

FY 2010 Southern California Range Complex Environmental Planning Team Narrative

Narrative

1 Introduction

Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet (COMPACFLT) submits this nomination for the Chief of Naval Operations Environmental Planning Team Award for the Southern California (SOCAL) Range Complex Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)/Overseas Environmental Impact Statement (OEIS). The EIS/OEIS was developed to ensure continued access to vital training areas of the SOCAL Range Complex and analyzed proposed enhancements to fleet training, large-scale range exercises, new training and facilities on San Clemente Island, and capabilities to test and train with new and emerging technologies, vehicles, system platforms. The EIS/OEIS team faced significant challenges in the development of the EIS/OEIS that included analyzing impacts to seven threatened and endangered marine species and 11 federally listed terrestrial animal and plant species on San Clemente Island.

The primary environmental goal was to prepare a thorough, comprehensive, and legally defensible EIS/OEIS prior to the expiration of the National Defense Exemption and successfully negotiate a Biological Opinion for San Clemente Island. The team developed an extensive agenda of environmental planning objectives and required timelines that were integral to the success of meeting this goal. Close working relationships with regulators from National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) headquarters in Maryland and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) greatly assisted COMPACFLT in achieving its objectives.

The EIS/OEIS team was composed of Navy and contractor personnel with expertise in naval operations, exercise planning, and legal sufficiency; marine biologists; acoustics analysis experts; terrestrial biologists; environmental compliance specialists; Geographic Information Systems (GIS) experts; ecologists; public involvement specialists, and program managers. This vast array of expertise was required due to the complexity of the analyses to be completed in compliance with the Marine Mammals Protection Act (MMPA), National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA), and Endangered Species Act (ESA). The team composition and organization resulted in meeting every required delivery date even when timelines were accelerated and project requirements were continually changing.

2 Background

2.1 *Team Details Specific to This Project*

A team of experts was created to successfully complete the EIS/OEIS and associated environmental documents and consultations. Completing environmental documentation for various parts of and actions within the SOCAL Range Complex had been in progress for many years; therefore, knowledge of this history was critical to team success. An EIS for San Clemente Island was well underway when the SOCAL EIS/OEIS project began. During the development of both documents it was determined that it would make sense to fold the San Clemente Island EIS into the SOCAL EIS/OEIS. The SOCAL EIS/OEIS team expanded to include experts from the San Clemente Island EIS team in order to preserve the historical knowledge. In addition, an EA had been developed for the Composite Training Unit Exercise/Joint Task Force Exercise major range event. It was important to include team members that were knowledgeable about the development of this EA as it was the subject of litigation during the development of the SOCAL EIS/OEIS.

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The legal and technical challenges of this project required strong and decisive senior leadership and project team members. The team’s effort in meeting a very aggressive schedule was an essential element for the success of the project due to litigation requirements.

2.2 Team Organization and Staffing

To meet the environmental planning objectives and succeed under the major schedule constraints, a multidisciplinary team with knowledge regarding the history of the project and state of the science was formed. Key team members are listed in the table below (Table 1).

Table 1: Environmental Planning Team		
Name	Title/Discipline	Organization
Management		
Mr. Alex Stone	Project Manager	COMPACFLT
CAPT Dean Leech	Environmental Counsel	COMPACFLT
CDR Daniel Eldredge	Environmental Counsel	COMPACFLT
Ms. Delphine Lee	Environmental Planner	COMPACFLT
Mr. Chip Johnson	Marine Species Advisor	COMPACFLT
Mr. Ken MacDowell	Training/Operations Advisor	COMPACFLT
Mr. Kent Randall	Legal Technical Representative	NAVFAC SW
Dr. Kelly Brock	Natural Resources/Terrestrial Biology	NAVFAC SW (now with CNO N45)
Dr. Andy Yatsko	Anthropologist	NAVFAC SW
Ms. Melanie Ravan, Esq.	Region Environmental Counsel	COMNAVREG SW
Ms. Karen Waller	Program Manager	SRS-Parsons Joint Venture
Mr. Brian Tucker	Project Manager	SRS-Parsons Joint Venture
Mr. Brian Wauer	Project Manager	SRS-Parsons Joint Venture
Ms. Krystal Kermott	Deputy Project Manager	SRS-Parsons Joint Venture
Mr. Bruce Campbell	Project Manager	SRS-Parsons Joint Venture
Mr. Lewis Michaelson	Principle	Katz and Associates
Mr. Lawrence Honma	Senior Scientist	Merkel and Associates
Dr. Valerie Thompson	Senior Scientist	SRA
Mr. Tom Mulroy	Terrestrial Biologist	SAIC

