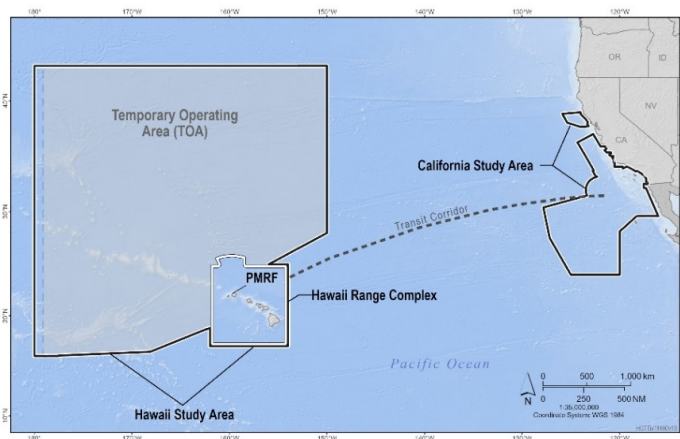


Introduction



Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet (CPF) is pleased to submit this nomination for the 2026 Secretary of the Navy Awards in the Award Category - Environmental Quality – Individual/Team for the **U.S. Pacific Fleet National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Team – Advancing Operational Readiness in the Indo-Pacific**. The CPF NEPA team enables CPF’s mission of *Safeguarding America’s interests by projecting a powerful force across the maritime domain with persistent naval presence to ensure regional stability and national security* by ensuring all CPF military readiness activities comply with NEPA and other

applicable environmental laws, regulations, and policies, providing the Navy uninterrupted access to at-sea ranges and modernizing and sustaining at-sea range capabilities. The CPF NEPA team demonstrated the execution of two complementary, mission-focused environmental planning projects completed between October 2023 and September 2025 that enabled continuous and uninterrupted critical training and testing activities within the CPF Area of Operations: the Hawaii-California Training and Testing (HCTT) Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)/Overseas EIS (OEIS) and the Pacific Missile Range Facility (PMRF) Land-Based Training and Testing (LBTT) Environmental Assessment (EA). The HCTT EIS/OEIS analyzed all current and future at-sea training and testing in the Hawaii and California range complexes, and the PMRF EA analyzed all PMRF training and testing on land, including gunnery and missile launches. These two projects complement each other in that the at sea aspects of the PMRF LBTT activities are covered by the HCTT EIS/OEIS. Both studies were completed in conjunction with each other to enable unit-level, integrated, and joint training exercises for all military services to include large scale exercises, such as the biennial Rim of Pacific (RIMPAC) exercise conducted in Hawaii. The CPF NEPA Team led both efforts.

For HCTT, the Navy team published the Notice of Intent (NOI) in the *Federal Register* on December 15, 2023, and filed the Final EIS/OEIS with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency on September 24, 2025. The NEPA process was successfully completed with the signing of the Record of Decision on November 26, 2025, and final permits issued in December 2025 prior to the expiration of the prior permits. Work began on the PMRF LBTT EA in early 2024 and concluded with the Final EA and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) on September 17, 2025.

The Mission. The DoW’s ability to project power and prevail in any potential conflict depends on the Navy and other military services conducting realistic training and testing in the strategically important HCTT Study Area (Figure 1). In addition to training, testing, and range modernization and sustainment, the study ensured that ranges fully support evolving weapons and tactics used by warfighters. Together, training, testing, and range modernization and sustainment are referred to as *military readiness activities*. For HCTT, the Navy’s ability to conduct military readiness activities in the Eastern Pacific Ocean relies on authorizations issued under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) and Endangered Species Act (ESA) that expired Dec 2025. The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), a cooperating agency and the regulator responsible for the protection of marine mammals, used the EIS/OEIS to fulfill their NEPA requirements. By completing the HCTT EIS/OEIS, the PMRF LBTT EA, and related regulatory consultations, this team directly supports the warfighter’s ability to conduct critical at-sea and amphibious readiness activities, including training with sonar and explosives, necessary to ensure the success of the fleet mission and to enable other services (Army, Air Force, and Marines) to use PMRF for unit-level training.

Background

The interdisciplinary (active-duty service members, environmental engineers, environmental attorneys, biologists, contract partners, and operational planners) **team’s purpose and goals** are to enable the warfighter in support of the CPF mission, as well as other service’s military readiness activities, by ensuring unfettered access to at-sea ranges and the ability to fully utilize technologically advanced weapon systems through

compliance with applicable environmental laws and policies including successfully renewing MMPA and ESA authorizations.

