

Environmental Impact Statement/ Overseas Environmental Impact Statement

Point Mugu Sea Range

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3.12 Recreation

3.12.1 Introduction

The Point Mugu Sea Range (PMSR) has many important elements beneficial to recreational use, including relatively mild climate and water temperatures for activities such as year-round recreational boating and whale watching excursions, and proximity of the Channel Islands for recreational enjoyment. In general, most recreational activities occur relatively close to the shorelines of the mainland and the adjacent islands. The Channel Islands National Park (CINP) encompasses five islands: Anacapa, Santa Cruz, Santa Rosa, San Miguel, and Santa Barbara (National Park Service, 2015). The CINP and the ocean environment of the islands provide opportunities for activities such as recreational fishing, tourism, surfing, swimming, hiking, and camping. Tourists arrive from the mainland to the Channel Islands by ferry or boat from Ventura, Santa Barbara, or Channel Islands Harbors. Santa Rosa Island and San Miguel Island (SMI) allow small planes/aircraft to land from Camarillo Airport. Private airplanes are not allowed to land on the islands (California Office of Tourism, 2018).

3.12.2 Region of Influence

The region of influence (ROI) for recreation is defined as the area in which the principal effects arising from implementation of the Proposed Action or an identified alternative are likely to occur. The Proposed Action would directly affect areas already dedicated to military use in Ventura County (including Naval Base Ventura County [NBVC] Point Mugu, NBVC Port Hueneme, and San Nicolas Island [SNI]), and open water locations off the coastlines of Los Angeles, Ventura, Santa Barbara, and San Luis Obispo Counties.

3.12.3 Approach to Analysis

To the extent that the ongoing and proposed testing and training activities that occur within the Region of Influence could affect the recreational opportunities, the following activities were identified: recreational fishing, tourism, diving, boating, kayaking, and other recreational activities.

The baseline for identifying the recreational activities in the ROI was derived using relevant published information from sources that include federal and state government agencies and databases. Previous environmental studies were also reviewed.

The alternatives were evaluated based on the potential for impacts and the degree to which testing and training activities could impact recreational activities and resources. The potential for impacts depends on the likelihood that the testing and training activities would interface with public activities and infrastructure. Factors considered in the analysis include whether there would be temporal or spatial interfaces between the public or infrastructure and testing and training activities. If there is potential for this interface, factors considered to estimate the degree to which an exposure could impact recreations include whether there could be an impact on quality of experience, recreational availability, or enjoyment. If no potential for the public to interface with an activity is expected, the impacts would be considered negligible.

3.12.4 Affected Environment

3.12.4.1 Recreational Activities

Recreational fishing involves hook-and-line fishing from piers and docks, jetties and breakwaters, beaches and banks, private and rental boats, and commercial passenger fishing vessels. Recreational

fishing also includes activities such as spear and net fishing. Recreational fisheries in Southern California access both nearshore and offshore areas, targeting both bottom fish and mid-water fish species.

Southern California is a leading recreational fishing area along the west coast. Weather and sea conditions allow for year-round fishing activity. The coastlines around the Channel Islands are popular sport fishing areas; although most of kelp beds are within 1 nautical mile (NM) of shore, some fishing areas extend as far as 5 NM from shore and include lingcod grounds to the west of SMI, broadbill swordfish and marlin in waters south of Santa Cruz Island (SCI), and kelp beds off the coast of SNI. Commercial passenger fishing vessels frequently offer one-day sport fishing excursions from the Ventura, Santa Barbara, or Channel Islands Harbors (U.S. Department of the Navy, 2002).

