

**U.S. Department of the Navy
United States Fleet Forces Command**

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT/FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT HARM
(FONSI/FONSH) for ICE EXERCISE 2022**

Introduction

Pursuant to National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Executive Order (EO) 12114, *Environmental Effects Abroad of Major Federal Actions*, Department of Defense regulations found at 32 Code of Federal Regulations Part 187, and the Chief of Naval Operations Instruction 5090.1E and its accompanying manual (M-5090.1), the Navy gives notice that an Environmental Assessment/Overseas Environmental Assessment (EA/OEA) and Finding of No Significant Impact/Finding of No Significant Harm (FONSI/FONSH) were prepared for the conduct of an Ice Exercise (ICEX) north of Alaska during February to April 2022.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to evaluate the employment and tactics of submarine operability in an Arctic environment. The Proposed Action would also evaluate emerging technologies and assess capabilities in the Arctic environment and gather data on Arctic environmental conditions.

The need for the Proposed Action is to prepare forces capable of extended operations and warfighting in the Arctic in accordance with Title 10 U.S.C. § 8062 and the Navy's strategic blueprint for the Arctic titled *A Blue Arctic*.

Description of the Proposed Action

The Navy's Proposed Action is to conduct submarine training and testing activities, which includes the establishment of a tracking range and temporary ice camps, and to conduct research in an Arctic environment. The Proposed Action would occur over a six-week period from late February through April 2022 and a Beta camp would be constructed in 2023 (considered winter through early spring). The entire Proposed Action, including construction and demobilization of the ice camp, would occur over this six-week period, whereas the submarine training and testing and the research activities would occur over approximately four weeks during the six-week period.

Alternatives

The Proposed Action is to conduct ICEX. To develop and screen alternatives, the Navy used the following criteria:

- ICEX and Beta camps must be conducted during a time of year when there are sufficient hours of daylight to support several hours of training and testing each day.
- The location must be on a large area of stable ice that does not have (and is not likely to develop) leads or "gaps" and can sustain a runway and a camp for several weeks.
- The location must have sufficient water depth to accommodate safe submarine activities.

- The location must be in sufficient proximity to shore logistics centers to allow for transfers of personnel and equipment to and from the ice camp.

Based on these screening criteria, a No Action Alternative and two Action Alternatives were analyzed.

Under the **No Action Alternative**, Navy would not establish an ice camp and would not conduct submarine training and testing activities or research in the Arctic in winter/spring 2022, nor would a Beta camp be constructed in 2023. This alternative required no analysis of potential consequences to environmental resources as no action would occur.

Under **Action Alternative 1**, Navy would conduct an ICEX (submarine training and testing with the inclusion of research activities) in winter/spring 2022, but no Beta camp constructed in 2023.

Under **Action Alternative 2 (Preferred Alternative)**, Navy would conduct an ICEX (submarine training and testing with the inclusion of research activities) in the winter/spring 2022, and a Beta camp would be constructed in 2023 (either on an ice floe or on a frozen lake in Deadhorse, Alaska).

Other **action alternatives considered but not carried forward for detailed analysis** include geographic, seasonal, and operational variations. As discussed in the screening criteria, holding ICEX in a different location, or at a different time of year would not satisfy the purpose and need. For example, holding ICEX closer to shore would not afford sufficiently thick ice to support an ice camp as well as the submarine tracking range to conduct the required submarine training and testing. Positioning the camp further from shore would put the camp beyond the reach of logistics support required to sustain the activity. Not constructing and testing equipment for a Beta Camp would not allow new technologies to be tested before a longer duration use in the ICEX event. Seasonal alternatives are likewise not feasible because the ice conditions required to support the ice camp are only available in the timeframe identified for the Proposed Action. Additionally, any alternative that restricted acoustic transmissions, aircraft movement, or prescribed time restrictions would not allow the Navy to meet its training requirements and therefore, would not satisfy the purpose and need.

Environmental Impacts of the Proposed Action

Potential environmental stressors include acoustic stressors (acoustic transmissions, aircraft noise, and on-ice vehicle noise), physical stressors (aircraft, on-ice, and in-water vessel/vehicle strike, and human presence), and stressors associated with expended material (bottom disturbance, combustive byproducts, entanglement, and ingestion). The potential environmental consequences of these stressors have been analyzed in this EA/OEA for resources associated with the natural, physical, and socioeconomic environments. Resources that were not considered for analysis because the Proposed Action has no potential to affect them include air quality, airspace, terrestrial wildlife (except Arctic fox), deep sea corals and coral reefs, and sea turtles.

As described in the EA/OEA, implementation of the Proposed Action would result in no significant harm to the natural and physical environments.

Mitigation and Standard Operating Procedures

The following standard operating procedures would be implemented:

- The location for any air-dropped equipment and material would be visually surveyed prior to release of the equipment/material to ensure the landing zone is clear. Equipment and materials would not be released if any animal is observed within the landing zone.
- Air drop bundles would be packed within a plywood structure with honeycomb insulation to protect the material from damage.
- Spill response kits/material would be on-site prior to the air-drop of any hazardous material (e.g. fuel).

In addition to the standard operating procedures above, the following mitigation measures would be implemented to reduce or avoid potential harm to marine resources.

