



**Alaska District
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers**

Engineering Division

Public Notice

Date: 28 May 2013 Identification No. ER-13-03
Please refer to the identification number when replying

**Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact
for
Removal Action
Petroleum-Contaminated Soil
Fort Pierce Former Navy Installation
Biorka Island, Alaska
F10AK0066-01**

Defense Environmental Restoration Program
Formerly Used Defense Sites

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Alaska District (Corps) plans to continue the cleanup of contamination and containerized waste at the former Fort Pierce Navy facilities on Biorka Island near Sitka, Alaska. Activities planned for 2013 are described in the enclosed environmental assessment prepared for this action and include the excavation and transportation off-site for proper treatment and disposal of up to 200 tons of fuel-contaminated soil; the removal and transportation off-site of oily waste from a fuel-storage vault, followed by the cleaning of the vault and sealing of its entrance; the investigation and removal of other containerized wastes and potential asbestos-containing material; and additional sampling of potentially contaminated soil and concrete surfaces.

Comments and questions regarding the proposed action should be submitted to the address below no later than 30 days from the date of this public notice. Written comments received on or before this date will become part of the official record and will be considered in the determination of whether to prepare an environmental impact statement. No public meeting is scheduled.

If you believe a public meeting is needed, send a written request to the address below during the 30-day review period explaining why a meeting is necessary.

U.S. Army Engineer District, Alaska
ATTN: CEPOA-EN-G-ER (FLOYD)
P.O. Box 6898
JBER, Alaska 99506-0898

Please contact Chris Floyd of the Corps' Environmental Resources Section at (907) 753-2700 or write to the above address if you would like more information about the proposed work. Comments, requests for public meetings, and requests for additional information may also be submitted electronically to the following e-mail address: Christopher.B.Floyd@usace.army.mil.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael R. Salyer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "M".

Michael R. Salyer
Chief, Environmental Resources

Enclosure



**US Army Corps
of Engineers**

Alaska District

Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact

Removal Action
Petroleum-Contaminated Soil

Fort Pierce Former Navy Installation Biorka Island, Alaska F10AK0066-01

Formerly Used Defense Sites Program



May 2013

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Alaska District (Corps) has assessed the environmental effects of the following action:

**Removal Action
Petroleum-Contaminated Soil
Fort Pierce Former Navy Installation
Biorka Island, Alaska
F10AK0066-01**

This action has been evaluated for its effects on several significant resources, including fish and wildlife, wetlands, threatened or endangered species, marine resources, and cultural resources. No significant short-term or long-term adverse effects were identified.

This Corps action complies with the National Historic Preservation Act, the Endangered Species Act, the Clean Water Act, the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, and the National Environmental Policy Act. The completed environmental assessment supports the conclusion that the action does not constitute a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human and natural environment. An environmental impact statement is therefore not necessary for the removal action at Fort Pierce.

Christopher D. Lestochi
Colonel, Corps of Engineers
District Commander

Date

Environmental Assessment

1.0 PURPOSE AND NEED OF REMEDIAL ACTION

1.1 Introduction

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) prepared this environmental assessment (EA) to address under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) the excavation of petroleum-contaminated soils and other ground-disturbing activities to be performed at the former military facilities on Biorka Island, near Sitka, Alaska. The Corps' proposed actions are authorized under the Department of Defense (DOD) Environmental Restoration Program – Formerly Used Defense Sites (DERP-FUDS), which provides the means to clean up waste materials, contaminated soil, and unsafe structures and debris from areas formerly used by the DOD. Most FUDS projects follow Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA) processes, which would not include preparation of an EA under NEPA. However, the proposed project involves the excavation and removal of soils contaminated only with petroleum, which falls outside the purview of CERCLA.

1.2 Site Description and History

The Fort Pierce (often spelled “Peirce” in older documents, but “Pierce” has become the more prevalent spelling in recent communications) site occupies 462 acres on Biorka Island, which is about 15 miles southwest of Sitka, Alaska, off the coast of Baranof Island (figure 1). The U.S. Navy installed a wireless telegraph station on the island in 1909. During World War II the U.S. Army acquired the property and began construction of a coastal defense battery including two 6-inch gun emplacements and support facilities (figure 2). Construction was abandoned in 1944; the guns were never installed, but other structures were completed, including a concrete command bunker, concrete vaults for fuel storage, 16 Quonset huts, a mess hall, infirmary, power facility, and a radar installation. The lands occupied by the Fort Pierce site are currently managed by the U.S. Coast Guard and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA); the FAA maintains a navigation facility and small dock on the eastern side of Biorka Island.