The recreational use of NBVC beaches and beachfront waterway is restricted from public access and controlled by a base instruction (U.S. Department of the Navy, 2017), which sets forth rules to protect public safety and to enable range operations. NBVC Point Mugu Beach extends east from the Beach 1 Marker Sign located at the west boundary of Beach 1 to the eastern end of Family Beach (Figure 3.12-1). Use of NBVC beaches is open to all active duty and retired military personnel, Department of Defense civilian employees, their families, foreign nationals with proper badge and security plan, and sponsored guests. Sponsors must remain with their guests while onboard the base. If the NBVC Point Mugu Command Duty Officer determines it is necessary to close the beaches or surfing areas for safety reasons or range operations, security personnel will signal surfers to exit the water. As noted on nautical charts, the shoreline of NBVC Point Mugu is restricted from public access and recreational use pursuant to 33 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 334.1126. NBVC Point Mugu Beach is an unmanned area, and no lifeguards are on duty.

Recreational activities in the Point Mugu Sea Range other than hook-and-line fishing include scuba diving for spiny lobster, scallop, and spear fishing for rockfish, sheephead, and swordfish. These activities also occur primarily in shallow waters near the coastline and from private and chartered commercial passenger fishing vessels.

Whale watching is a very popular attraction along the coast of California and within the PMSR. In Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties, trips are offered year round with the southern migration of gray whales between late December and February and the northern migration between February and mid-May (O'Connor et al., 2009). The peak of activity is between January and March and particularly during the northern migration, as the whales travel much closer to the shore and often more slowly as the mothers are travelling with calves. Blue and humpback whale watching occurs between June and November, although the highest concentration of whales usually occurs between June and September. The Santa Barbara Channel has very reliable sightings of blue whales during this time and is one of the best spots in the world for boat-based blue whale watching (O'Connor et al., 2009).

Throughout the year occasional organized events, including paddle boarding, group kayaking, snorkeling, and group boating, are put on by community groups and private companies. These events occur close to the shorelines of both the mainland and Channel Islands (California Office of Tourism, 2018).



Figure 3.12-1: Location of Naval Base Ventura County and Point Mugu Beach

3.12.4.2 Channel Islands National Park and National Marine Sanctuary

3.12.4.2.1 Boundaries

The five islands composing the chain of the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary (CINMS) are the San Miguel, Santa Rosa, Santa Cruz, Anacapa, and Santa Barbara islands (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, 2009). CINMS boundaries extend from the high-water mark to 6 NM beyond the coast of each island (including rocks and islets) and encompass 1,113 square NM per regulation 15 CFR 922.70 boundary (Figure 3.12-2) (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, 2018).

The CINP comprises four islands in the northern chain of the Channel Islands and includes Santa Barbara Island to the south (Figure 3.12-2). Together, the islands span 250,000 acres. CINP boundaries extend 1 NM beyond the coast of each island (including rocks and islets) (National Park Service, 2015). The National Park Service (NPS) has management responsibility for Anacapa, Santa Barbara, Santa Rosa, and San Miguel islands, as well as management responsibility for a portion of SCI (National Park Service, 2015). However, over 30 other local, state, and federal agencies also have jurisdiction for lands, resources, or activities that impact the CINP. Several of the principal agencies include the Navy, state and local agencies, Native American tribes, and the Nature Conservancy (U.S. Department of the Navy, 2002).

SMI and the associated Prince Island have been owned by the Navy since 1934 and managed under a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with NPS since 1963 (U.S. Department of the Navy, 2016). The MOA with the NPS is used for managing both cultural and natural resources, as well as recreational activities on SMI. From 1948 until the 1970s, SMI was used for bombing with both live and practice bombs. Unexploded ordnances still remain on SMI and are at risk of explosion. The Land Use Control Implementation Plan written in October 2015 and signed by both the Commanding Officer NBVC and Superintendent NPS sets the operational guidance for public use activities as well as management and research on SMI. Recreational users may arrive one of two ways to SMI. Whether visitors access SMI via NPS Concessions or Commercial Use Authorization or private boat, they must complete an "Acknowledgement of Danger: Authorization Hold Harmless Agreement for SMI" upon departure to SMI, which is collected by NPS. All visitors on SMI must have a valid permit and are only allowed to access the island at Cuyler Harbor (Figure 3.12-3). Visitors are only allowed to access certain areas unescorted. These areas are Nidever Canyon Trail from the beach to the Cabrillo Monument and Ranger Station, runway, campground, and Cuyler Harbor Beach area. All other travel by recreational visitors on the island is restricted to trails, and such travel must be escorted by NPS personnel or by a person approved by NPS to lead the hikes. Camping is restricted to the SMI campground located near the Ranger station (Figure 3.12-3). Trespassing on protected and private areas will result in a fine and possible jail time (U.S. Department of the Navy, 2016).

