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# 1 PURPOSE AND NEED

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The United States Marine Corps (USMC) proposes to conduct a Shore Fire Control Party (SFCP) Feasibility Study at Marine Corps Base (MCB) Camp Lejeune, North Carolina (Figure 1-1). This study would involve firing both inert (non-explosive) and live (explosive) NGF rounds into established impact areas at Camp Lejeune. The proposed Feasibility Study would occur no earlier than mid October 2001.

## 1.1 Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action

The purpose of the proposed study is to gather information in order to determine if Camp Lejeune is capable of accommodating SFCP training on a routine basis. Conducting SFCP training at Camp Lejeune would 1) save money associated with moving people, equipment, and ships to San Clemente Island or Vieques, 2) decrease the number of days personnel are deployed or are away from their homeport or unit by allowing them to train at or near home station, and 3) increase readiness by expanding frequency and opportunities for training.

This Environmental Assessment (EA) addresses the potential environmental impacts of decisions available to the Base Commander, namely to:

- Approve the Proposed Action (conduct the Feasibility Study); or
- Disapprove the Proposed Action.

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## 1.2 Background

Amphibious landings, attacks launched from the sea by naval and landing forces (Marines), are the hallmark of the Marine Corps. These landings involve the movement of Marine forces and their supporting equipment ashore, while naval aircraft provide close air support (CAS) and naval ships provide naval surface fire support (NSFS). Two types of NSFS are conducted during an amphibious landing:

- **Direct** NSFS is NGF aimed at a target that can be seen from the ship. Direct NSFS is used to take out enemy targets that pose an immediate threat on the beach. Command and control of NGF resides with the supporting naval forces.
- **Indirect** NSFS is NGF directed at enemy targets that cannot be seen from the ship. Marine SFCPs provide coordinates from positions on the beach, at which naval ships direct their fire. In essence, SFCPs become the eyes of the naval ships.

Once target coordinates from SFCPs have been provided to the naval forces offshore, the ship's crew plots the target, compares the target's position to itself, and passes fire control data to the naval gunners. This information is fed to the fire control computers, and double-checked against

the position plotted on a map. Weapons handlers then ensure the guns are loaded with the correct ammunition, and finally, the naval guns are fired remotely. SFCPs provide adjustments to the coordinates, as necessary, until the enemy target has been destroyed (US Navy, 2001).

Use of live ordnance is a necessity to determine SFCP performance. Using live ordnance allows the SFCP to determine if the shot was accurate enough to destroy the target. If the target is not destroyed with the first shot then as stated above adjustments to the coordinates need to be made. In addition, live ordnance reinforces strict handling procedures, and develops individuals who know when (or when not) to deliver NGF. Such skills are highly perishable, and practice is absolutely necessary to ensure flawless end-to-end execution of ordnance evolutions (Department of Defense, 1999).

The equipment and skills necessary to conduct effective indirect NSFS are complicated and perishable. At this time, there are only two locations within the US and its territories capable of accommodating this type of training: San Clemente Island, California and Vieques Island, Puerto Rico.

Both training locations challenge the ability of the Marine Corps to provide the required quarterly training for its East Coast-based SFCPs. (The requirement for quarterly training is presented in Marine Corps Order (MCO) 3501.26A.) For instance, the cost of sending one East Coast-based SFCP to San Clemente Island, California (outside of the Atlantic Fleet Operating Area) is almost \$6,000. In addition to this cost, sending East Coast SFCPs to the West Coast is very time consuming, contributing to the time Marines spend away from their home and families and also cutting into the limited time Marine personnel have to train. Besides being expensive and time consuming, training exercises at San Clemente Island do not allow Atlantic Fleet ship crews the opportunity to participate in the NSFS and SFCP training. The integration and coordination of ship crews with its SFCPs is one of the most important aspects of indirect fire NSFS training.

SFCP training at Vieques Island is also costly (nearly \$4,000 per SFCP). The larger constraint at Vieques Island, however, is the significant reduction in NSFS range availability (no more than 90 days per year). Numerous required training exercises compete for the available training days, thereby limiting the amount and flexibility of SFCP training at Vieques Island.

For these reasons, and due to the fact that no other ranges can currently accommodate indirect fire NSFS and SFCP training, a Feasibility Study at Camp Lejeune is proposed. Presently, indirect NSFS and SFCP training is not authorized at any of the training ranges on Camp Lejeune. The results of the proposed Feasibility Study will be used to determine if SFCP training can be conducted at Camp Lejeune on a routine basis. This study is not intended to find a replacement site for NSFS (either direct or indirect fire) training.

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## **1.3 The Environmental Review Process**

### **1.3.1 The National Environmental Policy Act**

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 requires consideration of the environmental impacts of major federal actions. Detailed environmental impact statements (EISs) must be prepared for those major federal actions with the potential to significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Environmental assessments (EAs) are concise public documents that provide evidence and analysis for determining whether to prepare an EIS or a finding of no significant impact (FONSI), and to aid in an agency's compliance with NEPA when an EIS is not required. The EA should include brief discussions of the need for the proposal, the alternatives, the affected environment, the environmental impacts of the proposed action and alternatives, and a listing of agencies and persons consulted.

This EA has been prepared pursuant to NEPA and the following:

- The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations as contained in 40 CFR Parts 1500 to 1508, which direct federal agencies on how to implement the provisions of NEPA; and
- Marine Corps Order (MCO) P5090.2A, which documents the USMC's internal operating instructions on how it implements the provisions of NEPA.

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### **1.3.2 Permits, Approvals, and Agency Coordination**

In addition to NEPA, other laws and regulations are applicable to conduct of the proposed Feasibility Study. Specifically, the following would be obtained prior to project implementation:

- Coastal Consistency Determination under the Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA).

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