

United States Coast Guard

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT  
FOR

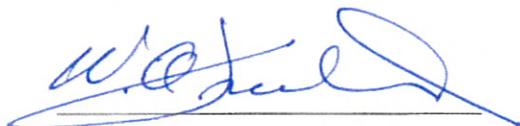
Environmental Assessment for the US Coast Guard Search and Rescue / Navigation Remote  
Fixed Communication Facility on Saipan, Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas

The proposed action would include construction of a US Coast Guard Rescue 21 communication site at Mt. Tapochau, Saipan. This project has been thoroughly reviewed by the US Coast Guard and it has been determined, by the undersigned, that this project will have no significant effect on the human environment.

This Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is based on a contractor-analyzed, internally-prepared Environmental Assessment (EA), which has been determined to adequately and accurately discuss the environmental issues and impacts of the proposed project and provides sufficient evidence and analysis for determining that a Environmental Impact Statement is not required. The US Coast Guard takes full responsibility for the accuracy, scope, and content of the attached EA.

6-20-2011

Date



William A. Freeland, R.E.M.  
Environmental Reviewer

Environmental Protection  
Specialist  
USCG Rescue 21, Project Resident  
Office, Alaska

I have considered the information contained in the EA, which is the basis for this FONSI. Based on the information in the EA and this FONSI document, I agree that the proposed action, as described above and in the EA, will have no significant impact on the environment.

6/22/11

Date



CDR Steven Osgood  
Recommending Official

Commanding Officer, US Coast Guard  
Scottsdale, Arizona

6/28/2011

Date



Eugene G. Lockhart  
Responsible Official

Deputy Project Manager  
Acquisitions Directorate  
Washington, D.C.

**U.S. Department of  
Homeland Security  
United States  
Coast Guard**



**Acquisition Directorate**  
**Assistant Commandant for Acquisition**

**Background Information Appended to the  
Finding of No Significant Impact  
For the  
Environmental Assessment for the US Coast Guard Search and  
Rescue / Navigation Remote Fixed Communication Facility on Saipan,  
Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas**

**I. Introduction**

The United States Coast Guard (USCG) has proposed the construction of a Rescue 21 Search and Rescue (SAR) / Navigation Remote Fixed Communication Facility at Mt. Tapochau, Saipan. The proposed communication facility at Mt. Tapochau would consist of a communication tower, communication equipment shelter, back-up generator, and all necessary electronic equipment and utilities associated with receiving and transmitting radio signals within the relevant service area. The site would occupy an area of about 2700 square feet in the compound and approximately 3300 square feet for an access road.

The proposed project is located on the island of Saipan in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands at 15°11'15.1"N, 145°44'37.5"E (Mt. Tapochau).

The pending decisions by the USCG are analyzed in an Environmental Assessment (EA) entitled Environmental Assessment for the US Coast Guard Search and Rescue / Navigation Remote Fixed Communication Facility on Saipan, Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas. The USCG must decide to construct, operate, and maintain the facility after obtaining a land use lease from the CNMI Department of Public Lands.

## **II. Consultation and Coordination**

The USCG coordinated preparation of the EA with the research and analysis assistance of MWH Americas, Inc. (and subcontractors) but remained in charge of document preparation at all stages of production. The USCG also sought comments from the public, other Federal agencies, State and local agencies during the initial scoping for issues and during a 30-day review period on the EA. In particular, the USCG coordinated or consulted with the following Federal entities: the USFWS Endangered Species Program and the National Park Service. State and local entities were also consulted: the CNMI Department of Lands and Natural Resources, the CNMI Coast Management Program, the CNMI Division of Fish and Wildlife, and the CNMI Division of Historic Preservation.

The FONSI and the EA will be made available to the public for a period of 30 days before any action is taken on the proposal. A media release will be made announcing the availability of the FONSI and EA.

## **III. Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)**

### **Context**

The EA analyzed the natural and socio-economic resources that would potentially be affected in the context of the two alternatives (the proposed action and the no action alternative). The analyses and conclusions presented in the EA were based upon the professional knowledge of the analysts; their review of existing plans, research, or industry literature; and measurable parameters (or comparability with similar activities) associated with the subject matter. Conclusions such as whether an effect or impact is negligible, minimal, or substantial were based upon the analyst's judgment of the magnitude of the change in the surrounding environment without the facility or with the facility, and the duration of an activity.

### **Intensity**

The EA addressed the intensity of effects upon each of the resources from the alternatives based upon this scale of negligible, minimal, or substantial levels of effects. Chapter 3 of the EA described the Affected Environment and enumerated the level of effects (Environmental Consequences) anticipated by the subject matter experts.

### **1. Impacts that maybe both beneficial and adverse.**

For the No Action Alternative, there would be no impacts upon any of the natural resources at either of the sites. There would be a negative effect upon public safety because there would be continuing gap in SAR communications in the area of Saipan. Since there are no existing facilities on Saipan, there would be a continuing need for communication facilities.

For the Proposed Alternative, there would be no or negligible impacts to common wildlife or wildlife habitat and to air quality or the soundscape. There would be minor adverse impacts to land use and hazardous materials/waste management. There would be moderate effects on visual resources, cultural and historic resources, soils, and vegetation. Endangered and threatened wildlife species may be affected but not adversely affected, with the exception that some individuals may avoid the staging areas during construction, a temporary and negligible effect. There would be major beneficial impacts from providing a communications facility for maritime users.