3.12.4.2.2 Management

The CINMS is a haven for protected species and features sensitive habitats, shipwrecks, and maritime heritage artifacts. A comprehensive ecosystem-based management approach is used to promote long-term conservation of sanctuary waters, wildlife, habitats, and cultural resources, while allowing compatible human uses (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, 2009).

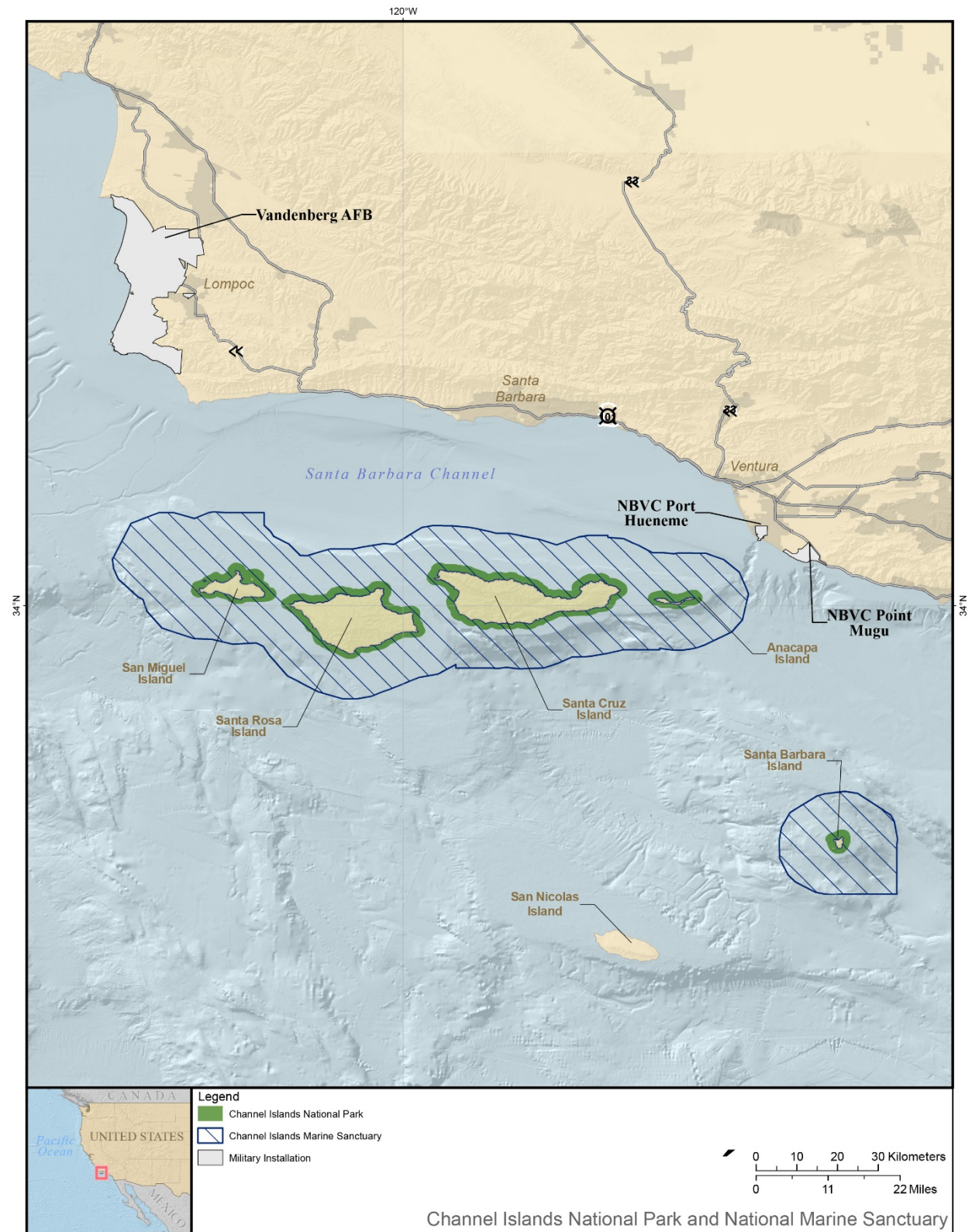


Figure 3.12-2: Location of the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary



Figure 3.12-3: San Miguel Island

Portions of the waters and submerged lands from the mean high-tide line to 1 NM off the islands have been designated by the State of California as ecological reserves. Two areas around Anacapa Island and one area around SCI are designated marine ecological reserves. Within these areas, recreational and commercial fish takes are not allowed. The waters surrounding the islands have been given the designation of Areas of Special Biological Significance in recognition of the high quality of the marine ecosystems and to ensure their protection.

Recreational activities within CINMS and CINP include diving; snorkeling; sailing; and wildlife observation, particularly of marine mammals and most popularly whale watching. An increasing number of visitors kayak in park waters, and school groups use the resources of the CINP extensively. Kayaking has become one of the most popular attractions within the CINMS and CINP. Summer is the most popular time for diving, snorkeling, and hiking, and popular activities in the winter months include wildlife observation, specifically whale watching (National Park Service, 2015). There is great interest in non-consumptive diving in the CINMS due to the diversity of the marine habitat, and shipwrecks. Of the more than 100 shipwrecks in the CINP and CINMS, 21 of these have been located and are popular dive sites according to NPS (National Park Service, 2015). More detailed information on shipwrecks is available in Section 3.10 (Cultural Resources).

