis for the proposed action, the Department of the Navy selected 1990 as the most appropriate year to reflect Navy aircraft operations and activities at Miramar as a fully operational Naval Air Station in normal circumstances. As such, 1990 was used as a basis to calculate emissions increases and decreases caused by the proposed action; i.e., the "net" emissions considering all incoming and outgoing direct and indirect emissions. The "netting" of emissions in this manner appropriately accounts for the total direct and indirect emissions associated with the proposed action and is in accordance with provisions of the General Conformity Rule. The Department of the Navy's use of 1990 to analyze net emissions is also consistent with the San Diego Air Pollution Control District's (APCD) use of 1990 for determining emissions inventories.

*Difference between the FEIS and the SIP—use of best available data instead of SIP estimates.* In conducting its conformity applicability analysis, the Department of the Navy did not use emission estimates found in the San Diego SIP air emissions budget. With San Diego APCD's concurrence, the Department of the Navy calculated the emissions for 1990 that more accurately estimated emissions at NAS Miramar than those found in the San Diego SIP. Table B–1 in the FEIS, "1990 Annual Air Quality Emissions at NAS

Miramar," identified the specific Navy and EPA technical sources (which did not include the SIP) that the Department of the Navy used to calculate emissions. The section of that table entitled "Aircraft Emissions", explains how the Department of the Navy calculated aircraft emissions for the year 1990. Operational data were based on definitive studies, specific aircraft types, and defined aircraft operating characteristics. The proposed realignment does not violate any emission reduction targets for military aircraft, since no reduction targets exist in the SIP.

*Differences in emissions figures for helicopters between the DEIS and FEIS.* Some comments questioned why estimates for emissions from helicopters varied between the DEIS and the FEIS. The San Diego APCD responded during the public review period of the Draft EIS with questions regarding rotary-wing emissions and the inversion layer height, which is at 2,000 feet for six months and 3,000 feet for six months of the year. The FEIS addressed these concerns by calculating rotary-wing aircraft emissions up to 3,000 feet year-round and no further comments were received from the SDAPCD on this issue. This change in altitude of the inversion layer accounts for the difference in rotary-wing aircraft emission estimates found in the DEIS and FEIS.

*Inclusion of direct and indirect emissions in conformity applicability analysis.* In performing either a conformity determination or an analysis to determine the applicability of the requirement for a conformity determination, an agency does not have to include every indirect emission that could be associated with a project. Implementing regulations reasonably limit the reasonably foreseeable indirect emissions that must be considered to those that practicably are subject to control by the agency in the normal course of its mission. The Department of the Navy calculated the direct and indirect emissions associated with the proposed realignment that were both reasonably foreseeable and practicably controlled under the Department of the Navy's use of Miramar as a military airfield. The Department of the Navy has no "continuing program responsibility" for most offbase indirect emissions within the meaning of the regulations governing conformity determinations.

*Appropriate methodologies.* I carefully reviewed the public comments on the air analysis and conformity applicability analysis in the DEIS, FEIS and SIR. In view of these comments, I

reviewed and took a hard look at the Department of the Navy's method for estimating air emissions and the supporting data and calculations. The Department of the Navy's method for calculating aircraft emissions applies the following elements: number of aircraft operations; type or mode of operation (power setting); number and type of aircraft engines per aircraft; time in mode; and, corresponding emission factors. The emission factors were obtained from studies conducted by the Navy Aircraft Environmental Support Office (AESO) that are referenced in the EPA "Compilation of Air Pollutant Emission Factors (AP-42)."

After receipt of comments on the SIR, the Department of the Navy reviewed the applicability analysis and found that the original analysis assumed that the E-2/C-2 Navy aircraft currently stationed at NAS Miramar would leave the air basin. No final decision has been made, however, on relocation of the E-2/C-2 aircraft and they potentially could remain in the air basin. To determine the impact if the E-2/C-2 aircraft remain, the emissions were recalculated including the E-2/C-2 emissions. Even with these emissions included, the analysis showed that emissions would still be below de minimis thresholds established by the General Conformity Rule. This analysis was very conservative, because it did not reduce projected emissions to account for four Marine squadrons that were moved outside the air basin. The original analysis included eleven fixed-wing and ten rotary-wing squadrons. Subsequently, two fixed-wing and two rotary-wing squadrons were decommissioned or relocated to other sites outside the air basin. Thus emissions can reasonably be expected to be lower still.