This nomination package recognizes the team's successful completion of the environmental analysis of nearly 50,000 annual military readiness activities to be conducted in the HCTT Study Area, comprised of the land portion of PMRF, waters around the Hawaiian Islands, training and testing areas off the coast of California (including San Nicolas Island and the Point Mugu Sea Range (PMSR)) and a corridor between SOCAL and the Hawaiian Islands. The HCTT project was distinctly more challenging relative to previous phases in that the area studied (Study Area) included two additional range complexes (approximately 43,000 NM² of sea and airspace), created 82,000 NM² of new special use airspace and sea space to support the use of our most capable aircraft and weapons, and supported the upgrade and expansion of at-sea instrumented ranges.

The team's efforts include renewing MMPA and ESA authorizations needed to legally train with sonar and explosives. The team also consulted under the Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA), National Marine Sanctuaries Act (NMSA), Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA), and National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA).

Team Organization and Staffing

The team analyzed all potential environmental impacts of proposed activities in compliance with NEPA and ensured the MMPA and ESA authorizations fully supported ongoing and future military readiness. Team members consisted of personnel with expertise in naval operations, exercise planning, environmental planning and compliance, marine and terrestrial biology, sonar acoustics analysis, cultural resources, public involvement, Geographic Information Systems, and laws and regulations. This broad and diverse expertise was required due to the complexity of the proposed activities, range of resources analyzed and the high degree of stakeholder interest including Native American, Native Hawaiian, and other public interests. The Navy's analyses required continuous collection and interpretation of best available science, creation and adoption of methodologies to predict environmental effects, and compilation of information into a scientifically accurate, legally sufficient, reliable, and readable document.

To reduce workload and costs across the DoW, DHS, and other US agencies, the Navy included USCG, Army, USAF, and MDA activities that are similar to Navy activities conducted in the Study Area. Inclusion of these activities required the full participation of their personnel and the integration of their organizational processes.

The team's composition and organization resulted in meeting important completion dates despite a constantly evolving regulatory environment. Mr. Alex Stone and Mr. Brian Whitehouse, CPF Environmental Readiness Division, led their respective teams with strong technical and administrative support from NAVFAC Project Managers: Ms. Nora Macariola-See, Ms. Stephanie Sleeman, Ms. Brienne McNair, and Ms. Lori Megliola, who oversaw schedules, budgets, and contract deliverables. Mr. Brian Wauer and Ms. Katherine Hryn led the MANTECH contractor team for all aspects of NEPA, regulatory consultation support, and outreach coordination. This core group had the knowledge and expertise to lead a multi-year initiative that required flexibility to adapt to changes in budget and mission requirements, all within the framework of evolving NEPA regulations throughout 2024 and 2025.

Management Approach

The HCTT EIS/OEIS was the first Navy at-sea EIS that was not a Supplement EIS to achieve the two-year schedule. The management team of both projects led teams of dozens of scientists and specialists across six time zones, aligning each one's specific expertise with required tasks, and coordinated the entire effort along a significantly reduced timeline mandated by changes to NEPA. The team leadership was also responsible for integrating and coordinating the efforts and schedules of the two projects with the 12 regulatory consultations across 10 regulatory agencies.

The team's experience included knowledge of federal, state, and local regulatory requirements, familiarity with threatened and endangered species, and fostering working relationships with local Tribes, Native Hawaiian Organizations, and state and local governments. Navy experts sought opportunities to meet with and answer

questions from the Hawaii Governor's office, U.S. Senators and House Members, and local government agency representatives. For each project, the team employed effective project management:

- Created small subject matter expert (SME) working groups to lead specific components of the overall project (e.g., NEPA, ESA, CZMA, Mitigation, etc.). Individuals were assigned roles within the teams and expected to understand timelines for tasks within that team. Each team knew how its milestones could affect the overall project and stayed on schedule.
- Adjusted frequency of plenary team, working group and ad hoc meetings as dictated by project phase to ensure critical milestones were met. For example, during development of the Proposed Action, frequent meetings were held to focus on the training and testing activities and defining the Study Area. Alternatively, the public involvement group met only during critical outreach phases.
- Coordinated closely with Army, USCG, USAF, USMC, and MDA and their subordinate offices to understand future requirements and identify opportunities to minimize environmental impacts.
- Used an online management system, the Environmental Information Management System (EIMS) to efficiently manage hundreds of document reviews by more than 100 SMEs and maintain a comprehensive document repository easily accessed by entire team.
- Provided all team members with access to an online scheduling tool that allowed up-to-date schedule tracking across multiple Navy at-sea EISs and their associated consultation processes.
- Consulted frequently with federal and state agencies, tribes, and organizations, and proactively shared draft documents and potential environmental effects. This coordination ensured local concerns such as fishing and boating were carefully evaluated to balance public safety with operational requirements.