2.3 Challenges and Unusual Circumstances Addressed by the Team

Completing the SOCAL EIS/OEIS prior to the expiration of the National Defense Exemption was both a challenge and unusual circumstance. The race to complete the documents before the expiration required an accelerated schedule. The acceleration of the schedule was challenging because the size of the study area and number of activities addressed were quite large and the state of science involving sonar was in a state of flux. The team overcame these challenges by engaging the appropriate regulators early and remaining dedicated to the project.

Engaging Regulators Early and Often. As part of the team’s coordination efforts and strategy for success, meetings were conducted regularly with regulators to brief them on the status of the project and to solicit their input early in the process. The Navy engaged the USFWS before and throughout the consultation process to ensure a Biological Opinion would be issued in a timeframe that would allow the Navy to complete the NEPA process prior to the National Defense Exemption expiration. In addition, the National Marine Fisheries Service was engaged early to ensure their support in completion of the NEPA process prior to the National Defense Exemption expiration. In fact, NMFS was brought onto the team as a cooperating agency, a critical factor in the success of the project.

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Dedication, Hard Work, and Perseverance. Developing the SOCAL EIS/OEIS in the face of continuously changing science, accelerated schedules, and litigation threats was daunting at times, yet the SOCAL EIS/OEIS team worked together to ensure that a legally defensible product was developed. The team worked together often late and on weekends to meet very compressed and challenging timelines to ensure the successful completion of the SOCAL EIS/OEIS. Without this dedication, hard work, and perseverance, this could not have been accomplished.

3 Environmental Planning Summary

3.1 Environmental Plans and Agreements

The Navy initiated the environmental analysis process in December 2006 and released a Draft EIS/OEIS in April 2008. The Final EIS/OEIS was released in December 2008. The Record of Decision was signed by the Assistant Secretary of the Navy (Installations and Environment) on January 21, 2009.

In addition to the development of the EIS/OEIS, a number of supporting documents were required in order to complete appropriate environmental compliance requirements within the 25-month timeframe. These documents included:

- Coastal Consistency Determination (Final August 2008)
- Essential Fish Habitat Analysis and Coral Reef Analysis (Final December 2008)
- National Marine Fisheries Service Request for Letter of Authorization and two updates to the request (March 2008, April 2008, and May 2008)
- Biological Assessments (BAs) to support the ESA process (Terrestrial BA, Final September 2006 with an update in May 2008 and Marine BA, April 2008) and Programmatic Agreement in compliance with the NHPA for SCI

The Navy has made substantial efforts in environmental and natural resource management programs specifically targeted at protecting threatened and endangered species and promoting their recovery. The team's objective was to ensure Fleet readiness and success of the military mission while minimizing the effects of training on the environment. Development of the SOCAL EIS/OEIS and supporting documents provided the analysis needed to determine the potential environmental impacts and identify the protective measures necessary to minimize those impacts to the environment.

3.2 Most Outstanding Program Features

The existing SOCAL Range Complex plays a vital role in the execution of the naval readiness mandate. The region surrounding San Diego, California, is home to the largest concentration of U.S. Naval forces in the Pacific Fleet, and the SOCAL Range Complex is the most capable and heavily used Navy range complex in the Pacific. Included in the SOCAL Range Complex is San Clemente Island (Figure 1), which provides unique training including the only live-fire ship to shore bombardment capability and serves as one of the most critical range areas to support Naval Special Warfare training. It is the cornerstone of naval tactical training and a key component of the SOCAL Range Complex. Every carrier and Expeditionary Strike Group that deploys in the Pacific AOR receives pre-deployment certification of its readiness in the SOCAL Range Complex.