- The ice camp and runway would be established on multi-year ice without pressure ridges.
- Ice camp deployment would begin mid-February and be gradual, with activity increasing over the first five days and must be completed by March 15, 2022. This allows ringed seals to avoid the camp area prior to pupping, further reducing potential impacts.
- Personnel on all on-ice vehicles would observe for marine and terrestrial animals.
- Snowmobiles would follow established routes, when available.
- Personnel on foot and operating on-ice vehicles would avoid areas of deep snowdrifts near pressure ridges.
- Navy personnel would maintain a 100-meter avoidance distance from all observed marine mammals.
- On-ice vehicles would not be used to follow any animal, with the exception of actively deterring polar bears if the situation requires.
- All material (e.g., tents, unused food, excess fuel) and wastes (e.g., solid waste, hazardous waste) would be removed from the ice floe upon completion of ICEX activities.
- Navy personnel would begin passive acoustic monitoring (PAM) 15 minutes prior to start of activities involving active acoustic transmissions from submarines and torpedoes.
- Navy personnel would delay active acoustic transmissions if a marine mammal is detected during pre-activity PAM and must shut down active acoustic transmissions if marine mammals are detected during acoustic transmissions.
- Navy personnel would not restart acoustic transmissions until 15 minutes have passed with no marine mammal detections.
- Fixed wing aircraft would operate at highest altitudes practicable taking into account safety of personnel, meteorological conditions and need to support safe operations of a drifting ice camp. Aircraft would not reduce altitude if a seal is observed on the ice. In general, cruising elevation would be 305 m (1000 ft) or higher.
- Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UASs) would maintain a minimum altitude of at least 15.2 m (50 ft) above the ice and would not be used to track or follow marine mammals.
- Helicopter flights would use prescribed transit corridors when traveling to/from Prudhoe Bay and the ice camp. Helicopters would not hover or circle above or within 457 m (1,500 ft) of groups of marine mammals.

- Aircraft would maintain a minimum separation distance of 1.6 km (1 mi) from groups of 5 or more seals.
- Aircraft would not land on ice within 800 m (0.5 mi) of hauled-out seals.
- Dish and hand soap would be selected from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s “Safer Choice” list.
- All cooking and food consumption would occur within designated facilities to minimize attraction of nearby animals.
- All personnel will be required to complete environmental compliance training including environmental health and safety procedures.

Agency Consultation and Coordination

Marine Mammal Protection Act: The Navy applied for an incidental harassment authorization (IHA) for the taking of ringed seals on August 26, 2021. NMFS issued an IHA on February 4, 2022. The IHA authorizes in incidental harassment of ringed seals during ICEX 2022. Additionally, a request for the intentional take (deterrence) of polar bears was requested on December 7, 2021. A letter of authorization was received from USFWS on February 1, 2022. The USFWS LOA authorizes the intentional taking of polar bears for the safety of personnel and polar bears through active deterrence measures during ICEX 2022. Both of these authorizations are pursuant to 101(a)(4)(A), 101(a)(5)(D), 109(h), and 1112(c) of the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

Endangered Species Act: The Navy informally consulted with USFWS, Fairbanks Fish and Wildlife Field Office, on polar bears. USFWS concurred with Navy’s determination of may affect, but not likely to adversely affect, on February 2, 2022. The Navy also formally consulted with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), Alaska Region, on bearded seals and ringed seals. NMFS issued a Biological Opinion on January 31, 2022.

Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act: Through consultation for previous ICEXs, NMFS concluded that the Proposed Action would not likely reduce the quantity or quality of Essential Fish Habitat, therefore further consultation was not necessary.

Outreach

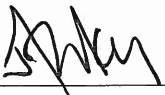
As part of the NEPA process the Navy made the EA/OEA for this ICEX available for public comment via <https://www.nepa.navy.mil/icex> from November 24 through December 15, 2021, and January 14 through Jan 28, 2022. Additionally the availability of the EA/OEA was published in the “Arctic Sounder” newspaper as well as on the “Arctic Sounder” website. The Navy also notified the Native Village of Nuiqsit, the Native Village of Kaktovic, and the Inupiat Community of the Arctic Slope via email on November 24, 2021 to inform them of the availability of the ICEX EA/OEA.

As part of the public comment period for the IHA, NMFS received a comment letter from Center for Biological Diversity on January 10, 2022. Additional discussion was included in the EA/OEA to address comments on alternatives (Section 2.3.5), polar bears (Section 4.2.4.3), ringed seals (Section 4.2.4.3), and climate change (Section 5.2.1).

Finding

After a review of the ICEX EA/OEA, which has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of NEPA and EO 12114 and Navy guidance for implementing NEPA and EO 12114 (M-5090.1), the Navy finds that conduct of an ICEX as implemented through the Proposed Action will not significantly impact or harm the quality of the natural and physical environments. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement/Overseas Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared. Copies of the EA/OEA, including this FONSI/FONSH, can be obtained from Ms. Laura Busch, U.S. Fleet Forces, 1562 Mitcher Ave Suite 250, Norfolk, VA, 23551.

8 Feb 2022
Date



Ms. Tracy Riker
Director, Fleet Installations and Environment and
Deputy Chief of Staff