Channel Islands regulations prohibit disturbing marine mammals or seabirds by flying motorized aircraft at less than 2,000 feet (609 meters) over the waters within 1 NM of any island, except to engage in kelp bed surveys or to transport persons or supplies to or from an Island. Failure to maintain a minimum altitude of 2,000 feet (609 meters) above ground level over such waters is presumed to disturb marine mammals or seabirds (15 CFR Part 922.72(a)(7)) (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, 2018).

3.12.4.3 Coastal Zone Management Act

The California Coastal Commission enforces the regulations and guidelines of the California Coastal Act. The California Coastal Commission maintains jurisdiction over the coastal zone, which runs from the mean high-tide line to 914 meters inland and extends out to 3 NM offshore. Coastal states are provided the authority to evaluate projects conducted, funded, or permitted by the federal government through the federal Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972, as amended (16 CFR Part 1451). Under the Coastal Zone Management Act, any federal project or activity affecting the coastal zone must be consistent to the maximum extent practicable with the provisions of federally approved state coastal plans, which in this case is Chapter 3 of the California Coastal Act. Accordingly, the Navy will submit a consistency determination to the California Coastal Commission for their consideration, which is documented in Section 6.1.1.1 (California Coastal Management Program).

3.12.5 Environmental Consequences

This section evaluates how and to what degree the activities described in Chapter 2 (Description of Proposed Action and Alternatives) would potentially impact recreational resources. Table 2-2 in Chapter 2 presents a comparison of the alternatives. The testing and training activities associated with the Alternatives vary in intensity, frequency, duration, and location within the PMSR. The recreational resources that could be impacted by the testing and training activities are

- Recreational Access, and
- Recreational Activities.