In response to its comments on the SIR, the Department of the Navy provided EPA Region 9 with a letter providing additional explanation, summarized above, clarifying the way it conducted the applicability analysis, addressing the issues that EPA felt it was unable to resolve, and offering to provide the underlying data for the analysis. On November 14, 1996, EPA Region 9 responded that although the applicability determination is the responsibility of the action proponent, it had reviewed the information provided by the Department of the Navy's letter and determined that the methods used by the Department of the Navy to determine the "total of direct and indirect emissions" from the proposed action was appropriate. The San Diego Air Pollution Control District had indicated its concurrence in the

methods used by the Department of the Navy in earlier correspondence.

A further comment on the air quality analysis was received on November 22, 1996. It continued to challenge the accuracy of the Department of the Navy's estimates of air emissions. The comment argues that the realignment will result in significant impacts to San Diego's air quality, that the action violates the Clean Air Act and EPA rules and regulations, and that the action will result in pollution in excess of SIP milestone goals, thereby potentially limiting commercial expansion in the area. The comment revealed no new significant environmental information or changed circumstances but relied on incorrect assumptions and methods to reach a much different, and faulty, result. A thorough review of the Department of the Navy's applicability analysis confirmed that it is accurate.

In summary, the Department of the Navy has conducted a thorough review of the data and methods used to analyze whether the requirement for a conformity determination applies to this proposed action. My review of the record indicates that the proposed realignment of Miramar represents a net decrease in air pollution and will contribute to San Diego's reasonable further progress toward attainment.

#### ii. Hydrology

As discussed in the FEIS, the proposed action will not have any significant impacts on the local or regional hydrology. (FEIS, § 4.3)

#### iii. Cultural

In accordance with 36 CFR Part 800, regulations implementing Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, it was determined that three cultural sites are eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). The State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) agrees with this determination. Similarly, the SHPO has concurred with the determination that the proposed action will not affect historic properties (FEIS, § 4.5). The proposed realignment of NAS Miramar will not significantly impact cultural resources listed or determined eligible for listing on the NRHP.

#### iv. Visual Resources

As discussed in the FEIS, the proposed action will not have any significant impacts on the visual resources (FEIS, § 4.6).

#### v. Land Use

As discussed in the FEIS, the proposed action will not have any significant impacts on land use as

designated in San Diego's CLUP for Miramar (FEIS, § 4.7). Land use compatibility in the context of aircraft and airfield operations is evaluated on the basis of Accident Potential Zones (APZ) and noise contours. Both the APZ analysis and the noise analysis using California CNEL standards indicate that current land uses surrounding MCAS Miramar are compatible with the proposed aircraft and airfield operations.

Some comments raised concerns that the proposed project will have significant impacts on existing and planned land uses in the surrounding communities. The analysis of land use impacts were based on the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) Series VIII forecast data, which were updated by the Department of the Navy to reflect 1994 conditions. The State of California has adopted the CNEL as the state-wide standard for land use planning around airports within the state. This standard is consistent with the adopted CLUP for NAS Miramar and Lindbergh Field, and is endorsed by the County of San Diego. SANDAG develops and maintains regional land use databases as part of its charter to track land use trends and forecast population growth. The most recent (1990) existing land use GIS database available from SANDAG was obtained to analyze land use compatibility in the FEIS. SANDAG updates the database every five years, and is currently working on the 1995 update. In order to update the database to 1994 (the baseline or existing conditions year for the FEIS), the Marine Corps, in cooperation with SANDAG, reviewed aerial photographs from the 1994 Thomas Brothers Aerial Photo Map Book. The photos were reviewed primarily to identify new housing development within the 65 dB CNEL noise contour surrounding NAS Miramar. In addition, SANDAG maintains a database of proposed site specific projects which was used as a guide for the 1994 update process. The Department of the Navy used this updated data in evaluating noise impacts.

#### vi. Public Health and Safety

A number of comments were received dealing with safety. Some of these comments discussed concerns about the safety of operating rotary- and fixed-wing aircraft at the same airfield. Some of these focused on the perceived risks during repetitive training operations at the field, especially Field Carrier Landing Practice (FCLP) approaches. Others discussed potential risks of operating military aircraft in an area

characterized as the second busiest in the country. The Department of the Navy takes aviation safety very seriously and recognizes that the public has legitimate concerns that those who use the nation's airspace must do so in a safe manner. After carefully looking at the issues and as discussed in the FEIS and the SIR, I have determined that the proposed action will not have any significant impacts on the local or regional public health and safety.