Challenges and Unusual Circumstances

The project team addressed several challenges and unusual circumstances, including:

- (HCTT) Complex Proposed Action that covered four military services, at-sea areas that spanned from near-shore to well beyond 12 NM, and nearly 50,000 annual at-sea military readiness activities that included controversial actions such the use of sonar and explosives. The project included all the Navy's at-sea training and testing in the Eastern Pacific, covering all warfare areas from unit-level training to major exercises such as RIMPAC, the Navy's largest multi-national exercise.
- (HCTT) A large and diverse Study Area that includes multiple marine ecosystems, such as coral reefs, kelp forests, intertidal zones, sandy shores, rocky shores, and deep-sea floor. The entire Study Area is greater than 2.5 million square miles in size.
- (HCTT) Requirement to complete multiple and complex regulatory consultations due to the broad and diverse environment, which is home to 43 federally threatened and endangered marine species and their habitats and eight National Marine Sanctuaries.
- (HCTT & PMRF LBTT) Challenging Public and Regulatory Climate. Hawaii and California both have well-informed and knowledgeable stakeholders, tribes, Native Hawaiian Organizations (NHOs), and a public that reviewed and provided extensive comments on the proposals and analysis.
- (PMRF LBTT) PMRF is rich with threatened and endangered species that require proactive management and mitigative measures.
- (PMRF LBTT) An unexpected determination that Ka'ula Island, a critical component of PMRF, met the criteria of a traditional cultural place (TCP), would be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), and that the proposed undertaking would adversely affect the Ka'ula Island TCP.

Each of these challenges are further described in "Summary of Accomplishments" below.

Summary of Accomplishments

Large Study Area of Multiple Range Complexes

Early warfighter engagement revealed a need to expand the HCTT Study Area to meet evolving air and sea space training and testing requirements. For the HCTT, the Navy analyzed the expansion of new sea space and special use airspace to include the addition of PMSR, a critical DoW over-water test range asset, and the

Northern California (NOCAL) Range Complex. Additional sea space was also added to accommodate specialized testing activities.

By including other DoW and DHS activities, incorporating PMSR and NOCAL into a single study, as opposed to several studies, saved the government millions of dollars and reduced administrative burden on regulatory agencies.

Successful Completion of Multiple Regulatory Consultations

In addition to completing NEPA for HCTT and PMRF LBTT, the team was responsible for leading consultations with multiple regulators as required by laws and regulations:

- MMPA consultation with NMFS headquarters, cooperating agency.
- ESA consultation with NMFS headquarters, cooperating agency.
- ESA consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) regional offices in Carlsbad, CA; Ventura, CA; Arcada, CA; and Honolulu, HI.
- CZMA consultation with the California Coastal Commission and the Hawaii Office of Planning and Sustainable Development.
- MSA consultation with NMFS regional offices in Long Beach, CA and Honolulu, HI.
- NHPA consultation with the Hawaii State Historic Preservation Division and the California State Historic Preservation Officer, offered consultation status to 39 Federally Recognized Tribes, and completed government-to-government consultation with 4 Federally Recognized Tribes. Also offered an opportunity for Native Hawaiian Organizations and other stakeholders the ability to request to become a Consulting Party.
- NMSA consultation for eight National Marine Sanctuaries with the NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (ONMS).

In each consultation, a specialized team of SMEs would prepare each consultation document specific to the regulatory authority. Pre-consultation meetings and frequent communications with the regulatory agencies ensured they understood the project's timeline. During consultation, questions or recommendations from the regulator were fielded by SMEs, who would coordinate with the appropriate entities to address questions and/or recommend mitigation measures that protected sensitive resources while maintaining operational flexibility. By communicating early and often and including each Action Proponent in the review of consultation materials and the agencies proposed mitigation measures, potential impacts to mission could be identified early in the process and evaluated to determine feasibility, and possible modifications to avoid and minimize impacts on the warfighter.

