DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI) FOR THE FOCUSED ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT FOR PIER REPLACMENT 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 gives 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 proposes to replace the pier at MCAS Beaufort in Beaufort County, South Carolina. The Proposed Action is to replace the existing pier to include new pilings, decking, storage shed, piping, and mooring dolphins. This new pier would be constructed prior to the demolition of the existing pier. Use of the existing pier would be maintained during the entire term of the project with the exception of a brief period of weeks where utility switch overs would occur. Access to the existing Boat Dock would be maintained throughout construction.

Purpose and Need: The purpose of the Proposed Action is to provide a functional, efficient, and safe means of ship to shore operations to support training and readiness at MCAS Beaufort.
The Proposed Action is needed because the pier currently in use, and built in 1957 with an upgrade in 1999, was recently evaluated and received an undesirable engineering assessment. Advanced deterioration and overstressing observed on widespread portions of the structure has resulted in a downgraded capacity. This means the pier cannot support utilities for proper operation. Increased sustainment costs and eventual failure of the pier have been determined to be unacceptable.

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

Alternative 1 (Preferred Alternative). Under the Preferred Alternative, the Marine Corps would replace all of the existing pier at MCAS Beaufort. The existing Boat Dock would be kept and connected to the new pier. The existing pier would be demolished using demolition jaws to cut/crush concrete. Existing pilings would be left in place and cut below the mud line where possible. Pilings that require removal would be demolished by the direct pull method. Demolition and construction under Alternative 1 would take approximately 36 months. The new pier would have an expected life cycle of 50-75 years if properly maintained.

Alternative 2. Under Alternative 2, the Marine Corps would replace portions of the existing pier at MCAS Beaufort. This would require demolition and replacement of a majority of the piling caps (those not replaced in 2015) and all of the prestressed deck beams and deck overlay. In addition, the portions of the north side of the pier that are currently not used would be demolished and not replaced. Finally, the piping from the shore as well as any other features that are not used would be demolished. Any pilings that are not reused as part of the repair would be demolished. Pilings being demolished would be left in place and cut below the mud line where possible or removed by the direct pull method. Access to the Boat Dock on the south end of the pier would be maintained throughout construction. Access would be

achieved by launching another vessel from the boat ramp located on the southern end of MCAS Beaufort and transiting to the south end of the pier, or by having the contractor provide safe access through the construction site. Demolition and construction under Alternative 2 would take approximately 36 months. The repaired pier would have an expected life cycle of 30-50 years with a more frequent maintenance effort than that needed for the new pier.

No Action Alternative. Under the No Action Alternative, the Marine Corps would not replace the pier at MCAS Beaufort. The No Action Alternative would not meet the purpose and need as described above and is not considered a reasonable alternative, although this alternative was carried forward for purposes of analyses.

Environmental Effects: As summarized below, the environmental resource areas analyzed in the EA include biological resources, water resources, and health and safety. Because potential impacts were negligible or nonexistent, the following resource areas were not evaluated in the EA: airspace, air quality, noise, land use, transportation, hazardous materials and wastes, 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: Construction of the new pier would require installation of up to 250 14-inch square concrete piles using an impact pile driver and installation of up to four mooring dolphins each composed of three, 30-inch steel pipe piles using both vibratory and impact pile driving methods.

Potential impacts to bird species could occur if an individual is foraging in the immediate vicinity on the pier during demolition and construction activities. Bird species that use the nearshore waters of MCAS Beaufort are acclimated to the noise associated with a military airfield. Any impacts that could occur as a result of the Preferred Alternative would not jeopardize the population or foraging habitat of any of the known bird species that utilize the nearshore areas of MCAS Beaufort.

For fish, impacts would primarily be limited to temporary displacement from benthic or water column habitats. Pile driving activities could result in injury or mortality to fish species. The overall potential for adverse impacts to fish would be highly localized.

The potential for adverse impacts to fish with Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) designated in the Proposed Action area is likely to differ from species to species, depending upon life history, habitat use (demersal vs. pelagic), and distribution and abundance. It is anticipated that short-term impacts to older life-stages (e.g., juveniles and adults) of fish (both pelagic and demersal) will be limited to temporary displacement from the Action Area. Juvenile and adult stages would likely leave the construction areas and move to nearby unaffected habitat during construction given the minimal increase in turbidity, sedimentation, and underwater sound. Impacts to these life stages would consist of a temporary displacement and a temporary loss of a very small portion of food/foraging area. Potential impacts could impact species (fish and invertebrates) with demersal eggs/larvae as they would be subjected to sedimentation or potential crushing from the new piles, but it is likely this will be minimal given the small construction footprint. In contrast, species with pelagic larvae and eggs are not expected to be impacted because they will continue to be carried through the Proposed Action area with prevailing tides, currents, and

wave action should spawning take place during the Proposed Action period and within or vicinity of the Proposed Action area.

