



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY

COMMANDER
UNITED STATES PACIFIC FLEET
250 MAKALAPA DRIVE
PEARL HARBOR HI 96860-3131

IN REPLY REFER TO:

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Ser N46/0643

August 10, 2023

Office Director, Office of Protected Resources
National Marine Fisheries Service
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
B-SSMC3, Room 13821
1315 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910-3282

Dear Director,

On behalf of Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet, enclosed is a printed copy of the unclassified Gulf of Alaska (GOA) Study Area Annual Training Report for the first year of the authorization (6 pages). The classified annex of this report will be delivered separately.

This report is submitted pursuant to the reporting requirements for the GOA Study Area Marine Mammal Protection Act authorization.

Please extend my thanks to your staff for their continued support of the U.S. Navy's compliance process. We are available to meet with you or your staff should you have comments on the enclosed report or recommendations for future reports. My point of contact for these matters is Mr. Ben Kostenbader at 808-471-4683 or arnold.r.kostenbader.civ@us.navy.mil.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "J. H. Beattie".

J. H. BEATTIE
Captain, U.S. Navy
Deputy Fleet Civil Engineer
By direction

Enclosure: 2023 Unclassified GOA Study Area Annual Training Exercise Report, Year 1

Prepared for and submitted to:

National Marine Fisheries Service
Office of Protected Resources

Prepared by:

Department of the Navy

In accordance with the Letters of Authorization
Under the MMPA and ITS authorization under
the ESA dated 03 February 2023

UNCLASSIFIED
2023 Gulf of Alaska (GOA)
Study Area
Annual Training Report
Year 1

Northern Edge 2023
04 to 19 May 2023

10 AUGUST 2023

TABLE OF CONTENTS

GOA STUDY AREA ANNUAL TRAINING REPORT

INTRODUCTION.....	1
(1) GOA – Mid-Frequency Active Sonar (MFAS)/High Frequency Active Sonar (HFAS)	
(i) Exercise information (for each MTE)	2
(ii) Individual marine mammal sighting information for each sighting in each exercise where mitigation was implemented.....	2
(iii) Mitigation effectiveness evaluation.....	3
(2) GOA – Summary of Sources Used	
(i) Summary of authorized sound sources used in all training events	
(A) Total hours	3
(B) Number of explosives	3
(C) Pre-event notification	4

GULF OF ALASKA STUDY AREA TRAINING REPORT

INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Navy prepared this Annual Training Report covering the period of Exercise Northern Edge 2023 in compliance with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Final Rule and Letter of Authorization (LOA), and Incidental Take Statements under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) and Endangered Species Act (ESA) authorizations for the Navy's Gulf of Alaska (GOA) Study Area.

In the GOA Final Rule and Letter of Authorization¹, the following report subsections were specified and are present within this report:

- (1) Mid-Frequency Active Sonar (MFAS)/High Frequency Active Sonar (HFAS)
 - (i) Exercise information (for each MTE)
 - (ii) Individual marine mammal sighting information for each sighting in each exercise where mitigation was implemented
 - (iii) Mitigation effectiveness evaluation

- (2) Summary of sources used
 - (i) Summary of authorized sound sources used in all training events
 - (A) Total hours
 - (B) Number of explosives
 - (C) Pre-event notification

The information in this report represents the best practical data collection for this period.

¹ GOA Requirements for Monitoring and Reporting, 50 CFR §218.155(e)(1) and (e)(2). The reporting requirements are also delineated in section 7(f) of the Letter of Authorization.

(1) GOA – Mid-Frequency Active Sonar (MFAS)/High Frequency Active Sonar (HFAS)

(i) Exercise information

Table 1-1. MTEs conducted in the GOA Study Area

(A) Exercise designator	(B) Date began and ended	(C) Location	(D) # and types of active sources used	(E) # and types of passive sources used	(F) Number and types of vessels, aircraft, etc. participating	(G) Total hours of observation by Lookouts	(H) Total hours of all active sonar	(I) Total hours of each active sonar source bin	(J) Wave height (high, low average) (ft)
Northern Edge 23	4-19 May 2023	GOA	*	*	*	2,448	*	*	6, 2, 3

*This information is presented in the classified annex to this report.

(ii) Individual marine mammal sighting information for each sighting in each exercise when mitigation occurred

Table 1-2. GOA TMAA MTE – Individual Marine Mammal Sighting Information: Northern Edge 2023 4 May - 19 May 2023.