A “powerhouse” building on the south side of the island has also been investigated under the FUDS program. This isolated building does not appear to have been part of the World War II coastal defense facility, but may have been associated with the early U.S. Navy, Coast Guard, or Civil Aeronautics

The Corps and the U.S. Forest Service conducted several site investigations at Fort Pierce between 1985 and 1998; the investigations focused on two concrete vaults at the coastal defense site enclosing aboveground storage tanks (ASTs) that had filled with water and leaked fuel. An interim removal action in 2011 performed the following:

- Removed water and fuel from the two tank vaults, abandoned the tanks in place, and sealed the outer access ports to the vaults
- Discovered a third vault (Vault 3) containing leaked fuel, which had to be left in place at that time
- Collected soil samples in the vicinity of the fuel vaults and the powerhouse
- Collected wipe samples for polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) from the walls of the powerhouse
- Rendered safe three compressed gas cylinders at the powerhouse and disposed of them off-site
- Discovered a new debris area near Vault 3 with drums and electrical equipment

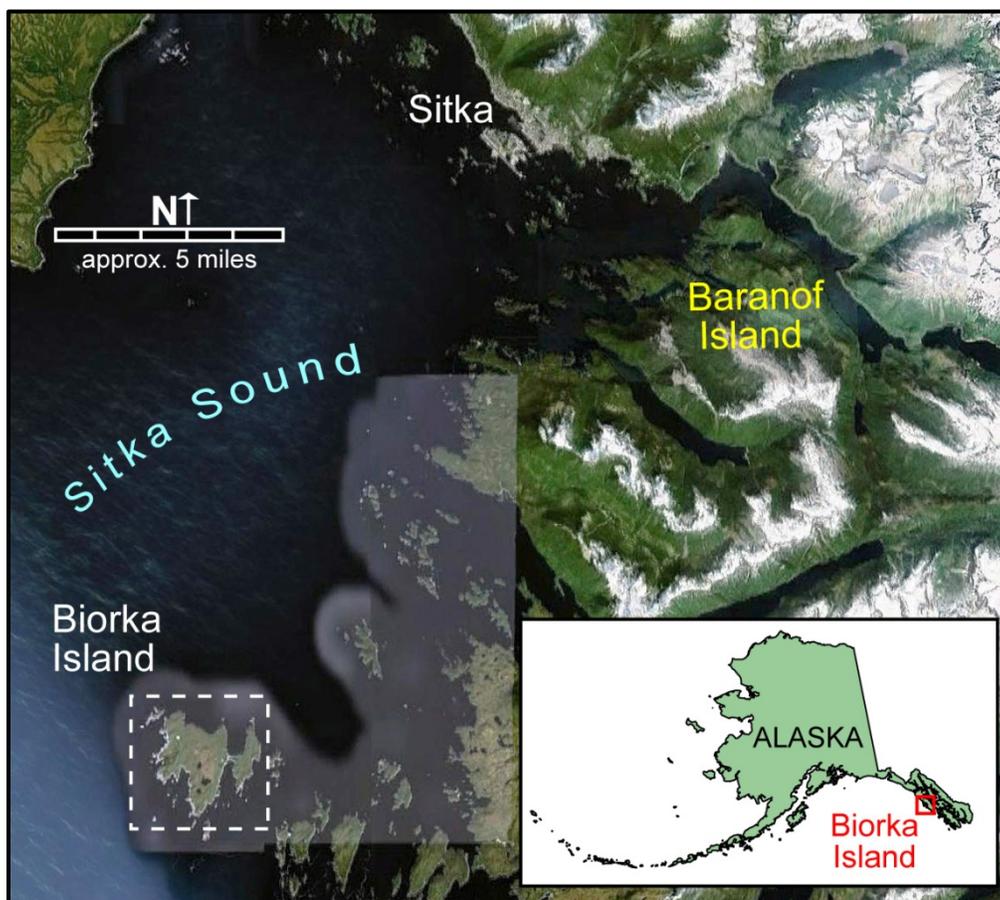


Figure 1. Location and vicinity of Biorka Island

1.3 Need for Action

Soil samples collected in 2011 showed fuel contamination in soils near Vaults 1 and 3 and near the powerhouse, at concentrations above State of Alaska cleanup levels of 230 mg/kg diesel-range organics (DRO) and 8,300 mg/kg residual-range organics (RRO). In addition, the third fuel vault discovered in 2011 remains unsecured, with an estimated 105 gallons of oily waste that needs to be removed and disposed of off-site. Containerized waste and potential asbestos-

containing materials remain on the site. Compliance with State and Federal environmental regulations requires further action at the Fort Pierce FUD site.



Figure 2. Primary project sites and geographical features at Biorka Island (adapted from U.S. Geological Survey Quad “Port Alexander D1”).

2.0 ALTERNATIVES

2.1 No-Action Alternative

Under the no-action alternative, the contaminated soil and debris would remain in place. This would potentially allow the migration of chemical contaminants to nearby wetlands and the marine environment. The no-action alternative would avoid the short-term disruptions to the local environment that would be caused by the operation of heavy equipment and excavation of soil and concrete.

2.2 Removal Action Alternative

The preferred alternative is to continue with the removal of contaminated soil and containerized waste, and the investigations of potentially contaminated areas.