#### *Measures to ensure safety of flight.*

Some comments raised the issue of mixing rotary-wing and fixed-wing aircraft, especially combining close-in patterned FCLPs by fixed-wing aircraft and rotary-wing take-offs and landings. The Marine Corps will be one of numerous users of the airspace above and adjacent to MCAS Miramar. Consequently, the Marine Corps has a vested interest in maintaining safe operations and will make maximum use of appropriate control measures and operating procedures to ensure proper time, distance, and altitude separation between aircraft. The Marine Corps has operated rotary- and fixed-wing aircraft at a number of other air stations, relying on a combination of redundant measures to ensure safety of flight at its air stations and the air corridors nearby. These measures include extensive pilot training and briefing, established traffic separation schemes, and watchful air traffic controllers in constant communication with aircraft. These measures have allowed the Marine Corps to operate safely in the past in circumstances at least as severe as those its pilots will face operating from MCAS Miramar.

At MCAS Miramar, traffic patterns have been designed to provide the necessary separation between aircraft. Fixed-wing and rotary-wing aircraft will be based at opposite ends of the airfield. This separation will occur on the parking apron, fuel pits, aircraft movement areas and the landing/departure surfaces. Most rotary-wing aircraft arrivals and departures and all pattern work will be done on the north pads while fixed-wing FCLP's are in progress on the 24L runway located to the south side of the air station. Consequently, to improve safety, fixed- and rotary-wing aircraft will be laterally separated and deconflicted while FCLP operations are in progress. Entry into the patterns is carefully controlled by air traffic controllers. The air traffic controllers maintain visual and/or radar surveillance of all aircraft in the vicinity of the field, have communications with all aircraft in the patterns, and can warn them of dangerous situations.

MCAS Miramar will use the rules set forth in FAA Handbook 7110.65 to operate rotary- and fixed-wing aircraft while they are within controlled airspace and under the control of air traffic controllers. These rules contain separation and sequencing requirements for operating all types of aircraft and will be applied to all operations at MCAS Miramar as required. All air traffic controllers are trained and qualified to provide safe and expeditious handling of all aircraft under their control. Also, unique operating procedures are developed at each air station to accommodate the unique mix of aircraft at that air station and are published in the Air Field Operations Manual. A revised Air Field Operations Manual will be published for MCAS Miramar to address the planned mix of aircraft. Most of the aircraft stationed at MCAS Miramar will also provide some advantages over typical commercial aircraft and many general aviation aircraft. The helicopters are dual seat aircraft, allowing one of the pilots to help maintain a visual scan of the area. The helicopters also have broad windscreens and better cockpit visibility than many commercial aircraft. The F/A-18s have clear canopies and are designed to provide excellent all around visibility. Although nothing can guarantee absolute safety, these measures provide a substantial margin of safety. Finally, the Marine Corps is committed to sacrificing efficiency if necessary to ensure that safety is maintained.

*Marine Corps success in operating safely in congested uncontrolled airspace.* Several comments raised the issue of safety and the operation of rotary-wing aircraft in "uncontrolled airspace." The Department of the Navy has safely integrated rotary wing aircraft with general aviation aircraft for many years in the existing San Diego airspace structure. The comments received have not offered any evidence to the contrary that would lead me to conclude that the proposed operations in San Diego can not be conducted safely. The Marine Corps has worked closely with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), the Southern California Terminal Radar Approach Control Facility (SC TRACON), and the San Diego Airspace Users Group (SAUG) to ensure that the proposed action will be compatible with the existing airspace structure. Rotary wing aircraft operate at approximately the same speeds as small general aviation aircraft and this contributes to these two types of aircraft operating safely in a VFR environment. Currently, Marine Corps rotary-wing aircraft

operate safely in "uncontrolled airspace" in other areas, including equally congested airspace, without incident. For example, over 90% of the USMC rotary-wing operations in the vicinity of MCAS Tustin in 1995 were VFR operations (95,525 of 104,171), and of those, nearly 20% were in uncontrolled VFR airspace. This demonstrates the ability of the Marine Corps to operate rotary-wing aircraft in congested uncontrolled airspace safely.

Compared with the airspace around NAS Miramar, the airspace around MCAS Tustin and John Wayne/Orange County Airport is far more congested with approximately 21,971 operations per square mile (three mile radius) in 1994, compared to nearly 4,927 operations per square mile (five mile radius) in 1994 between NAS Miramar and Montgomery Field. If the area under consideration at Orange County is expanded to include the operations of MCAS El Toro (a radius of seven miles), the congestion (approximately 4,675 operations per square mile) is nearly equal to that experienced near Miramar in 1994. The SC TRACON, as well as the Marine Corps, is equipped to handle the air traffic volume in these areas. Thus, the history of operating rotary-wing aircraft at MCAS Tustin and fixed-wing aircraft at MCAS El Toro in congested airspace, both controlled and uncontrolled, demonstrates that the impacts of these operations on general aviation can be managed safely.

