



**DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY**

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UNITED STATES PACIFIC FLEET  
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IN REPLY REFER TO:

5090

Ser N46/0172

March 12, 2024

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:

**SUBJECT: HAWAII AND SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA ANNUAL TRAINING REPORT,  
FIFTH YEAR**

On behalf of Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet, enclosed is a copy of the Hawaii and Southern California Training and Testing (HSTT) Study Area Annual Training Report for the fifth year of the authorization (12 pages). The classified annex of this report will be delivered separately.

This report is submitted pursuant to the reporting requirements for the HSTT 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 discuss with you or your staff should you have comments regarding this 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](mailto:arnold.r.kostenbader.civ@us.navy.mil).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "J. H. Beattie", is positioned above the typed name.

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

Enclosure: 2023 HSTT Study Area Annual Training Report, Year 5

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 10 July 2020

**2023**  
**Hawaii/SOCAL Training & Testing (HSTT)**  
**Study Area Annual Training Report**

**21 December 2022 to 20 December 2023**  
**Year 5**

**21 MARCH 2024**

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# HAWAII-SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA TRAINING AND TESTING STUDY AREA TRAINING REPORT

## INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Navy prepared this Annual Training Report covering the period from 21 December 2022 to 20 December 2023 in compliance with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Final Rule, Letters of Authorization (LOA), and Incidental Take Statements under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) and Endangered Species Act (ESA) authorizations for the U.S. Navy's Hawaii-Southern California Training and Testing (HSTT) Study Area.

In the HSTT Final Rule and Letters of Authorization,<sup>1</sup> the following report subsections were specified and are present within this report:

- (1) Major Training Exercises (MTEs)
  - (i) Exercise information (for each MTE)
  - (ii) Individual marine mammal sighting information for each sighting in each exercise when mitigation occurred
  - (iii) Evaluation (based on data gathered during all MTEs) of the effectiveness of mitigation measures designed to minimize the received level to which marine mammals may be exposed
- (2) Sinking Exercises (SINKEXs)
  - (i) Exercise information (gathered for each SINKEX)
  - (ii) Individual marine mammal observation (by Navy Lookouts) information (gathered for each marine mammal sighting) for each sighting where mitigation was implemented
- (3) Summary of Sources Used
  - (i) Total annual hours or quantity (per the LOA) of each bin of sonar or other acoustic sources (pile driving and air gun activities)
  - (ii) Total annual expended/detonated ordnance (missiles, bombs, sonobuoys, etc.) for each explosive bin
- (4) Humpback Whale Special Reporting Area (December 15 – April 15)
- (5) HSTT Study Area Mitigation Areas
- (6) Geographic Information Presentation
- (7) Sonar Exercise Notification

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

Additionally, the U.S. Navy agreed to report sightings of aggregations of four or more whales within specified waters off of Southern California. This information is included in Section (8).

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<sup>1</sup>HSTT Requirements for Monitoring and Reporting, 50 CFR 218.75(e)(1) through (e)(7). The reporting requirements are also delineated in section 7(e) of the Training Letter of Authorization.

**(1) HSTT – Major Training Exercises**

This section summarizes authorized sonar use and marine mammal observations from MTEs conducted within the HSTT Study Area during the reporting period. The HSTT MTEs include Large Integrated Anti-Submarine Warfare, which consists of *Composite Training Unit Exercises (C2X)* and *Rim of the Pacific Exercise (RIMPAC)*, and Medium Integrated Anti-Submarine Warfare, which consists of *Fleet Exercises (FLEETEX)*, *Sustainment Exercises (SUSTEX)*, and *Undersea Warfare Exercises (USWEX)*.

**(i) Exercise information**

**Table 1-1. MTEs conducted in the HSTT Study Area**

(A) Exercise designator	(B) Date began and ended	(C) Location	(D) Number and types of active sonar sources used	(E) Number and types of passive acoustic sources used	(F) Number and types of vessels, aircraft, and other platforms participating	(G) Total hours of all active sonar source operation	(H) Total hours of each active sonar source bin	(I) Wave height (high, low, average)
C2X	12 Jul – 7 Aug 2023	SOCAL	*	*	*	*	*	6,2,4
FLEETEX <sup>1</sup>	14 Oct – 21 Oct 2023	SOCAL	*	*	*	*	*	6,3,5
C2X	7 Nov – 3 Dec 2023	SOCAL	*	*	*	*	*	5,1,2

\* Information is presented in the classified annex to this report.