In order to mitigate impacts from pile installation on EFH, the Marine Corps would implement general construction best management practices (BMPs), including adherence to Clean Water Act permit requirements, spill containment, spill response, and construction equipment requirements. Piling removal BMPs would also be implemented during demolition activities. Contractors would be required to assess the condition of the piling and either remove it using a barge or upland equipment. The work plan would include procedures for extracting and handling pilings that break off and limit partial removal. Contractor would be required to slowly remove pilings. Pilings would not be shaken, or material removed during demolition. If clamshell bucket is used, extraction would be conducted during the best tidal conditions. Contractors would also be required to utilize a soft start procedure for impact pile driving at the beginning of each day's in-water pile driving or any time pile driving has ceased for more than 30 minutes. This would allow for animals to leave the Proposed Action vicinity before sound pressure increases. Overall, the Preferred Alternative would not substantially adversely affect EFH. The Preferred Alternative may cause minimal and temporary impacts, but would not have any lasting direct or indirect effect upon the status or sustainability of managed species or their habitat.

In order to mitigate impacts to marine mammals, threatened and endangered species, and wildlife from pile installation, the Marine Corps would utilize marine mammal observers, which would likely also observe any sea turtles entering the project area. If a marine mammal or sea turtle were observed entering the pile driving zone of impact, work would be stopped and would not commence until the animal moves out of the area. Contractors would also be required to utilize the soft start procedure mentioned above. There would be no significant impact on threatened and endangered species, marine mammals, or wildlife. Based on informal consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, it was determined that the Preferred Alternative *may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect* wood storks (*Mycteria americana*), black rails (*Laterallus jamaicensis jamaicensis*), and West Indian manatees (*Trichechus manatus*). Implementation of the Preferred Alternative would not result in significant impacts to biological resources.

Water Resources: Construction and demolition related activities may temporarily lower surface water quality. Demolition or pile installation may briefly cause sediment resuspension and turbidity to increase within the project area, which could lower dissolved oxygen levels. Elevated turbidity plumes may last from a few minutes to several hours depending on various factors, such as sediment type and water hydrology. This impact would be temporary during demolition and construction activities and would be reduced from implementation of BMPs. All construction and demolition would be done in adherence to MCAS Beaufort's state-required Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan as well as all state and Marine Corps required erosion and sedimentation control procedures.

Implementation of the Preferred Alternative would not have any permanent impacts on estuarine wetlands. Increased turbidity and associated sedimentation from Proposed Action construction and demolition has the potential to impact salt marsh habitat if sediment deposition smothers or covers the salt marsh for an extended time period. However, the expected turbidity and sedimentation is comparable to what might be circulated through a typical storm event. Appropriate BMPs to minimize turbidity within the project area would be used.

The Preferred Alternative would not alter the function of the 100-year floodplain.

Therefore, implementation of the Preferred Alternative would not result in significant impacts to water resources.

Health and Safety: During construction and demolition, contractors would be required to wear proper personal protective equipment such as hard hats, gloves, steel toed boots, eye protection, and long pants/long sleeve shirts as necessary, and safe equipment operation procedures would be followed. Construction and demolition activities occurring at MCAS Beaufort are required to be conducted in a manner that is consistent with all federal regulations, including all applicable Occupational Safety and Health Administration and Marine Corps requirements.

Once operational, the new pier would have an expected life cycle of 50-75 years, if properly maintained, providing long-term benefits to health and safety.

There are no environmental health or safety risks associated with the Proposed Action that would disproportionately affect children.

Therefore, implementation of the Preferred Alternative would not result in significant impacts to health and safety.

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, water resources, and health and safety. None of the past, present, or future actions would overlap temporally or geographically with the Preferred Alternative or Alternative 2. Therefore, implementation of the Preferred Alternative or Alternative 2 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, a project Factsheet and the Final focused EA were published to the base website and public notices were published in the Beaufort Gazette. Questions pertaining to the focused EA can be directed to the Marine Corps at the following address: BFRT_JPAO@usmc.mil.

Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI): Based on analysis presented in the Final focused EA and FONSI, the Marine Corps finds 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.

20 Jan 2022

Date

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