Complex Proposed Action

These efforts required the Navy to analyze nearly 50,000 military readiness activities to be conducted annually in the HCTT Study Area, including increased use of in-water explosives, new activities and technologies, and evolving tactics, new Action Proponents in new locations – all to allow warfighters to train to evolving missions and training requirements. One notable change was the significant increase in unmanned air, surface, and undersea systems in all warfare areas, and their inclusion in many new and existing activities, which also required a re-evaluation of the mitigations to be implemented. New Central and Northern California amphibious activities were included, requiring specialized ESA consultations with USFWS on nearshore species. Team members met with warfighters and Navy acquisition program offices early in the process to make sure the team understood the proposed activities and how they supported the current and future readiness. These meetings were valuable in ensuring these activities were fully understood by the scientists and SMEs conducting the analyses. As mitigation measures were developed, the warfighters and the testing community were engaged to confirm that proposed mitigation measures would not negatively affect mission readiness.

HCTT also included a new category of activity: range sustainment and modernization, which covers the installation or replacement of underwater systems, such as hydrophones and buoys that are needed to ensure ranges support evolving weapons and tactics used by warfighters. Previously, these efforts would have been completed under separate NEPA and consultation documents but including them within the HCTT reduced the

costs associated with these consultations, as well as the burden to the outside agencies that support these processes.

While PMRF's at-sea ranges were included in HCTT, the PMRF LBTT EA completed the first comprehensive review of PMRF land-based training and testing needs since 2008, directed by DoW to include joint service multi-domain fire requirements. By successfully including these activities in HCTT and associated consultations, the Navy team ensured access to ranges and the uninterrupted training and testing of all military services.

Challenging Public Climate

Within the HCTT Study Area, public and local organizations were concerned about military activities in the area, and their potential impact to environmental and cultural resources. In anticipation of these concerns, the project team executed a comprehensive, multi-layered public involvement program, consisting of various outreach communication strategies and tactics, to adequately and effectively involve and communicate with stakeholders, federally recognized tribes, and NHOs.

Stakeholder Briefings and Regulatory Agency Consultations: The team maintained continuous engagement with federal, state, and local regulators, including National Marine Sanctuaries, California Coastal Commission, the Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources, the Hawaii Office of Planning and Sustainable Development, Kauai County officials, Office of Hawaiian Affairs, Congressional staff, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region IX. Outreach also included focused briefings to a dozen local groups, such as the Kauai Port Allen Fishing Club, to address localized concerns regarding military activities near Ka'ula Island associated with the PMRF LBTT. Briefings and consultations proactively addressed issues and concerns, promoted two-way dialogue, reduced misinformation or inaccuracies, and improved and sustained communication and relationships.

Additional Partnerships: The CPF NEPA team partnered with the Federal Aviation Administration in the development of new special use airspace and the Center for Naval Analyses to understand complex vessel movement data. The team coordinated with Navy Region Hawaii partners through the "One Kauai" outreach team, an internal Navy information-sharing forum to promote and improve cross-command and cross-project communication between NEPA teams, particularly with respect to the PMRF LBTT EA and other NEPA projects Navy Region Hawaii is undertaking related to PMRF and other real estate actions. Working in collaboration with the One Kauai team, CPF identified key Kauai-based stakeholders and their concerns, developed key messages to explain the importance of training and testing activities, and implemented a comprehensive engagement strategy to promote consistency in outreach, public meeting formats, and briefings to key stakeholders. The Navy has and continues to develop partnerships and build coalitions with government agencies, environmental organizations, and communities to better manage and protect natural and cultural resources throughout the Navy's training and testing areas in Hawaii and California.

Public Outreach and Involvement: To reach target audiences throughout California and Hawaii and interested organizations and individuals outside of the geographic proximity to the Study Area, the project team expanded their typical outreach tactics. For HCTT, the team developed a project overview video and virtual presentations with audio narration for each topic. The video and presentation were posted on the project website, along with general project information, to educate the public on the Navy's need to conduct military readiness activities, environmental stewardship programs, results of the environmental analyses, mitigation measures, and public commenting opportunities. The team used social media to extend its reach and sent direct email notifications to more than 500 subscribers. To further notify, inform, and involve the public during the public review and comment period, the Navy held three in-person public meetings and one virtual public meeting, which included a public question-and-answer session. The virtual public meeting, which allowed interested individuals to attend live by computer, tablet, mobile device, or telephone, was recorded and posted on the project website. Although public commenting and public meetings are not required for EAs, the Navy team provided a comment period for the PMRF LBTT Draft EA, receiving almost 1,900 comments, and conducted an in-person public meeting. The HCTT and PMRF LBTT teams developed project-specific information for inclusion in a public fact sheet distributed to Kauai-based stakeholders that explained differences in proposed actions for seven different

ongoing NEPA actions on Kauai. In response to local media interest, the team's SMEs provided on-camera and phone interviews. The public involvement program contributed to the Navy's ability to continue military readiness activities in the Study Area and build and sustain strong relationships with stakeholders, federally recognized tribes, and NHOs.