<sup>1</sup>Exercise Black Widow 24 (FLEETEX-level event)

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

Table 1-2. HSTT MTE -- Individual Marine Mammal and Sea Turtle Mitigation Sighting Information: C2X 12 Jul - 7 Aug 2023

(A) Date/time/location of sighting	(B) Species	(C) Number of individuals	(D) Initial detection sensor	(E) Indication of specific type of platform observation was made from	(F) Length of time observers maintained visual contact with marine mammal (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 sonar 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 was hull-mounted, true bearing of animal from the vessel, true direction of vessel's travel, and estimation of animal's motion relative to vessel	(M) Lookouts must report, in plain language and without trying to categorize in any way, the observed behavior of the animal(s) and if any calves were present
22-Jul 0031Z	Whale	2	Vis	DDG	6	4	8	Y	200-500	Shut down sonar	Whale bearing 055T, ship course NR, whale paralleling ship	Swimming
25-Jul 1724Z	Whale	2	Vis	DDG	5	1	10	Y	500-1000	Powered down sonar	Whale bearing 105T, ship course 100T, whale opening ship	Blowing
25-Jul 2206Z	Whale	1	Vis	DDG	1	1	10	Y	500-1000	Shut down sonar	Whale bearing 100T, ship course 130T, whale paralleling ship	Blowing
25-Jul 2313Z	Whale	1	Vis	DDG	1	1	10	Y	500-1000	Shut down sonar	Whale bearing 040T, ship course 010T, whale closing ship	Blowing

NR=not reported

Table 1-3. HSTT MTE – Individual Marine Mammal and Sea Turtle Mitigation Sighting Information: FLEETEX 14 Oct – 21 Oct 2023

(A) Date/time/location of sighting	(B) Species	(C) Number of individuals	(D) Initial detection sensor	(E) Indication of specific type of platform observation was made from	(F) Length of time observers maintained visual contact with marine mammal (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 sonar 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 was hull-mounted, true bearing of animal from the vessel, true direction of vessel's travel, and estimation of animal's motion relative to vessel	(M) Lookouts must report, in plain language and without trying to categorize in any way, the observed behavior of the animal(s) and if any calves were present
No marine mammal mitigations reported during this exercise.												

Table 1-4. HSTT MTE – Individual Marine Mammal and Sea Turtle Mitigation Sighting Information: C2X 7 Nov – 3 Dec 2023

(A) Date/time/location of sighting	(B) Species	(C) Number of individuals	(D) Initial detection sensor	(E) Indication of specific type of platform observation was made from	(F) Length of time observers maintained visual contact with marine mammal (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 sonar 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 was hull-mounted, true bearing of animal from the vessel, true direction of vessel's travel, and estimation of animal's motion relative to vessel	(M) Lookouts must report, in plain language and without trying to categorize in any way, the observed behavior of the animal(s) and if any calves were present
15-Nov	Whale	2	Vis	DDG	5	1	10	Y	1000-2000	Shut down sonar	Whales bearing 060T, ship course 105T, whales opening ship	Spout, Tail Slapping
16-Nov	Dolphin	2	Vis	DDG	30	NR	NR	Y	<200	Shut down sonar	Dolphins bearing NR, ship course 336T, dolphins closing ship	Non-Bow Riding

NR=not reported

**(iii) Evaluation (based on data gathered during all exercises) of effectiveness**

There were three major training exercises conducted in the HSTT Study Area this reporting period (see Table 1-5). In support of these MTEs, the Navy conducted over 1,962 hours of Marine Species Awareness Training for at least 1,281 personnel prior to the beginning of these training exercises.

**Table 1-5. HSTT Study Area Major Training Exercises.**

MTE Type	Dates	# of Exercise Days	# of US Ships Involved (MFAS and non-MFAS)	# of Marine Mammal Mitigation Sightings	# of Marine Mammals
C2X	12 Jul - 7 Aug 2023	27	15	4	6
FLEETEX	14 Oct - 21 Oct 2023	8	4	0	0
C2X	7 Nov - 3 Dec 2023	27	16	2	4
	<b>Total</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>10</b>

**HSTT Study Area Major Training Exercise Marine Mammal Observations When Mitigation Occurred**

There were six marine mammal sightings over the course of the three MTEs in the HSTT Study Area (see Table 1-5) that required active sonar mitigation. The breakdown of sightings by species type is shown in Table 1-6.