However, not all of the testing and training activities described in Chapter 2 (Description of Proposed Action and Alternatives) would require range closures within the PMSR, and some testing and training activities could occur at the same time under the same range closure. The analysis presented applies to all of the testing and training scenarios (air-to-air, air-to-surface, surface-to-air, surface-to-surface, subsurface-to-surface, and electronic warfare [EW]), as described in Section 2.1 (Proposed Action).

3.12.5.1 No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, proposed testing and training activities would not occur within the PMSR. Other military activities not associated with this Proposed Action would continue to occur. Stressors from Navy activities would not be introduced into the marine environment. Therefore, existing environmental conditions would either remain unchanged or would improve slightly after cessation of ongoing testing and training activities.

Discontinuing the testing and training activities may increase recreational activities on the PMSR in the absence of Navy testing and training. Therefore, discontinuing testing and training activities under the No Action Alternative would lessen the potential for impacts on recreation.

3.12.5.2 Alternative 1 (Preferred Alternative)

A comparison of operational tempo proposed for each alternative, and proposed types and level of activities, are provided in Section 2.1.1 (Current and Proposed Activities).

3.12.5.2.1 Recreational Access

Testing and training activities in the PMSR have the potential to temporarily limit access to marine areas in the PMSR for recreational users and the public. The Navy does not possess exclusive rights to these waters. In 2015, the Navy completed the Southern California and Northern California Range Complexes Encroachment Action Plan to evaluate the use of offshore and nearshore waters by military and civilian stakeholders (U.S. Department of the Navy, 2015). Based on freedom of the seas and open access rights to citizens and commercial organizations alike, these same waters are used by civilians for recreational activities. The Navy has coexisted with other users in the air and water of the PMSR for decades without significant impacts on recreational activities. For safety reasons, Navy testing and training activities can occasionally limit recreational access to nearshore and offshore waters in the PMSR (U.S. Department of the Navy, 2018). Range closures to certain areas of the PMSR due to Navy testing and training activities could increase under Alternative 1 compared with the baseline. However, despite a potential increase in periodic closures of certain areas of the range, access to CINMS and CINP would not be affected.

On SNI, recreational access is only allowed for military personnel and is very limited. The Navy maintains control over the restricted area waters within 0.25 NM of SNI, within which public access is restricted according to CFR 33 100.200. On NBVC Point Mugu beaches, recreational access is only allowed for military personnel out to 100 yards offshore. Recreational boats and some recreational activities may be temporarily inconvenienced by restrictions. However, impacts on recreational access throughout the PMSR are not anticipated because inaccessibility to recreational areas would typically be limited to specific areas, temporary, and of short duration (hours). Therefore, impacts on access for recreational purposes associated with testing and training activities for Alternative 1 would be less than significant.

3.12.5.2.2 Recreational Activities

Boating

Under Alternative 1, periodic range closures of various areas within the PMSR could be necessary. The PMSR is used by Navy vessels as well as other recreational boaters at sea. Navy testing and training activities would be coordinated so that no conflicting uses or vessel traffic would occur with recreational boaters. The Naval Air Warfare Center Weapons Division (NAWCWD) would issue a Notice to Mariners (NTM) 24 hours in advance of Navy activities as well as daily Very High Frequency (VHF)-FM Marine Radio (Channel 16) broadcasts to notify recreational boaters and the public of any range closures associated with testing and training activities. Recreational boaters would be able to adopt alternate routes to avoid areas subject to range closures, so they would not be affected by testing and training activities associated with Alternative 1.