PMRF Sensitive Species

The Navy reinitiated informal consultation with USFWS under section 7 of the ESA for species on Kauai that could be affected by PMRF activities. Following informal consultation, the USFWS provided concurrence with the Navy's determination that the Proposed Action may affect but is not likely to adversely affect 11 ESA-listed species that exist at PMRF. The Navy committed to conduct seabird monitoring at Ka'ula Island and provide reports to the Hawaii Office of Planning and Sustainable Development.

Ka'ula Island, a Traditional Cultural Place

The Navy conducted multiple meetings with NHOs, the Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA), State Historic Preservation Division (SHPD), and other interested parties to identify historic properties and gather information regarding the historic and cultural significance of Ka'ula Island. Subsequently, the Navy determined Ka'ula Island meets the criteria of a TCP eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) and determined that the proposed undertaking would adversely affect the Ka'ula Island TCP. Specifically, the proposed increase in activities will introduce additional visual and atmospheric elements that diminish the integrity of setting and feeling and will adversely affect the Ka'ula Island TCP. The Navy initiated consultation with NHOs, OHA, SHPD, and other consulting parties; and notified the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation to resolve adverse effects and develop a Section 106 Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) in accordance with Stipulation IX.C.1 of the 2012 Programmatic Agreement and 36 Code of Federal Regulations section 800.6. By engaging consulting parties to develop a legally binding framework to address adverse effects on historic properties, the commitments within a resulting MOA are expected to reduce impacts on cultural resources and historic properties through mitigation and minimization measures, while still allowing for effective, realistic warfighter training at Ka'ula Island.

Conclusion

The CPF NEPA team's successful delivery of the HCTT EIS/OEIS and PMRF LBTT EA, two complex, dynamic and challenging environmental planning projects in 2025, despite changing NEPA regulations, extensive coordination requirements, and demanding schedules, represents a monumental achievement in environmental planning and warfighter support. By navigating a shifting regulatory landscape and consolidating multiple range complexes into a single, efficient analysis for at-sea military readiness activities in HCTT, and including range modernization and sustainment activities, the team avoided millions of dollars in costs while ensuring U.S. forces have the ability to conduct the training and testing activities needed to achieve and maintain the highest levels of warfighter readiness. In the PMRF LBTT EA, the Navy's commitment to transparent public engagement and proactive stewardship of critical cultural and natural resources—ranging from the protection of endangered species to the respectful management of Ka'ula Island—has strengthened vital relationships with stakeholders and indigenous organizations. These relationships will endure, benefiting other ongoing environmental efforts in the region for years to come.

The successful completion of the HCTT EIS and PMRF EA in 2025 represents a critical contribution to U.S. national defense. By providing the indispensable environmental framework for joint force training in the Pacific, these projects directly enhance the nation's military readiness and its ability to project power and ensure stability across the Indo-Pacific region.

This effort was fundamental to national defense in several key ways:

- **Foundation for Joint Force Lethality:** The studies are the cornerstone that enables realistic, large-scale "train as you fight" scenarios. By strategically linking the land-based activities at PMRF with the vast at-sea ranges of HCTT, the analysis provides the legal and environmental foundation for the Navy, Marine Corps, Army, and Air Force to train together in a complex, multi-domain environment. This integration is essential for building a combat credible joint force capable of deterring adversaries and winning decisively.

- **Guaranteeing Peak Military Readiness:** The proactive and continuous coordination with warfighters ensured that the full spectrum of training and testing requirements was met. This eliminated potential training limitations, guaranteeing that U.S. forces can achieve and sustain the highest state of operational readiness without compromise. A ready force is the most effective instrument of national defense.
- **Securing Strategic National Assets:** This comprehensive environmental planning secures the long-term viability of the premier training and testing complexes in the Pacific. In doing so, it ensures that these strategic assets remain available to prepare U.S. forces for any contingency, directly underpinning the nation's defense posture in a vital region.

While the projects also yielded significant cost savings and strengthened community partnerships, their most vital contribution lies in fortifying national defense by empowering America's joint forces with the validated, unrestricted ability to train for high-end conflict.