DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
DEFENSE HEALTH AGENCY

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI) FOR THE FOCUSED ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT FOR AMBULATORY CARE CENTER CONSTRUCTION AT MARINE CORPS AIR STATION BEAUFORT, SOUTH CAROLINA

Pursuant to Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations (40 Code of Federal Regulations Parts 1500-1508) implementing the National Environmental Policy Act, Navy Regulations (32 Code of Federal Regulations part 775), and Marine Corps Order 5090.2, the United States (U.S.) Marine Corps and Defense Health Agency (DHA) give notice that a focused Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared and an Environmental Impact Statement is not required for the following activities at Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Beaufort.

Proposed Action: The Marine Corps and DHA propose to construct a new Ambulatory Care Center (ACC) at MCAS Beaufort. Construction would include a two-story, 155,189 square foot (SF) structure. The facility would provide 323 spaces for staff parking and 237 spaces for patient parking in two separate lots. The site proposed for the ACC is approximately 26.3 acres in size; 24.2 acres of the total are forested, and 2.1 acres are developed. Approximately 14.7 acres within the site would be cleared and utilized to construct the ACC project components; 13.6 acres to be cleared are forested and 1.1 acres are developed.

Patient services provided at the new ACC would include primary care, flight medicine, dental, behavioral health, orthopedics/podiatry, physical therapy, occupational health/audiology, optometry, clinical laboratory, pharmacy, radiology, outpatient ambulatory surgery, and healthcare administration. It is anticipated that in Fiscal Year 2028, a total of 11,885 eligible beneficiaries would be enrolled for care at the new ACC, which would require a total staff of 382.

Demolition under the Proposed Action would include the following buildings at the existing MCAS Beaufort Branch Health Clinic (BHC): Building 598 (21,747 SF); Building 707 (4,855 SF); Building 895 (1,207 SF); Building 940 (732 SF); and Building 1033 (225 SF). After demolition, the BHC site and associated parking (6.2 total acres) would be replanted with vegetation and left in a natural state.

Purpose and Need: The purpose of the Proposed Action is to provide a facility in which DHA and Naval Hospital Beaufort may meet their mission to achieve medical readiness, improve the health of our people, enhance the experience of care, and lower healthcare costs. The Proposed Action would replace the existing MCAS Beaufort BHC facility and would increase the capabilities and modernize outpatient care support for Active-Duty personnel, family members, and other eligible beneficiaries, which may include retirees and retiree family members, within the Beaufort military community.

The Proposed Action is needed because existing MCAS Beaufort buildings facilitating the medical mission are in poor condition. Building maintenance is becoming unreasonably burdensome and facilities are likely to fail to meet clinically necessary conditions. In addition to there being no space for expansion, current room configurations do not meet functional layout needs. Without intervention, the

future quality of patient care and access is projected to decline in existing MCAS Beaufort health care facilities.

Alternatives Analyzed: The Marine Corps considered two Action Alternatives as well as the No Action alternative.

Alternative 1. Under Alternative 1, the Marine Corps would construct a new ACC at MCAS Beaufort. Buildings 598, 707, 895, 940, and 1033 at the existing BHC would be demolished. The traffic network at MCAS Beaufort would remain unchanged under Alternative 1.

Alternative 2 (Preferred Alternative). Under Alternative 2 (Preferred Alternative), the Marine Corps would construct a new ACC at MCAS Beaufort. Buildings 598, 707, 895, 940, and 1033 at the existing BHC would be demolished.

The Preferred Alternative would also include upgrades to the MCAS Beaufort Traffic network. Two options for traffic upgrades will be analyzed in this focused EA. The first option would include installation of traffic signals at the intersections of Geiger Boulevard and Drayton Street and Geiger Boulevard and Elrod Street. Left-turn lanes would be added to southbound Drayton Street onto Delalio Street.

The second option for traffic network upgrades would include changes at the same intersections; however, traffic circles would be installed instead of stop lights. Option 2 would also include the addition of southbound left-turn lanes at Drayton Street and Delalio Street. It is anticipated that each traffic circle would have a diameter of 180 feet and a total footprint of approximately 0.6 acres.

No Action Alternative. Under the No Action Alternative, the Marine Corps would not construct a new ACC at MCAS Beaufort. While, the No Action Alternative would not meet the purpose and need, and is not considered a reasonable alternative, it is required by the CEQ and Marine Corps Order 5090.2. Also, the No Action Alternative is included as a baseline to compare potential impacts of the Proposed Action. Therefore, this alternative was carried forward for analysis.

Environmental Effects: As summarized below, the environmental resource areas analyzed in the EA include biological resources and traffic and transportation. Because potential impacts were negligible or nonexistent, the following resource areas were not evaluated in the EA: airspace, air quality, noise, land use, water resources, hazardous materials and wastes, health and safety, socioeconomics and environmental justice, infrastructure, cultural resources, and geological resources. The summary of effects is focused on the Preferred Alternative. The level of detail in the summary analysis is commensurate with the level of potential effect to the resource.

Biological Resources. In order to complete construction of the ACC, approximately 13.6 acres of forested habitat would need to be cleared. The mixed loblolly pine-hardwood habitat at the site has hardwood trees suitable for roosting male northern long-eared bats. There is no habitat present on the site that is suitable for roosting females based on a recent South Carolina Department of Natural Resources study.