### **2. The degree to which the selected alternative will affect public health or safety.**

Public safety would be enhanced with the available capabilities of a USCG Rescue 21 SAR communication facility at Mt. Tapochau. What is now a "dead" area for communications would be eliminated. Boaters in distress would be able to call the USCG for help. Response times would be shortened. There would be increased channel capacity for simultaneous communications. The Digital Selective Calling capability would quickly provide the vessel's name, exact location and nature of distress. Digital recording of calls would provide instant playback. There would be reduced down time. The interoperability among the USCG and other federal, state, and local communication systems would be enhanced.

### **3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to cultural or historic resources, park lands, prime farm lands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.**

There are no wetlands, floodplains, wild and scenic rivers, or prime farm lands at the site.

No historic or cultural resources are expected to be affected, including visual effects. If any of these cultural resources were to be discovered during construction, the USCG shall stop any contractor work and then seek out

appropriate consultation, surveys, and characterization could be performed. Appropriate consultation shall be done with the State Historic Preservation Officer and affected stakeholders.

**4. The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.**

Scoping with Federal, State, local agencies, and the public did not identify any highly controversial issues or effects associated with the site. No responses from the public were received during the public comment period on the EA.

**5. The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.**

This proposal does not present any highly uncertain or involve any unique or unknown risks.

**6. The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about future considerations.**

As this is a continuation of the construction of many new facilities proposed to cover existing geographic gaps in SAR communication areas or replace the current National Distress Response System (NDRS), there is no precedent being set. There are previously installed facilities throughout the continental United States, the Caribbean, and US Pacific islands. As part of the nationwide National Distress Response System (Rescue 21) modernization project, this facility will provide coverage in an area currently without such coverage.

**7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually but cumulatively significant impacts.**

The proposed facility is not associated with any other past, present, or future actions or proposals that would have a cumulatively significant effect in this area. The facility is one of four facilities that will provide VHF communications around the islands of Guam, Rota, Tinian, and Saipan.

It also has been the policy of the USCG to co-locate antennas and share infrastructure with other federal and state agencies for their operational or emergency communication equipment. But no proposal for co-location has been identified.

**8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss of destruction of significant scientific, cultural or historic resources.**

The USCG consulted with the CNMI Historic Preservation Office (HPO) staff about the site. There are historic or cultural resources that were identified during the preparation of the EA. However, all were located beyond the Area of Potential Effect. A visual resource analysis was conducted to validate that the effects on these resources would be minimal. The HPO concurred that there would be no effect on significant historic properties.

**9. The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.**

Consultation with the USFWS Endangered Species Program resulted in a concurrence letter with the determination of "may affect, but not likely to adversely affect" the Mariana swiftlet. Vegetation clearing is not expected to adversely affect swiftlet foraging. There will be no guy-wires that would have the potential for collisions with flying birds.

The proposed project has a "no effect" determination on the Nightingale Reed-Warbler and the Micronesian Megapode. The project is designed as recommended in the USFWS Guidance on the Siting, Construction, Operation, and Decommissioning of Communications Towers.

The CNMI Division of Fish and Wildlife concurred with that no wildlife resources would be affected by the proposal.

**10. Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or Local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.**

This proposal will conform to the National Environmental Policy Act, the CNMI Division of Environmental Quality permit regulations, the FAA regulations and other environmentally-oriented laws, regulations, and executive orders. Use of best management practices (BMPs) to avoid soil erosion, locating staged construction materials, spill containment BMPs, and adoption of mitigation and monitoring practices during construction and operation would eliminate any potential effects as well as avoid any potential violation of Federal, State, or local requirements for the protection of the environment.

The following mitigation and monitoring features shall be adopted as a Project Design Feature to be implemented during construction, operation, and maintenance of this proposal:

Environmental effects of the construction, operation, and maintenance of these facilities will be monitored. Specific activities would vary with the stage of the project. During construction, personnel will monitor for spills, measure noise, and cleanup effectiveness. During operation, generator run time and output will be tracked. During scheduled maintenance, notes will be recorded for animal damage, weather damage, general condition of the facilities, and general condition of the surrounding vegetation. Progress notes will be recorded on the success of natural revegetation establishment, the overall vigor of the re-established species, and the presence of invasive species.

#### **IV. Proposed Finding:**

The construction and operation of a Rescue 21 Search and Rescue (SAR) / Navigation Remote Fixed Communication Facility at Mt. Tapochau, Saipan does not constitute a major Federal action having a significant effect on the human environment; therefore, an environmental impact statement is not necessary and will not be prepared. This conclusion is based upon consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality's criteria for significance (40 CFR §1508.27) with regard to the context and the intensity of the impacts described in the EA, and on understanding the project, review of the project analysis, and review of public comments. This conclusion is consistent with the planning associated with the Rescue 21 Modernization Project and the anticipated effects are within the scope, type, and magnitude of effects anticipated and analyzed in that plan. The analysis of project effects has also occurred in the context of multiple spatial and temporal scales as appropriate for different types of impacts and the effects were determined to be insignificant.