

## COMPATIBILITY DETERMINATION

**Use:** To allow the Department of the Navy to operate a tethered aerostat balloon with calibrated targets along refuge beach on the south end of the refuge (in the immediate vicinity of the U.S. Coast Guard station).

**Refuge Name:** Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge, Established in 1943

**Establishing and Acquisition Authority(ies):**

Migratory Bird Conservation Act

**Refuge Purpose(s):**

The Chincoteague NWR was established: "... for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds. "

**National Wildlife Refuge System Mission:**

The purpose of the NWR System is to "administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans".

**Description of Use:**

- a. The Naval Surface Warfare Center, Department of the Navy, has been tasked to conduct a series of experiments using the sensor system at the Surface Combat System Center at Wallops Island, Virginia. These experiments will include a deployment of tethered aerostat with calibrated targets (enclosure 1).
  
- b. A Rigid Inflatable Boat (RIB) (enclosure 4) will land at Fishing Point (the southern tip of the refuge), the aerostat balloon will be transferred to a flight winch trailer (enclosure 5). The flight winch trailer will then be towed by four-wheel drive vehicle across refuge beach to an anchoring point that will be on the seaside of the island in the immediate vicinity of the National Park Service's old U.S. Coast Guard Station (enclosure 3). The trailer will then be anchored and the aerostat balloon deployed to altitudes as high as one mile (enclosure 2). The Department of the Navy will conduct their tests between 1200 to 2400 hours. After completion of tests at 2400 hours, the aerostat will be lowered back down to the flight winch trailer and the trailer towed back across the beach to Fishing Point and loaded back on the RIB to be taken back for the evening.
  
- c. The above process will be repeated on each of the test days. Tests will be conducted on the days of January 3 - 5, 2001. Two to three hours will be needed on both sides of the testing hours for setup and take down each day.
  
- d. These experiments will be performed using the sensor system at the Surface Combat System Center at Wallops Island, Virginia. The proposed experiments require that the

sensor system make uncluttered measurements of calibrated targets and due to technical requirements of positioning of the aerostat balloon, and the need for anchoring the trailer, the refuge is the primary location for deployment of the aerostat balloon.

**Availability of Resources:**

The Department of the Navy will be conducting all work associated with the project. No new or additional facilities will be needed. Only cost to the Service will be insuring compliance with any specific regulations to ensure minimal impacts to resources.

**Anticipated Impacts of the Use:**

a. The location of use is within the refuge's off-road vehicle zone located on the southern end of the refuge and referred to as the Hook. The Hook is open to off-road vehicles from September 1 through March 14 on any given year. And then closed from March 15 through August 31 to precipitate nesting for the threatened piping plover. Off-road vehicle use within the Hook during the aforementioned time frame was determined to be compatible due to the minimal impact it had on wildlife species.

b. The proposed use may intermittently interrupt the feeding habitats and roosting places of several migratory birds for the three day period. Bird numbers at the Hook during the proposed time of use are minimal. During the January time frame, several hundred shorebirds, gulls and some snow geese are present. The refuge's optimal time for migratory bird activity on the Hook is during spring and summer, with peak numbers occurring in August.

**Public Review and Comment:**

This compatibility determination was posted in the administrative office and visitor contact station. No public comments were received.

**Use is Compatible or Not Compatible (circle one):**

**Justification:**

The allowance of the Department of the Navy to set up and deploy an aerostat balloon with calibrated targets will have minimal impact on refuge resources. The point of entry to the anchoring location for the aerostat is currently open to public use and more specifically ORV use. The timing of the test by the Department of the Navy coincide with minimal use of the Hook resources by wildlife.

**Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility:**

1. All activities (vehicle and pedestrian) will take place in currently open areas for ORVs.

2. Department of Navy personnel will remove the aerostat and targets as quickly as possible after tests conclude for that evening.

**Consultation with Refuge Supervisor:**

**Concurrence:** Refuge Supervisor: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature/Date)

**Signature:** Refuge Manager: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature/Date)

Mandatory 10 or 15-year Reevaluation Date: Not Applicable