



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
NAVAL AIR FACILITY EL CENTRO
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EL CENTRO, CA 92243

5090
Ser N00E/300
July 27, 2010

Tamara Klug, Senior Botanist
Entrix
201 N. Calle Cesar Chavez, Suite 203
Santa Barbara, CA 93103

Subj: NOTICE OF PREPARATION AND REQUEST FOR PROJECT INFORMATION FOR
CUMULATIVE IMPACT ANALYSIS FOR SALTON SEA SPECIES CONSERVATION HABITAT
PROJECT

Dear Ms. Klug:

Thank you for your recent request for comments concerning the proposed Salton Sea Restoration Project. Please consider these comments herein described as our response to both the Notice of Preparation (NOP) issued on June 21, 2010 and as our response to your July 13, 2010 correspondence. The Navy is committed to environmental restoration and Naval Air Facility El Centro was recognized last year by the Secretary of the Navy as the winner of the Navy's Installation Environmental Restoration Award.

NAF El Centro is recognized as a critical flight training base in the United States that supports fleet replacement squadrons. Located within the Imperial Valley in southern California (CA), NAF El Centro lies approximately 120 miles east of San Diego, California and 60 miles west of Yuma, Arizona. The base is an integral part of military air training missions in the United States, providing realistic training opportunities to active and reserve military units, and is the "winter home" of the Blue Angels. NAF El Centro and its personnel have a role of providing essential support to the squadrons and units training here. Every month, 7 to 12 squadrons and up to 1,600 personnel train at NAF El Centro, including Navy SEALs and British, French, German and Italian aviators who also visit for various phases of their training.

In addition, NAF El Centro provides base support to Naval Aviation Squadrons and is associated with the R-2510 and R-2512 Restricted Airspace Ranges that provide for critical military operations for their weapons and air combat training. It also has a primary responsibility for the support of all Naval and Marine flight training activities. The base's isolated desert location, predictable climate, restricted non-military aircraft use, and its gunnery and bomb ranges make it a vital training facility for Department of Defense aviators.

The R-2510 and R-2512 Ranges encompass approximately 218,000 acres (155,000 for R-2510 and 63,000 for R-2512) of diverse terrain and are critical for DoD testing and training. Continued operational utility of R-2510 and R-2512, as well as the NAF El Centro airfield and ranges, is vitally dependent on preventing activities that could impact this critical training mission and affect the safety of our pilots and persons on the ground.

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Bird Aircraft Strike Hazard (BASH)

The Navy's primary concern is in regard to the potential safety impacts associated with increased bird populations that may result proximate to Naval Air Facility (NAF) El Centro training ranges.

The Navy is concerned with increasing encroachment affecting the airspace in which our pilots and aircraft operate. Regarding the above project specifically, habitat restoration which has the potential to attract and increase local bird populations can seriously jeopardize NAF El Centro's mission and readiness. Birds pose a serious collision threat to aircraft and pilot safety. The anticipated increase in bird populations in the local environment as a result of this project has the potential to directly impact air operations, especially over our training ranges. This impact must be analyzed and mitigated if found to be significant.

Additionally, several other projects can be reasonably foreseen which would contribute to a cumulative impact. Currently, the Imperial Irrigation District is constructing several thousand acres of managed marsh in the vicinity of the Salton Sea which is primarily intended to attract and provide habitat for avian species affected by decreased Salton Sea levels resulting from agricultural/urban water transfers. Also, a planned development, the Desert Springs Resort, is proposed for construction on the west side of Imperial Valley less than four miles from the base perimeter and directly adjacent to our parachute drop range. This project is currently projected to include over one hundred acres of lakes and associated landscaping (golf course) which we believe would attract large populations of birds.

These projects, as well as any others which may increase bird populations in the local airspace or result in increased or new local bird flyway routes between wetland sites, must be analyzed with the cumulative impacts of these projects accounted for. The Navy is committed to environmental restoration but at the same time must guarantee the safety of our aviators and the integrity of the critical training that is conducted at Naval Air Facility El Centro.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. Point of contact for this project is Mr. David Hulse who can be reached at (760)339-2224 or by email at david.s.hulse@navy.mil.

Sincerely,



RITCHARD R. THOMPSON
Captain, U.S. Navy
Commanding Officer
Naval Air Facility El Centro

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