For recreational fishing and boating, the testing and training activities that could result in closures of SNI would include launch events conducted from SNI (up to 40 per year). However, these are likely to be partial area closures, so boats can move to another area near SNI to recreate without leaving the area entirely. In most years, the Navy has only conducted an average of four to eight launches from SNI (U.S. Department of the Navy, 2018). Testing and training activities are not conducted until vessels are clear of the area in accordance with the range clearance procedures as described in Section 3.14 (Public Health and Safety). Additionally, most recreational boaters are typically in nearshore areas of Ventura and Santa Barbara Counties and would not likely be in the clearance area prior to a testing and training activity. When compared to the baseline, Alternative 1 could increase the number of closures for recreational boaters; however, these closures would typically be limited to specific areas and of short duration (typically less than 24 hours), and areas would reopen when the testing and training activity is complete. Therefore, impacts of Alternative 1 on recreational boating would be less than significant.

Other Recreational Activities

Navy testing and training activities could disturb recreational activities occurring in the PMSR due to closures and proximity of the testing and training activities with recreational activities. Recreational diving within the PMSR takes place primarily at known diving sites such as shipwrecks and reefs in nearshore areas where Navy activities would not typically occur. The locations of these popular dive sites are well documented, dive boats are typically well marked, and diver-down flags are visible from a distance. As a result, any vessels conducting testing and training activities that do not require closures would be able to identify and avoid the dive sites. Additionally, the Navy would issue a NTM 24 hours in advance of any testing and training activities that require closures, in addition to daily VHF-FM Marine Radio (Channel 16) broadcasts, and divers would not be permitted to enter those areas while the closure is in effect. Interactions between testing and training activities and recreational divers thus would not be expected. Similar knowledge and avoidance of popular fishing areas would minimize interactions between testing and training activities and recreational fishing. Additionally, whale watching can occur year round in the Santa Barbara channel and attracts tourists from various areas. Restricted or closed areas are avoided by whale watching tour groups. Other recreational activities, including kayaking, surfing, paddle boarding, and bird watching, mostly occur near the shore of Ventura and Santa Barbara Counties as well as along the coast of the CINP and not near restricted areas or the open waters of the PMSR.

Temporary PMSR clearance procedures in the area for safety purposes do not adversely affect recreational activities because closures are short in duration (typically less than 24 hours) and typically occur in areas where tourism activities are not largely prevalent (U.S. Department of the Navy, 2018). The Navy temporarily limits public and recreational access to areas where there is a risk of injury or

property damage. These closures are disclosed through a Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) and NTM issued by the NAWCWD and publicly accessible websites. The Navy strives to conduct its operations in a manner that is compatible with recreational ocean users by minimizing temporary access restrictions (U.S. Department of the Navy, 2018). While closures could increase under Alternative 1 compared to the baseline, the avoidance measures, short duration, and specific locations of closures discussed above ensure that impacts on recreational activities would not greatly increase. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.

Channel Islands National Park and National Marine Sanctuary

No land-based testing and training activities are being proposed on the CINP, with the exception of proposed EW emitters on SCI used during EW activities (Section 2.1.8.1, Electronic Warfare Combat Range). Aircraft overflights and sonic booms may be heard from a distance by recreational users in the vicinity, as Navy policy is that sonic booms are limited to altitudes above 30,000 feet and not within 30 NM from shore. Additionally, as stated in Section 3.12.4.2.2 (Management), the Channel Islands regulations prohibit disturbing marine mammals or seabirds by flying motorized aircraft at less than 2,000 feet (609 meters) over the waters within 1 NM of any island, unless coordinated in advance. Therefore, the noise-generating activity will be far from any public that are recreating in the area. Closures due to Navy activities in the CINP and CINMS are highly unlikely. SMI only implements closures for trash pickups. Therefore, access would not be affected. When compared to the baseline, the increased tempo under Alternative 1 could lead to additional closures and overflights. However, if these closures were ever to occur, aircraft would not fly close to the Northern Channel Islands and the duration would be temporary. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.

3.12.5.3 Alternative 2

A comparison of operational tempo proposed for each alternative, and proposed types and level of activities, are provided in Section 2.1.1 (Current and Proposed Activities).