(A) Date/time/location of sighting	(B) Species	(C) Number of individuals	(D) Initial detection sensor	(E) Indication of specific type of platform the observation was made from	(F) Length of time observers maintained visual contact with marine mammal(s) (min)	(G) Sea state (Beaufort scale)	(H) Visibility (nm)	(I) Sound source in use at time of sighting (Y/N)	(J) Indication of whether animal was <200 yd, 200-500 yd, 500-1000 yd, 1000-2000 yd, or >2000 yd from sound source	(K) Whether operation of sonar sensor was delayed, or sonar was powered or shut down, and how long the delay	(L) If source in use is hull-mounted, true bearing of animal from vessel, true direction of vessel's travel, and estimation of animal's motion relative to ship	(M) Observed behavior – Lookouts shall report, in plain language and without trying to categorize in any way, the observed behavior of the animals and if any calves present
No marine mammal mitigations reported during this exercise.												

(iii) Mitigation Effectiveness Evaluation

(U) Northern Edge 2023 was conducted from 4-19 May 2023. There were no reported active sonar mitigations due to marine mammals during the exercise, and there were 14 reported instances of ships maneuvering to avoid marine mammals. In support of Northern Edge 2023, the Navy conducted over 387 hours of Marine Species Awareness Training for 451 personnel prior to the exercise.

Table 1-3. GOA MTE – Northern Edge 2023.

MTE Type	Dates	# of Exercise Days	# of US Ships Involved (MFAS and non-MFAS)	# of Marine Mammal Mitigations	# of Marine Mammals
Northern Edge	4-19 May 2023	16	4	0	0
	Total	16	4	0	0

(U) Mitigation Effectiveness Discussion

Although no active sonar mitigations took place during Northern Edge 2023, the proper implementation of mitigation measures for sighted marine mammals are estimated to be highly effective at preventing exposures that may result in injury (e.g. Permanent Threshold Shift).

The two categories of mitigation measures (procedural mitigation and mitigation areas) outlined in the GOA Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)/Overseas Environmental Impact Statement (OEIS) of September 2022 and approved by NMFS in the GOA LOA were trained to, and were effectively implemented by the watch standers and lookouts during Northern Edge 2023. Fleet commanders, aircrews, and ship watch teams continue to improve individual awareness and enhance reporting practices. This improvement can be attributed to the various pre-exercise conferences, mandatory Marine Species Awareness Training (including on-line training required for watch standing qualifications), awareness tools such as Protective Measures Assessment Protocol, and application of lessons learned in marine mammal sighting and reporting.

(2) GOA – Summary of Sources Used

This section summarizes total usage of each type of sound source used for training within GOA from 4-19 May 2023, which constitutes Year 1 of the 7-year authorization.

(i) Summary of authorized sound sources used in all training events

(A) Total hours

The total hours of each bin of sonar or other non-impulsive source can be found in the classified annex to this report.

(B) Number of Explosives

There were no explosive exercises conducted during the reporting period.

Table 2-1. Explosive Sources Usage within GOA Studay Area by Source Bin.

Authorized sound sources From GOA Final Rule		Authorized Amount (03Feb23- 02Feb24)	Actual Usage (03Feb23- 02Feb24)	% Used of Authorized Amount
(A) Explosive sources used during training **				
E5	5 inch projectile	56 detonations	0	0%
E9	500 lb. bomb	64 detonations	0	0%
E10	Harpoon missile / 1,000 lb. bomb	6 detonations	0	0%
E12	2,000 lb. bomb	2 detonations	0	0%

Table 2-2. 7-year Cumulative Training Explosive Sources Usage within GOA Studay Area by Source Bin.

Sound Source Bin	Year 1 Actual Usage (03Feb23- 02Feb24)	7-yr Authorized Amount (03Feb23- 02Feb28)	7-yr Cumulative Actual Usage (03Feb23- 02Feb28)	% Used of 7-yr Authorized Amount
(ii) Acoustic Sources Used During Training				
<i>See classified annex for all other acoustic sources</i>				
(ii) Explosive Sources Used During Training				
E5	0	392	0	0%
E9	0	448	0	0%
E10	0	42	0	0%
E12	0	14	0	0%

(C) Pre-event Notification

The Navy met all requirements for coordination with NMFS prior to conducting exercises within the GOA Study Area during the reporting period.