

NAVY

Tiny Hawaiian island used for Navy bombing practice eligible for historic listing

By WYATT OLSON

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The yellow area in this image of Kaula Island, which lies about 55 miles southwest of Kauai, Hawaii, indicates the target area used for the Navy's inert bombing and gunnery drills. (U.S. Navy)

The Navy has promised additional protections for a tiny Hawaiian island it determined is a “traditional cultural place” where [it plans to increase the frequency of bombing practice](#).

The island of Kaula — the site of aerial bombing drills for decades — is also eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, the Navy said in a document released Wednesday.

The determination was part of a final environmental assessment issued in August ahead of plans to significantly increase the training tempo at the Pacific Missile Range Facility on Kauai and Kaula.

Kaula is a 135-acre crescent-shaped isle about 55 miles southwest of Kauai.

The assessment examined the potential environmental, safety and cultural effects of the increased tempo. On Wednesday, the Navy issued a finding of no significant impact, which means an exhaustive environmental impact statement will not be required.

The Navy plan overall calls for a significant increase in missile and rocket launches, amphibious and drone operations and airport use by helicopters by the joint force.

The assessment determined that the Navy's training program on Kaula “incorporates specific measures to ensure that known archaeological sites will be avoided during

proposed training activities,” which occur only in a designated impact area on the island’s southern tip.

The Navy, however, became more aware of the cultural significance of Kaula after meeting in recent months with native Hawaiian organizations, the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, the State Historical Preservation Division and others.

From that, the Navy determined that Kaula Island meets the criteria as a traditional cultural place and concluded that “the proposed undertaking would adversely affect” that status, the finding document states.

The Navy has “initiated consultation” with native Hawaiian organizations, the Office of Hawaiian Affairs and State Historic Preservation Division for mitigating those adverse effects through a Section 106 Memorandum of Agreement, the finding states.

A section 106 memorandum is a legally binding document that outlines how a federal agency would address adverse effects on historic properties as part of the National Historic Preservation Act.

The Navy is not proposing new types of training or testing at Pacific Missile Range Facility or Kaula, only an increased pace.

Kaula, which the Navy has managed and used since 1952, would see increases in air-to-ground bombing exercises and air-to-ground gunnery exercises.

About 11 acres in the south of the island is used for those exercises, during which only inert, non-explosive ordnance weighing less than 500 pounds are used.

The number of bombing exercises, by strike fighter pilots delivering inert ordnance on the island, would increase from 12 to 31, according to the assessment.

In gunnery drills, strike fighters and helicopter crews use guns and inert rockets to attack the island. Those exercises would increase from 14 to 24 per year.

Training activities on Kaula will not commence until the memorandum of agreement negotiation process is finalized, the Navy said in the finding document.

The commander of U.S. Pacific Fleet, however, could authorize training before finalization in the event of compelling national defense needs, the document states.



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Wyatt Olson is based in the Honolulu bureau, where he has reported on military and security issues in the Indo-Pacific since 2014. He was Stars and Stripes’ roving Pacific reporter from 2011-2013 while based in Tokyo. He was a freelance writer and journalism teacher in China from 2006-2009.

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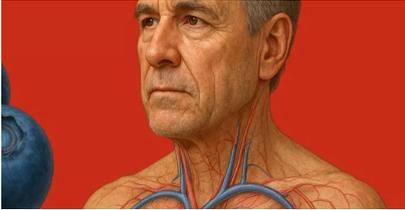
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