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Figure 1 - San Clemente Island, north end looking south

The waters within SOCAL Range Complex and which surround San Clemente Island are home to over 500 species of fish and 1,500 species of marine invertebrates. Approximately 35 species of marine mammals are found in the area, including six cetaceans that are federally-listed as threatened or endangered. San Clemente Island is one of the most environmentally distinct coastal islands, hosting 272 species of native plants, 245 bird species, 6 mammal species, and 2 reptile species. Among these is one of the rarest birds found in North America - the San Clemente loggerhead shrike. San Clemente Island is home to more endangered species than most states, with 11 terrestrial animal and plant species that are federally-listed by the USFWS as threatened or endangered species. Seven of these species are only found on San Clemente Island.

In addition to extensive marine and terrestrial biological resources within the SOCAL Range Complex, a significant number of cultural resources exist on San Clemente Island. Archeological deposits and artifacts representing the occupation and use of San Clemente Island by prehistoric Native Americans, turn-of-the-century ranching structures, and signs of early military use are found throughout the island. There are over 7,000 identified archeological sites on San Clemente Island.

As part of the environmental documentation for the Final EIS/OEIS, and as an MMPA permit applicant, the Navy entered into early consultation procedures with NMFS regarding the potential effects on ESA-listed species from the conduct of the activities outlined in the Final EIS/OEIS. A Biological Opinion was issued on January 14, 2009 concluding that implementation of the Navy's proposal was likely to adversely affect but not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the threatened and endangered species under NMFS' jurisdiction.

The Navy conducted USFWS consultation in accordance with section 7 of the ESA for species under its jurisdiction. The Terrestrial Biological Assessment analyzed 11 terrestrial animal and plant species. USFWS issued a Biological Opinion and Incidental Take Statement on November 17, 2008. The opinion concluded that the Navy's ongoing and proposed activities are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the threatened and endangered species under USFWS jurisdiction.

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The Navy prepared a Programmatic Agreement to comply with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and Integrated Cultural Resources Management Plan. There were no anticipated adverse impacts to cultural resources because of the implementation of avoidance and protective measures developed during the process. The Navy consulted with the State Historic Preservation Office, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, Native American groups and other appropriate consulting parties to ensure full compliance with Federal historic preservation laws and regulations.

3.3 *Unique Aspects of the Environmental Planning Effort*

Unique to this project was the extensive concurrent effort by the team to complete all the required regulatory requirements for this highly complex action within an extremely important and sensitive coastal environment. Together the team prepared a detailed Plan of Action and Milestones to ensure that all deadlines were met. The team's composition, perseverance, dedication to the project, and contribution of many hours of intense analysis and responding to comments enabled the project to stay on track with no interruptions to COMPACFLT's training requirements.

Also unique to the project was a one-team approach. A great deal of effort focused on understanding the equities of the regulators, the Non-Governmental Organizations, the operators, Navy subject matter experts, contractors, and those in the chain of command. The SOCAL team focused on mission accomplishment and environmental stewardship and, in stressful times, reminded all of "one team, one goal." This project would not have been completed without the support of cooperating agencies, superiors in the chain-of-command, the regulators, the operators, the COMPACFLT and NAVFAC staffs, and the contractors who took ownership of this project.

4 Accomplishments

4.1 *Objectives Attainment*

- Achieved full NEPA compliance through finalization of the EIS/OEIS. The EIS/OEIS supported the ESA Biological Opinion and MMPA Letter of Authorization and Final Rule.
- Procured SOCAL range-wide MMPA and ESA authorization to operate sonar and use explosives.
- Finalized comprehensive USFWS Biological Opinion for San Clemente Island. The Terrestrial Biological Opinion was extremely thorough and received favorable reviews by USFWS.
- Successfully negotiated a Programmatic Agreement in compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.
- Analyzed Strike Group Training Exercises (Composite Training Unit Training Exercise and Joint Task Force Exercise) that included critical training for over 8,000 military personnel.
- Never missed a milestone deadline. Completed final environmental documentation prior to the expiration of the National Defense Exemption associated with MMPA requirements and the use of mid-frequency active sonar.