3.12.5.3.1 Recreational Access

Under Alternative 2, testing and training activities in the PMSR have the potential to temporarily limit access to marine areas in the PMSR for recreational users and the public as described under Alternative 1. The Navy does not possess exclusive rights to these waters. Based on freedom of the seas and open access rights to citizens and commercial organizations alike, these same waters are used by civilians for recreational activities. The Navy has coexisted with other users in the air and water of the PMSR for decades without significant impacts on recreational activities. For safety reasons, Navy testing and training activities can occasionally limit recreational access to airspace and nearshore and offshore waters in the PMSR (U.S. Department of the Navy, 2018). Limits on accessibility to certain areas of the PMSR due to Navy testing and training activities could increase under Alternative 2 compared to the baseline. However, access to SNI for military personnel would remain the same as defined under Alternative 1, and access to CINMS and CINP would not be affected. While range closures in the PMSR could increase under Alternative 2 compared to the baseline, these range closures would typically be limited to specific areas, temporary, and short in duration. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.

3.12.5.3.2 Recreational Activities

Boating

The PMSR is used by Navy vessels as well as other recreational boaters at sea. Under Alternative 2, Navy testing and training activities would be coordinated so that no conflicting uses or vessel traffic would occur with recreational boaters. Closures of areas to recreational boating in the PMSR due to Navy testing and training activities would increase from the current conditions. The NAWCWD would issue a NOTAM and NTM 24 hours in advance of Navy activities, in addition to notifications via daily VHF-FM Marine Radio (Channel 16) broadcasts to notify recreational boaters and civilians of any closures associated with testing and training activities. Recreational boaters would be able to adopt alternate routes to avoid areas subject to range closures so that recreational boating would not be impaired by testing and training activities associated with Alternative 2. Access to SNI would remain the same as defined under Alternative 1. While the number of closures may increase under Alternative 2 as compared to the baseline, the range closures would typically be limited to specific areas and short in duration and would not restrict the use of the entire PMSR. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.

Other Recreational Activities

The locations and descriptions of recreational activities would remain the same as described in Section 3.12.5.2.2 (Recreational Activities). Range closures of areas to recreational activities in the PMSR due to Navy testing and training activities could increase with the implementation of Alternative 2, when compared to the baseline. However, under Alternative 2, temporary PMSR closures would not adversely affect recreational activities because the closures would last for only a short duration (typically less than 24 hours) and would be planned in areas where tourism activities are not as prevalent (U.S. Department of the Navy, 2018). The Navy temporarily limits public access only to areas where there is a risk of injury or property damage and publishes scheduled activities. The range closures are publicized using NOTAMs and NTMs issued by the NAWCWD and posted on publicly accessible websites, in addition to notifications via daily VHF-FM Marine Radio (Channel 16) broadcasts. The Navy strives to conduct its operations in a manner that is compatible with recreational ocean users by minimizing temporary access restrictions (U.S. Department of the Navy, 2018). Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.

Channel Islands National Park and National Marine Sanctuary

No land-based activities are being proposed on the CINP, with the exception of proposed EW emitters on SCI used during EW activities (see Section 2.1.8.1, Electronic Warfare Combat Range). Aircraft overflights and sonic booms may be heard by recreational users in the vicinity. However, as stated in Section 3.12.4.2.2 (Management), Channel Islands regulations prohibit disturbing marine mammals or seabirds by flying motorized aircraft at less than 2,000 feet (609 meters) over the waters within 1 NM of any island, unless coordinated in advance. Therefore, the noise will be far from any public that are recreating in the area. Closures due to Navy activities in the CINP and CINMS are highly unlikely and would not result in inaccessibility of these areas. SMI only implements closures for trash pickups and cleanups of the island. Therefore, access would not be affected. Under Alternative 2, the increased tempo over baseline conditions could lead to additional closures and overflights compared to the baseline. However, if these closures were ever to occur, aircrafts would not be flying close to the Northern Channel Islands, and the duration would be temporary. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.

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