*Coordination with the Federal Aviation Administration and local groups.* Some comments also raised an issue regarding the operation of fixed-wing and rotary-wing aircraft in the same airspace. The realignment of NAS Miramar to MCAS Miramar necessarily involves a change in the aviation operations at Miramar. The change in aviation operations was fully considered in studies associated with the EIS. The Marine Corps and the Department of the Navy have worked closely throughout the planning process with the FAA, SC TRACON, and the SAUG to deal with the change in aviation operations. Of note, the FAA is charged with overall responsibility for the safe and expeditious handling of all aircraft in the National Airspace System. As such, the FAA is responsible for determining whether airspace should be uncontrolled or controlled (unregulated or regulated). The Department of the Navy has worked with these agencies to plan for the realignment, and none of these agencies has submitted an objection to the proposed action.

*Interface with Class B airspace.* An issue was raised regarding the impacts of flight operations for the proposed

realignment on Class B airspace. A comment also argued that the proposed mitigation measures are insufficient. The point was made that San Diego TRACON is the second busiest facility in the United States and is predicted to grow in complexity and congestion. For clarification, the San Diego TRACON was consolidated into SC TRACON in September, and is now referred to as the San Diego Sector of the SC TRACON. As described above, the San Diego Sector of SC TRACON is appropriately equipped for the workload. The Marine Corps has been working with SC TRACON to ensure compatibility. The introduction of rotary-wing aircraft will not have a significant impact on Class B airspace because most helicopter operations will not be required to operate in Class B airspace. The SIR explains that 60% of the rotary-wing operations will take place within the confines of MCAS Miramar, thus these operations will have no impact except at MCAS Miramar. Further, the impact on Class B airspace will be reduced as the USMC will conduct fewer total operations in Class B airspace than the Navy because it will have fewer fixed-wing aircraft at Miramar than the historic Navy levels. The Marine Corps will continue to work with the FAA and the Miramar Technical Advisory Committee, providing an ongoing dialogue to promote regional airspace safety.

#### vii. Hazardous Material and Wastes

As discussed in the FEIS, the proposed action will not have any significant impacts related to hazardous materials or wastes (FEIS, § 4.9).

#### viii. Aircraft Operations

As discussed above and in the FEIS, the proposed action will not have any significant impacts on commercial or private aircraft operations within the San Diego region. The Airfield and Airspace Operational Study for MCAS Miramar was prepared by ATAC Corporation in 1995, and is incorporated in the FEIS by reference. The study encompassed current and projected future operations and considered impacts upon both military and civilian users of the airspace in the greater San Diego area. This study, through the use of the Naval Aviation Simulation Model (NASMOD), demonstrated that the proposed quantity of fixed-wing and rotary-wing aircraft can be safely collocated while operating effectively and efficiently at Miramar.

#### ix. Socio-Economics

As discussed in the FEIS, the proposed action will not have any

significant local or regional socio-economics impacts (FEIS, § 4.13). In compliance with Executive Order 12898, an analysis was conducted to determine if minority or low-income populations would suffer disproportionately high and adverse environmental impacts as a result of the proposed action (FEIS, p. 4.13-3). It was determined that these populations would not suffer disproportional impacts. Two community planning groups raised questions regarding compliance with Environmental Justice guidelines with respect to Mira Mesa. The impacts on Mira Mesa were reexamined and it was confirmed that residents of Mira Mesa are not being disproportionately affected.

#### 8. Conclusion

On behalf of the Department of the Navy, I have decided to realign NAS Miramar into MCAS Miramar. I have carefully considered all of the comments, including those urging further analysis. After reviewing the administrative record and information received during the environmental review process, I have determined that no new significant environmental information or circumstances exist. Consequently, I have determined that a supplemental EIS is not warranted. I have decided to implement this action using the West-Ramp configuration (Alternative B), which was both the Preferred Alternative and also the Environmentally Preferred Alternative.

#### 9. Where To Obtain Further Information

For further information, contact Lieutenant Colonel George Martin at (619) 537-6679.

Duncan Holaday,

*Deputy Assistant Secretary, Installations and Facilities.*

Dated: December 2, 1996.

M.A. Waters,

*LCDR, JAGC, USN, Federal Register Liaison Officer.*

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#### **Record of Decision for the Disposal and Reuse of Naval Training Center, Orlando, Florida**

##### **Summary**

The Department of the Navy (Navy), pursuant to Section 102(2)(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), 42 U.S.C. 4332(2)(C), and the regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality that implement NEPA procedures, 40 CFR Parts 1500-1508, hereby announces its decision to