Because of the success of the team, the completion of the SOCAL Range Complex EIS/OEIS ensures that the Navy can continue to use the range for rigorous, real-life training in the air, on land, and at sea in compliance with all regulatory requirements. Conducting realistic training is

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critical to ensure the Navy readiness. The ranges, facilities, and installations of the SOCAL Range Complex provide training opportunities for military personnel and the success of the military mission. This EIS and the accompanying regulatory actions under the MMPA and ESA will allow our sailors to continue this critical training.

Under the very capable leadership of Mr. Alex Stone, the team was able to meet all SECNAV timeline requirements including the management of numerous consultation and agency requirements for MMPA, ESA, Magnusen-Stevens Act, and CZMA. This required daily coordination and open communication with many team members and regulators throughout the process. Mr. Stone's ability to multi-task and maintain organization was critical in the success of this project. The dedication of Mr. Stone and the team combined with their in-depth understanding of the complex legal and environmental sensitivities were critical in meeting project objectives. The team's devotion to duty allowed the project to finish within the required time of a very aggressive schedule and within the negotiated terms in the context of the National Defense Exemption expiration.

The following were some of the lessons learned throughout the process:

- Engaging in timely scheduling and coordination to ensure full participation of key participants. *This was important to ensure that key team members provided their input when needed.*
- The need for flexibility and willingness to incorporate updates and changes despite challenging deadlines. *Flexibility by all team members ensured that all the requirement milestones were met.*
- The importance of working closely with regional regulators early on. *This reduced potential issues during the EIS process.*
- Frequent coordination with EIS team: weekly emails, weekly conference calls, WebEx meetings, and quarterly meetings helped maintain flow of data. *This ensured that the team had full situational awareness.*
- Use of WebEx services when meetings were not conducted in person. This allowed for more interactive participation during key meetings.
- Periodic updates to senior leadership ensured challenges were addressed in a timely manner.

As part of the EIS/OEIS process, the team engaged with the public and interested parties early and often. As part of the team's coordination efforts and strategy for success, meetings were regularly conducted with the various federal and state regulators and local politicians to brief them on the status of the project and to solicit their input early in the process. These meetings directly and positively assisted in successfully completing the project. In addition to meeting with various interested parties, extensive public outreach materials were developed. It was important to the team to provide outreach materials that communicated the message on the strategic the importance of the SOCAL Range Complex as well as the Navy's commitment to protect natural and cultural resources.

4.2 Specific Benefits to the Navy, the Public, and the Environment

As a result of the SOCAL environmental planning project, through protective measures being implemented by the Navy and various partnerships with conservation groups, the Navy can continue to provide critical training while minimizing environmental effects and implementing conservation efforts within the SOCAL Range Complex's sensitive ecosystem. Specifically at

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San Clemente Island, monitoring and management activities directed by the Navy have resulted in recovery of habitat quality over much of the island and resulted in increases in the populations of many of the listed plant and wildlife species, most notably the San Clemente loggerhead shrike.

4.3 Most Outstanding Accomplishments

The most outstanding accomplishment was the completion of the most expansive and complex biological opinion and a first-of-its-kind programmatic agreement with regulators. Because of these documents, the SOCAL project was able to keep the project moving and able to incorporate the San Clemente Island environmental studies initiated in 1999 within the scope of the SOCAL Range Complex EIS/OEIS. The ability to manage multiple priorities and successfully complete the 2,000 page EIS/OEIS, the MMPA application (with two addendums), the Marine Biological Assessment, the Terrestrial Biological Assessment, Coastal Consistency Determination, Essential Fish Habitat Analysis, and Cultural Resources Programmatic Agreement was a herculean effort within the timeline dictated by the National Defense Exemption.