

**Public Affairs Office**  
**Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point**

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**\*\*\* Press Release \*\*\***

**MARINE CORPS AIR STATION CHERRY POINT, N.C. (Sept. 19, 2008)** – Due to the military's requirement to provide the best possible training for its personnel, the Marine Corps has proposed some increases in training operations – which would result in the designation of an expanded water restricted area associated with Bombing Target 11, Piney Island, that would only be used on an intermittent basis. This intermittent range expansion would be required to optimize public safety, military training, and protect any vessels that operate in the vicinity of BT-11.

The intermittent expansion proposal for BT-11 is defined to include a block training schedule of one-week per month during the months of February through November. Proposed operational times of live fire have been established as 4 p.m. to 11 p.m. on scheduled days. The proposed block training times would be scheduled two weeks in advance of the actual start date for the proposed training.

Recently, there have been varying reports from multiple sources about the Marine Corps' proposal to expand bombing ranges in Carteret and Pamlico Counties. As outlined and described below, the Marine Corps is proposing to expand a specific water restricted area which would be periodically off limits to the public only when live fire exercises are underway. We understand this may impact commercial and recreational fishing in this area during these periods and want your involvement in this process. Please read the remainder of this information for further details and learn how you can participate.

**Background:**

The Marine Corps, Navy, Army and other services have used Bombing Targets 9, Brant Island Shoal, and 11, Piney Island, since the 1940's as training ranges for a variety of ordnance delivery. In early 2007, it was determined that the Marine Corps needed to study the impacts of training activities on its ranges, including BT-9 and BT-11. We determined that the scope of the study as it relates to the bombing targets should include the effect of weapons currently used, as well as weapons proposed to be used in the near future. The scope of the study also required us to follow the guidelines of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

**What is NEPA?**

NEPA requires federal agencies to examine the environmental impacts of their activities. The purpose of an Environmental Assessment (EA), which is being completed for this effort, is to provide sufficient evidence and analysis for determining whether to prepare an environmental impact statement or a finding of no significant impact (FONSI). Due to the intermittent nature of

this proposed expansion and existing information regarding the current level of impacts of ordnance delivery at the bombing targets, the Marine Corps determined that an EA would be an appropriate starting action to comply with NEPA. The EA will analyze a number of alternatives, one of which the USMC will select as the preferred. If the EA determines that there are significant impacts from one of the alternatives, and if the USMC chooses to implement that alternative, the USMC will prepare a full EIS prior to implementing that alternative.

### **Involving the Public:**

Since the proposed action takes place in waters that are economically and environmentally critical to North Carolina, the USMC decided that involving our regulatory partners and the public very early in the process was an important additional step for this EA. A meeting with key regulatory partners was conducted in April as were two public meetings in early June. Since those meetings, the planning criteria used to develop safety footprints for specific weapon systems has been modified and is not currently available for official use. Accurate safety footprints will determine the exact shape and characteristics of any proposed increase for water restricted areas around Bombing Target 9, Brant Island Shoal. Due to these considerations, there will be no proposed change to the water restricted areas surrounding BT-9 at this time.

### **Where We Are Now:**

#### **The Facts**

- The Military is required by law to properly train its service members.
- Current safety restrictions at BT-11 are insufficient for training with proposed weapons.
- All new restrictions, if any, will be designed with public safety as first priority.
- Proposed expansions of the BT-11 water restricted areas, if adopted, will not be full-time restrictions.
- The proposed expanded water restriction area for BT-11, if adopted, will only be used for a limited number of hours during block training times, which would be based on current training needs and further input from the public.
- The proposed restrictions, if adopted, would be lifted when training is not scheduled during the block training times.
- Per the NEPA process, no decision can be made until all available information is gathered, including comments from the public and various regulatory agencies.
- No change is currently proposed for BT-9 Brant Island Shoal.

The end result of this EA could be one of several things:

- No changes to the existing restrictions
- Intermittent increases to the BT-11 water restricted areas
- A decision to file a full EIS

### **Conclusion:**

The Marine Corps will conduct an additional round of public informational meetings in the local community. During the public information meetings, the Marine Corps will be available to describe the proposed action and alternatives, define the process involved in preparing the EA, and answer questions the public might have relevant to the proposal. All meetings will begin at 4 p.m. and last until 7 p.m. and will be held at the following locations:

<b>City/Town</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Location</b>
Smyrna	Monday, October 6 <sup>th</sup>	Smyrna Elementary School Gymnasium 174 Marshallberg Road Smyrna, NC 28579
Bayboro	Tuesday, October 7 <sup>th</sup>	Pamlico High School Cafeteria 601 Main St Bayboro, NC 28515

We encourage the community to attend these meetings and have your questions about this proposal answered by subject matter experts. We hope that you will attend to provide your comments.