

Military plans further intrusion on Pamlico fishing areas

Fred BONNER



For years it has been predicted that the military forces here in North Carolina are systematically going about grabbing more and more of North Carolina's land, air space and waterways for their own use. First they quietly had a large section of air space over Pamlico Sound restricted to civilian aircraft, then came the infamous proposed Offsite Landing Facility (OLF) in Beaufort County.

Now, as predicted, the military (Marine Corps.) is proposing a large expansion of the bombing and live firing range on the Brant Island Shoal (BT 9). As with the proposed OLF, this infringement of land, air and water by the military on the state of North Carolina is expected to meet with stiff opposition.

In the case of the proposed OLF, most of the opposition was because of the close proximity of the noisy practice landing field to a large concentration of waterfowl. In the case of the proposed expansion of BT 9, there's the question of what effect all the ordnance is having on bottlenose dolphin and several species of sea turtles in Pamlico Sound. These animals are heavily protected under the Marine Mammal Protection Act and the Endangered Species Act. Any actions that could possibly have a detrimental effect on either of these species is certain to meet with quick opposition from environmentalists and wildlife officials.

Commercial fishermen know very well what restrictions they have to suffer through because their nets "might" cause damage to sea turtles. The word "might" is a loosely used term used by federal officials that covers a lot of ground.

The term "might" was used over 20 years ago when U.S. Fish



Two black-painted rigid inflatables with machine guns and heavily armed military troops sit by a dock near the bombing range at Brant Island (BT 9) in Pamlico Sound. This area has been heavily used by several branches of American military since 9-11 and the military is proposing to expand the size of the restricted area for this bombing/firing range. Many commercial and sport fishermen are saying "Enough Already. Our military has taken more than their share of our land, our air space and now they want to take a lot of our water, too." (WDN Photo/Fred Bonner)

and Wildlife Service biologist Mike Gantt refused to grant hunting lodge owner Edwin (Booger) Harris of Pantego a permit to dike off a waterfowl impoundment near Pungo Lake. In turning down the permit application Gantt stated that it had been refused because there MIGHT be endangered bald eagles and banded sunfish within the proposed area. Not far away from the Harris area the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was busily, and quietly, building a waterfowl impoundment much the same as Harris had requested permission to build. It's amazing what our federal government gets away with!

Apparently the military pretty well gets away with whatever they want to do and will not even allow detailed studies to be conducted within the bombing ranges to see what effect the bombs are having on turtles. This is apparently why the military is quietly (and quickly) trying to get approval for the bombing range expansion without having to conduct thorough and lengthy environmental impact statements concerning the proposals.

They want to substitute the quick (and less thorough) environmental assessment instead. This type of study is also called a "Finding of No Significant Impact

or FONSI) and would allow the military to get clearance for the expansion within a year.

The proposed expansion area on BT 9 (Brant Island Shoal) would extend the restricted area out for several miles and would place the famed Brant Island Slough off limits to sport and commercial fishermen.

Last year when it was reported in this column that dead sea turtles were washing up in the Pamlico Sound and River areas, some interesting information surfaced along with the dead turtles. The Marine Corps had conducted studies on sea turtle populations (how many in the entire sound,

etc.) in Pamlico Sound but no studies had been conducted on the effects of the bombs and other ordnance on the sea turtles (or dolphins) in the restricted areas around the bombing ranges. As a matter of fact, the military authorities had refused to allow North Carolina biologists into the area to do any studies at all. Outside the area where the bombing and live firing were taking place, studies were conducted but inside those areas, nothing.

There's also the strong possibility that endangered manatees frequent the area around the Brant Island shoal. These large mammals appear regularly in Sil-

ver Lake at Ocracoke Island and have been seen as far up into the Pamlico River as Blounts Creek.

If the military thinks the noise of the F-18A aircraft and the effect this could have on waterfowl (protected but seldom endangered) caused a public outcry against the proposed OLF, wait until the public gets its teeth into what the bombing and live firing could be doing to manatees, dolphins and sea turtles. These animals have become what some call the "Bambi" species of the modern day environmental movement.

Now, with the proposed expansion of BT 9 (and BT 11 near Cedar Island) it looks like the Marine Corps is trying to very quietly get clearance to extend the area of the bombing ranges without the public having much input into the permitting process. Several "public information" meetings have been quietly held by the Marine Corps in hopes that public input into the bombing range expansion would be kept to a minimum and approval for the expansion of the restricted areas be quickly approved. It's like the old politicians' idea of comparing the voting public's need to know about raising mushrooms. It states that this can be achieved by "keeping the public in the dark and feeding them B.S."

According to a press release, citizens of North Carolina wishing to make comments about the proposed expansion of the bombing ranges can do so for a few weeks. Comments should be mailed to Susan Admire, Naval Facilities Engineering Command, 6506 Hampton Boulevard, Norfolk, VA. 23508 or by faxing comments to her at (757) 322-4894. (I attempted to fax some comments to this number but after many rings the phone never is answered or picked up. Why am I not surprised?)

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Beijing reveals plan for Olympic car ban

By STEPHEN WADE
AP Sports Writer

BELJING — Beijing will pull half its 3.3 million vehicles off the roads during the Olympics, betting the move, plus a stringent ban on construction and heavy industry, will clean the city's noxious air when the games open in seven weeks.

Vehicles will be allowed on the roads on alternate days — according to even or odd car registration numbers — from July 20 until Sept. 20. In addition, 300,000 heavy polluting vehicles — aging industrial trucks, many of which operate only at night — will be banned from July 1.

A deadly earthquake last month and fierce human rights protests on international legs of the Olympic torch relay have removed some of the scrutiny from Beijing's chronic air pollution. But sparkling venues and \$40 billion spent to improve infrastructure have not disguised the fact that air quality remains a contentious issue for the games.

International Olympic Committee president Jacques Rogge had said outdoor endurance events lasting more than an hour will be postponed if air quality is poor.

"Ironically, the one place where expectations are so low are on the environment, where China may come out looking better than people thought," Victor Cha, director of Asian Studies at Georgetown University, said in an e-mail.

"Pea-soup air at the opening ceremony would be their worst nightmare, however," Cha added.

The Beijing Olympics take place on Aug. 8-24 followed by the Paralympics Sept. 6-17. About 500,000 foreigners are expected for the Olympics with 10,000 athletes and about 30,000 journalists set to attend.

Under the temporary plan announced Friday, between 30 and 70 percent of 300,000 government-operated vehicles will be taken off the roads. Officials also expect a strong increase in the use of public transportation, with several new subway lines set to open. Several others have opened in the past year.

The traffic plan was announced on a day when Beijing sweltered under a thick haze of pollution, limiting visibility to a half mile. Conditions were even worse on Thursday, although both days the Beijing Environmental Protection Bureau's Web site described conditions as only "slightly polluted."

"Perception is often different from the scientific monitoring statistics," said Du Shaozhong, deputy chief of Beijing Environmental Protection Bureau. "We base our findings on data."

"We now have 27 monitoring stations which all use state-of-the-art equipment," Du added.

Du had repeatedly denied charges that officials moved the monitors away from polluted areas to get better readings.

"We have the confidence and capacity to provide good air quality for the Beijing Olympics," Du said. He estimated car emissions would be cut 63 percent by the ban and other measures.

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