**Table 1-6. Total number of marine mammal sightings observed from Navy platforms when mitigation occurred during Major Training Exercises.**

Species Type	# of Sightings	% of Total Sightings	# of Marine Mammals	% of Total Number of Marine Mammals
Dolphins	1	17%	2	20%
Whales	5	83%	8	80%
Pinnipeds	0	0%	0	0%
Turtles	0	0%	0	0%
Not recorded	0	0%	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>		<b>10</b>	

**SUMMARY: Mitigation Effectiveness and Navy Safety Zone Adherence**

During this year’s MTEs in the HSTT Study Area, prescribed NMFS mitigation zones were effectively applied in cases of observation of marine mammals within the applicable zone. Table 1-7 depicts the maximum estimated received levels by the marine mammal at the time the mitigation measure was applied. In each case, the Permanent Threshold Shift (PTS) threshold is higher than the estimated maximum exposure level prior to mitigation which means that the marine mammal was unlikely to experience injury. During this reporting period the proper implementation of mitigation measures for sighted marine mammals is estimated to be highly effective at preventing exposures that may result in injury (e.g. PTS).

The two categories of mitigation measures (procedural mitigation and mitigation areas) outlined in the HSTT Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)/Overseas Environmental Impact Statement (OEIS) of October 2018 and approved by NMFS in the HSTT Training LOA were effective in appropriately mitigating exposure of marine mammals to sonar. 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 online training required for watch standing qualifications), adherence to required active sonar mitigation zones, and application of lessons learned in marine mammal sighting and reporting.



Table 1-7. Sightings where sonar was on during detection of marine mammals, and the mitigation conducted.

1) Location	2) MTE	3) Month	4) Species sighted	5) # of marine mammals sighted	6) Platform	7) Length of time observed (min)	8) Range at which marine mammal sighted	9) Mitigation (Sonar powered down, Sonar shutdown)	10) Estimate MAX exposure PRIOR to mitigation (dB re 1µPa) <sup>1</sup>	11) Number of minutes sonar mitigation applied	12) Estimate exposure AFTER mitigation (dB re 1µPa) <sup>1</sup>	13) DISTANCE ship would have moved given length of mitigation and nominal 10-knot ship speed (yds)	14) If source in use was hull-mounted, true bearing of animal from the vessel, true direction of vessel's travel, and estimation of animal's motion relative to vessel	15) Observed behavior
SOCAL	C2X	Jul	Whale	2	DDG	6	200-500	Shut down sonar	<181-189	7	None	2,333	Whales bearing 055T, ship course NR, whale paralleling ship	Swimming
SOCAL	C2X	Jul	Whale	2	DDG	5	500-1000	Powered down sonar	<175-181	2	<169-175	667	Whales bearing 105T, ship course 100T, whale opening ship	Blowing
SOCAL	C2X	Jul	Whale	1	DDG	1	500-1000	Shut down sonar	<175-181	1	None	333	Whale bearing 100T, ship course 130T, whale paralleling ship	Blowing
SOCAL	C2X	Jul	Whale	1	DDG	1	500-1000	Shut down sonar	<175-181	3	None	1,000	Whale bearing 040T, ship course 010T, whale closing ship	Blowing
SOCAL	C2X	Nov	Whale	2	DDG	5	1000-2000	Shut down sonar	<169-175	17	None	5,667	Whales bearing 060T, ship course 105T, whales opening ship	Spout, Tail Slapping
SOCAL	C2X	Nov	Dolphin	2	DDG	30	<200	Shut down sonar	<189	15	None	5,000	Dolphins bearing NR, ship course 336T, dolphins closing ship	Non-Bow Riding

<sup>1</sup>Estimated exposure based on 20Log[R] spherical spreading propagation loss for ranges less than 1,000 yards and where nominal active sonar Source Level (SL) assumed to be 235 dB for CGs and DDGs. Actual operating parameters and oceanographic condition likely result in lower exposure. This calculation assumes exposure prior to mitigation. Once the animal was spotted at the range indicated, applied mitigation would have resulted in much lower to no exposures.  
NR=not reported