Construction activities would result in short-term impacts from disturbance to terrestrial wildlife including the northern long-eared bat, if present, but would not further threaten their existence. Any male bats roosting near the construction area would likely flee due to the localized construction noise. If

northern long-eared bats are found on the project site, work would stop and MCAS Beaufort natural resources personnel would be contacted.

The northern long-eared bat is not known to occur on MCAS Beaufort; however, it has been recently observed within Beaufort County. Due to its unlikely occurrence in the project area, the stop work order upon potential sighting, and based on consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service the activities associated with the Proposed Action *may affect, but are not likely to adversely affect*, the northern long-eared bat. As a conservation measure for the northern long-eared bat, tree clearing for the Proposed Action would be conducted during the species' inactive season of November 15th to March 31st.

Under the Preferred Alternative, demolition and construction activities would produce temporary impacts from noise and disturbance from general construction activities to terrestrial wildlife. These impacts would typically consist of individual animals becoming startled and potentially fleeing the area. The construction phase of the project would be limited in duration and disturbance to wildlife would be temporary and minor. Direct mortality of smaller, less mobile species could occur from construction activities; however, no long-term adverse impacts to wildlife would occur.

A small amount of forested habitat (13.6 acres) would be permanently lost; however, the area represents a small fraction of the total forested habitat on MCAS Beaufort. 2.7 acres of the Cleared Area at the ACC project site would be replanted with vegetation and maintained through landscaping after construction. Additionally, the 6.2-acre site of the existing BHC would be replanted with vegetation and left in a natural state after demolition. Therefore, impacts to vegetation under the Preferred Alternative would be minimal.

Implementation of the Preferred Alternative would not result in significant impacts to biological resources.

Traffic and Transportation. Under the Preferred Alternative, a new ACC would be constructed and the BHC would be demolished. Traffic upgrades would be implemented at Geiger Boulevard at Drayton Street (Intersection 2), Geiger Boulevard at Elrod Street (Intersection 3), and Delalio Avenue at Drayton Street (Intersection 5). MCAS Beaufort would implement one of two options for traffic upgrades. The first option would include the addition of traffic signals at Intersections 2 and 3, as well as the addition of left-turn lane to southbound Drayton Street onto Delalio Street at Intersection 5. The second option would include changes at the same intersections; however, traffic circles would be installed instead of traffic signals at Intersections 2 and 3.

During the demolition of the BHC and construction of the ACC, construction traffic, including workers in personal vehicles and trucks, would travel to and from local locations. Construction workers commuting to the project site would be distributed throughout the entire construction phase, but truck trips would primarily occur during the early years of construction (i.e., while disposing of demolition materials and delivering construction materials). Truck traffic would be spread across the entire workday, minimizing impacts on local peak hours and traffic conditions. While this traffic would contribute slightly to traffic volume and congestion, this increase would be temporary and would not permanently degrade traffic operations in the region of influence (ROI). Overall, the Preferred Alternative would have short-term, less-than-significant adverse impacts to transportation during construction.

In the long-term, traffic patterns within the ROI would change, as vehicles would no longer travel to the BHC and would instead travel to the ACC in the southwestern portion of the ROI. The Preferred Alternative would result in long-term, less-than-significant adverse impacts to US 21 (Trask Parkway) at Geiger Boulevard (Intersection 1), Geiger Boulevard at Gordon Street (Intersection 4), and Intersection 5 due to degradation in level of service (LOS). There would be no changes during AM or PM peak hours for Delalio Avenue at Gordon Street (Intersection 6). There would be long-term, beneficial impacts due to improved LOS for Intersections 2 and 3.

Implementation of the Preferred Alternative would not result in significant impacts to traffic and transportation.

Cumulative Impacts. Other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions were reviewed for potential cumulative impacts with implementation of the action alternatives. This analysis occurred with an emphasis on the evaluation of biological resources and traffic and transportation. None of the past, present, or future actions would have long-term cumulative effects when combined with Alternative 1 or the Preferred Alternative. Therefore, implementation of Alternative 1 or the Preferred Alternative combined with the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects, would not result in significant impacts within the project area.

Public Involvement: For this project, which will affect lands within the boundaries of MCAS Beaufort, the Draft focused EA was published to the base website and public notices were published in local newspapers. A public meeting was held at Tabby Place in Beaufort, South Carolina on April 12, 2022. Copies of the Draft focused EA were made available at the following public libraries: Beaufort Branch Library, Lobeco Branch Library, and the St. Helena Branch Library. The Marine Corps solicited public comments on the Draft EA for 30 days, from March 28, 2022 through April 27, 2022.

The Final focused EA was published to the base website and public notices were published in the Beaufort Gazette. Questions pertaining to the Final focused EA can be directed to the Marine Corps at the following address: BFRT_JPAO@usmc.mil.

FONSI: Based on analysis presented in the Final focused EA and FONSI, the Marine Corps and DHA find that implementation of the Preferred Alternative will not significantly impact the quality of the human or natural environment or generate significant controversy. Therefore, the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement will not be required.

18 May 2022

Date

Karl R Arbogast

K. R. Arbogast
COMMANDING OFFICER
MCAS Beaufort