



# United States Department of the Interior

## NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Southeast Support Office  
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Atlanta, Georgia 30303

APR 10 2003

Mr. Dave Plummer  
Regional Airspace Coordinator  
Commander, Marine Corps Air Bases Eastern Area (OQA)  
MCAABE ATC QA Office (G3) Bldg. 1318  
PSC Box 8004  
MCAS Cherry Point, NC 28533-0004

Dear Mr. Plummer:

Cape Lookout Superintendent Bob Vogel, key division chiefs from the park and Cape Hatteras, Acting Manager of the National Park Service (NPS) Natural Sounds Program Office Howie Thompson, consultant Steve Oppermann, and Southeast Regional Office Environmental Specialist Anita Jackson met with you and several officers from the U.S. Marine Corps, Second Marine Aircraft Wing operating out of Cherry Point, North Carolina, and Kelly Knight and Keith Jenkins from the Naval Facilities Engineering Command, Norfolk, Virginia, on Jan. 17, 2003. Skip Ambrose, NPS biologist and acoustical expert, participated in the meeting via teleconference. The purpose of the meeting was to review the NPS comments on the draft environmental assessment (EA) for Proposed Military Operations Areas in Eastern North Carolina.

The EA proposal is "to establish new and /or modify existing Special Use Airspace (SUA) in support of the Second Marine Aircraft Wing operating out of Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Cherry Point, North Carolina." The purpose of the proposed action was to "Provide a capability to conduct high speed ingress (sea to land) and egress (land to sea) operations at altitudes above 3,000 feet mean sea level (MSL)." The Marine Corps states that "With these enhancements, aviation training space will meet the needs of the Second Marine Wing aviators, and pilots from other military services, to safely acquire and maintain the critical skills essential to sustaining operational readiness."

Main topics of concern from the NPS standpoint are:

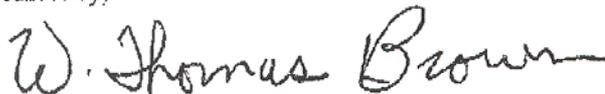
- The cumulative effects of high-speed overflights as low as 3,000 MSL on park bird populations and on visitor experiences;
- The use of noise metric DNL (day-night levels) for characterizing the aircraft noise levels at the park. The DNL noise metric is appropriate for use around airports, but is inappropriate for noise sensitive areas such as national parks. It was strongly recommended that other metrics, such as percent time above natural sound levels, Lmax (maximum sound pressure level at ground level), L90 (sound exceeded 90 percent of the time (to determine natural sound levels), and SEL (sound exposure levels), be used to determine the noise impacts to the park from the jet aircraft training missions;

- The sound pressure levels characterizing the park's natural and developed sound environments in the EA were extrapolated from other areas; we do not know if these values are valid for Cape Lookout. Acoustical measurements for specific areas of the park should be conducted to determine the sound pressure levels in both developed and undeveloped areas. If that is not practical and if acoustical data are to be extrapolated from other park(s), we suspect the most appropriate data would be from Everglades National Park and Biscayne National Park. These data are available from Wyle Laboratories; and
- The use of DNL for determining noise impact to parks is not appropriate. Use of DNL metric could lead to inaccurate noise impact determination on park resources and visitor experiences. The NPS will send a copy of a park soundscape management plan to Cherry Point MCAS to illustrate our approach in characterizing park sound environments and assessing noise levels.

We believe the meeting was productive. We also have a better understanding of Marine Corps and Navy concerns and issues. Because other issues are likely to arise in the near future, such as the relocation of other fighter aircraft to Cherry Point MCAS, the need for additional bombing range areas, and the requirement of additional pilot training that will utilize airspace in the area of Cape Lookout, it was strongly recommended that a cooperative long-term relationship be established with Cherry Point MCAS and the Navy. Superintendent Vogel and the Southeast Region will work with the Marine Corps and the Navy to enhance communication and cooperation between the organizations and to develop relationships at the field level.

Thank you very much for inviting us to the meeting and for the cooperative atmosphere that you established with your opening remarks. Please contact Howard Thompson at 303-969-2461 if you have any questions or if my office can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,



*for*  
William W. Schenk  
Regional Director  
Southeast Region