## Exposure Assessment

Estimated exposures within 2,000 yards can be determined based on standard formulas of how sound propagates in water. Spherical spreading is generally valid within 1,000 yards from the sound source, and can be expressed as spreading loss (in dB from a source) equals  $20\log R$  (with “R” being range from the source in yards). Spherical spreading loss in the first 1,000 yards equates to 60 dB of loss. At ranges between 1,000 and 2,000 yards, the sound waves become trapped by the sea surface and bottom and cannot expand vertically. The spreading wave then forms an expanding cylinder. Cylindrical spreading loss in dB between two points can be calculated by using the formula  $(10\log R_2/R_1)$ , with “R2” being the longer range, and “R1” being 1,000 yards. Cylindrical spreading loss between 1,000 and 2,000 yards equates to an additional 3 dB of loss. By the time the wave has propagated to 2,000 yards, the sonar signal strength has decreased by a total of 63 dB. Using the AN/SQS-53 sonar as an example, transmitting at 235 dB and subtracting the 63 dB of spreading loss equates to an estimated sonar Receive Level (RL) of 172 dB at 2,000 yards. The spreading loss formulas are used to make very conservative assumptions about potential exposure. The formula is an estimation of spreading losses only and does not take into account other factors that could increase the total propagation losses such as oceanographic conditions, attenuation losses, scattering losses, and Navy-unique MFAS operating parameters which would result in slightly lower sonar transmit levels. Use of this approach to estimate potential RL at any given animal assumes the horizontal range from a visual sighting accounts for an animal across all depths at which an animal travels to predict the maximum, worst-case potential exposure. In other words, this estimated worst-case exposure is presented independent of the animal’s actual depth level, since a) time and depth of current and previous dives cannot be deduced from a limited surface sighting, and b) oceanographic and tactical conditions influence actual sound propagation at different depths. Given the relative motion of ships and animals at sea, the time spent with any given exposure from surface ships is likely to be limited.

### (2) HSTT – Sinking Exercises (SINKEs)

No SINKEs were conducted in the HSTT Study Area during the reporting period.

### (3) HSTT – Summary of Sources Used

This section summarizes total annual usage of each type of sound source used for training within HSTT from 21 December 2022 to 20 December 2023, which constitutes Year 5 of the 7-year authorization.

#### (i) Total annual hours or quantity of each bin of sonar or other acoustic sources

**Table 3-1. Annual Training Acoustic Source Usage within the HSTT Study Area by Source Bin**

Authorized sound sources from HSTT Final Rule		Authorized Amount (21Dec22-20Dec23)	Actual Usage (21Dec22-20Dec23)	% Used of Authorized Amount
<b>(i) Acoustic Sources Used During Annual Training</b>				
Pile driving	Pile driving (impact)	238 count	0	0%
Pile removal	Vibratory pile removal	238 count	0	0%
<i>See classified annex for all other acoustic sources</i>				

#### (ii) Total annual expended/detonated ordnance for each explosive bin

**Table 3-2. Annual Training Explosive Source Usage within the HSTT Study Area by Source Bin**

Authorized sound sources from HSTT Final Rule		Authorized Amount (21Dec22-20Dec23)	Actual Usage (21Dec22-20Dec23)	% Used of Authorized Amount
<b>(ii) Explosive Sources Used During Annual Training</b>				
E1	Medium-caliber projectile	2,940 detonations	1,481	50%
E2	Medium-caliber projectile	1,746 detonations	99	6%

E3	Large-caliber projectile	2,797 detonations	1,073	38%
E4	Mine neutralization charge	38 detonations	22	58%
E5	5-inch projectile	4,830 detonations	1,300	27%
E6	Hellfire missile	592 detonations	20	3%
E7	Demo block / shaped charge	13 detonations	13	100%
E8	Maverick missile	38 detonations	38	100%
E9	500 lb. bomb	450 detonations	20	4%
E10	Harpoon missile / 1000 lb. bomb	224 detonations	75	34%
E11	650 lb. mine	17 detonations	0	0%
E12	2,000 lb. bomb	21 detonations	2	10%
E13	Multiple Mat Weave charges	9 detonations	6	67%

**Table 3-3. 7-year Cumulative Training Sound Source Usage within the HSTT Study Area by Source Bin**

Sound Source Bin	Year 1 Actual Usage (21Dec18-20Dec19)	Year 2 Actual Usage (21Dec19-20Dec20)	Year 3 Actual Usage (21Dec20-20Dec21)	Year 4 Actual Usage (21Dec21-20Dec22)	Year 5 Actual Usage (21Dec22-20Dec23)	7-yr Authorized Amount (21Dec18-20Dec25)	7-yr Cumulative Actual Usage (21Dec18-20Dec25)	% Used of 7-yr Authorized Amount
<b>(i) Acoustic Sources Used During Annual Training</b>								
Pile driving	0	0	0	0	0	1,666	0	0%
Pile removal	0	0	0	0	0	1,666	0	0%
<i>See classified annex for all other acoustic sources</i>								
<b>(ii) Explosive Sources Used During Annual Training</b>								
E1	2,629	0	0	876	1,481	20,580	4,986	24%
E2	492	494	0	52	99	12,222	1,137	9%
E3	405	2,068	2,736	2,603	1,073	19,579	8,885	45%
E4	4	96	38	38	22	266	198	74%
E5	773	914	900	1,721	1,300	33,310	5,608	17%
E6	35	57	116	181	20	4,056	409	10%
E7	1	8	9	13	13	91	44	48%
E8	17	16	3	32	38	241	106	44%
E9	38	18	26	42	20	2,950	144	5%
E10	16	26	9	78	75	1,543	204	13%
E11	1	0	0	2	0	69	3	4%
E12	0	0	2	3	2	114	7	6%
E13	0	8	0	6	6	63	20	32%

**(4) HSTT – Humpback Whale Special Reporting Area (December 15 – April 15)**

The amount of surface ship hull-mounted mid-frequency active sonar used for training in the six Humpback Whale Special Reporting Areas from December 15 to April 15 is presented in the classified annex to this report.

### (5) HSTT – HSTT Study Area Mitigation Areas

**Table 5-1. Training Active Sonar & In-Water Explosive Usage within the Hawaii Island Mitigation Area (year-round)**

Authorized sound sources from HSTT Final Rule		Actual Usage <sup>1</sup>
Active Sonar	All Source Bins	*
In-Water Explosives	All Explosive Bins	0

<sup>1</sup>MF1 usage did not exceed 300 hours and MF4 usage did not exceed 20 hours.

\*Information is presented in the classified annex to this report.

**Table 5-2. Training Active Sonar & In-Water Explosive Usage within the 4-Islands Region Mitigation Area (November 15 through April 15 for active sonar; year-round for explosives)**

Authorized sound sources from HSTT Final Rule		Actual Usage
Active Sonar	All Source Bins	*
In-Water Explosives	All Explosive Bins	0

\*Information is presented in the classified annex to this report.

**Table 5-3. Training Active Sonar & In-Water Explosive Usage within the San Diego Arc Mitigation Area (June 1 through October 31)**

Authorized sound sources from HSTT Final Rule		Actual Usage <sup>1</sup>
Active Sonar	All Source Bins	*
In-Water Explosives	All Explosive Bins	0

<sup>1</sup>Combined MF1 usage did not exceed 200 hours.

\*Information is presented in the classified annex to this report.

**Table 5-4. Training Active Sonar & In-Water Explosive Usage within the San Nicholas Island Mitigation Area (June 1 through October 31)**

Authorized sound sources from HSTT Final Rule		Actual Usage <sup>1</sup>
Active Sonar	All Source Bins	*
In-Water Explosives	All Explosive Bins	0

<sup>1</sup>Combined MF1 usage did not exceed 200 hours.

\*Information is presented in the classified annex to this report.

**Table 5-5. Training Active Sonar & In-Water Explosive Usage within the Santa Monica/Long Beach Mitigation Area (June 1 through October 31)**

Authorized sound sources from HSTT Final Rule		Actual Usage <sup>1</sup>
Active Sonar	All Source Bins	*
In-Water Explosives	All Explosive Bins	0

<sup>1</sup>Combined MF1 usage did not exceed 200 hours.

\*Information is presented in the classified annex to this report.

**Table 5-6. Training Active Sonar & In-Water Explosive Usage within the Santa Barbara Island Mitigation Area (year-round)**

Authorized sound sources from HSTT Final Rule		Actual Usage <sup>1</sup>
Active Sonar	All Source Bins	*
In-Water Explosives	All Explosive Bins	0

\*Information is presented in the classified annex to this report.

### **(6) HSTT – Geographic Information Presentation**

The precise locations and frequency of ASW training are classified. There is currently no method to declassify the sensitivity of this data in order to publish this type of information in an unclassified report. For this reason, the only available method for this information to be disseminated is in the classified annex of this report.

### **(7) HSTT – Sonar Exercise Notification**

The Navy submitted all required information to NMFS for all MTEs during the reporting period, including location of the exercise, beginning and end dates of the exercise, and type of exercise.

### **(8) HSTT – Southern California Whale Aggregation Reports**

The Commander, THIRD Fleet Battle Watch Captain received three reports of 4 or more whales in the Whale Reporting Box during the reporting period.

- 1) A sighting of 4 whales (July 2023) – 60 NM southwest of San Clemente Island
- 2) A sighting of 4 whales (November 2023) – 20 NM west of San Clemente Island
- 3) A sighting of 12 whales (December 2023) – 10 NM east of San Clemente Island