The Corps proposes to perform the following activities:

- Excavate and transport off-site for proper treatment and disposal up to 200 tons of fuel-contaminated soil from the command bunker fuel vaults and powerhouse areas
- Remove, containerize, and transport off-site oily waste from Vault 3, followed by cleaning the vault and sealing its entrance
- Sample, remove, and containerize potential asbestos-containing material from the powerhouse floor
- Investigate and sample additional containerized waste, and containerize and transport contents for off-site disposal
- Collect soil and wipe samples to further delineate existing contamination of soil and concrete surfaces

2.3 General Work Practices

Specific details of site activities will be developed in the contractor's work plan. General activities would include the following:

- Landing equipment and vehicles on a beach in Symonds Bay near the former FAA housing facilities on Biorca Island (figure 2; the existing dock is assumed to not be sufficiently sturdy to support vehicles or construction equipment.)
- Constructing a temporary camp with living quarters, mess facilities, and a field laboratory. A broad area of open ground adjacent to the command bunker site was used as a camp area in 2011 and will presumably be used again in the proposed continued cleanup.
- Excavating contaminated soil and backfilling the excavations with clean soil obtained from an established borrow source on Biorca Island (figure 2)

3.0 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

3.1 Community

Biorca Island is currently uninhabited; the nearest community is the City of Sitka 15 miles to the north.

3.2 Current Land Use

Current jurisdiction and management of former Fort Pierce site is under the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) and the U. S. Forest Service (USFS). The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)

currently maintains a dock and facility on the eastern shore of the island. An FAA radio facility and USCG Ioran transmitting station have been operated on the island. The Southeast Alaska Regional Health Corporation (SEARHC) sometimes holds a youth camp near Symonds Bay.

3.3 Climate

Situated off the outer coast of Baranof Island, Biorka Island has a typical maritime climate of cool summers and mild winters, with frequent rain and fog. January temperatures range from 23 to 35 °F; summers vary from 48 to 61 °F. Average annual precipitation is 96 inches, including 39 inches of snowfall (ADCRA 2013).

3.4 Topography, Soils, and Hydrology

Biorka Island is typical of the relatively flat, low-lying islands of the Alexander Archipelago. Bedrock is generally shallow and overlain with only a thin mantle of mineral soil. Due to dense forests and cool temperatures, organic material can accumulate in thick layers over the mineral soil. Muskeg bogs form in poorly drained areas. Several large shallow ponds are present in the southern part of the island (USACE 1996).

3.5 Biological Resources

Biorka Island is within Tongass National Forest and is vegetated with an isolated community of the temperate rainforest and muskeg bogs typical of coastal Southeast Alaska. Western hemlock and Sitka spruce dominate the forest overstory, while the understory is composed of shrubs such as red huckleberry and alders, and large forbs such as devil's club. The forest floor is covered with a mat of mosses, liverworts, and plants such as dwarf dogwood and skunk cabbage. Muskegs populated with sphagnum mosses, sedges, and shrubs form where drainage is restricted. Trees within the muskegs are sparse and consist mainly of stunted hemlock, lodgepole pine, and red cedar. Wildlife on the island is probably comparable to that of Baranof Island, especially with regards to birds such as bald eagle, sharp-shinned hawk, great horned owl, and pine grosbeak, and smaller mammals such as voles, squirrels, and porcupine (USDA 2008). Large mammals such as black-tailed deer or bear could conceivably reach Biorka Island, although the mostly rocky shoreline would tend to discourage recruitment of these animals. The island's shoreline hosts high-energy, exposed-rock marine communities, with a few sheltered gravel beaches such as at the end of Symonds Bay. Kelp forests are visible in the straits between Biorka Island and the many scattered rocky islets surrounding it and are presumably used by sea otters. Steller sea lions are known to use Kaiuchali Island and Jacob Rock south of Biorka Island as haulouts (figures 2 and 3; Savage 2010).

3.6 Wetlands

According to the USFWS National Wetlands Inventory, the vegetated areas of Biorka Island are predominantly wetlands of one type or another. The flatter interior of the island is mostly freshwater emergent scrub-shrub wetland with saturated soils and broad tree-less areas. Slightly better-drained areas around the perimeter of the island are forested palustrine wetland dominated by dense stands of large fir and cedar trees (USFWS 2013).

3.7 Threatened and Endangered Species

No terrestrial species listed as endangered or threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) exists in or near the project area. Steller sea lions, listed as “threatened” in Southeast Alaska, use the local waters. A sea lion haulout listed as “Biorka Island” in the critical habitat descriptions in 50 CFR 526.202 is actually at Kaiuchali Island, a 3-acre rocky islet a little less than 1 mile southwest of Biorka Island (figures 2 and 3; Savage 2010). The endangered humpback whale, sperm whale, sei whale, and blue whale may also be found foraging or migrating through marine waters near Biorka Island. The Southeast Alaska Pacific herring and the yellow billed loon are currently candidate species for the ESA that may be found in marine waters near Biorka Island. Northern sea otters resident to the Biorka Island area would not be part of the Alaska southwest “distinct population segment” that is listed as threatened under the ESA (USFWS 2009b).

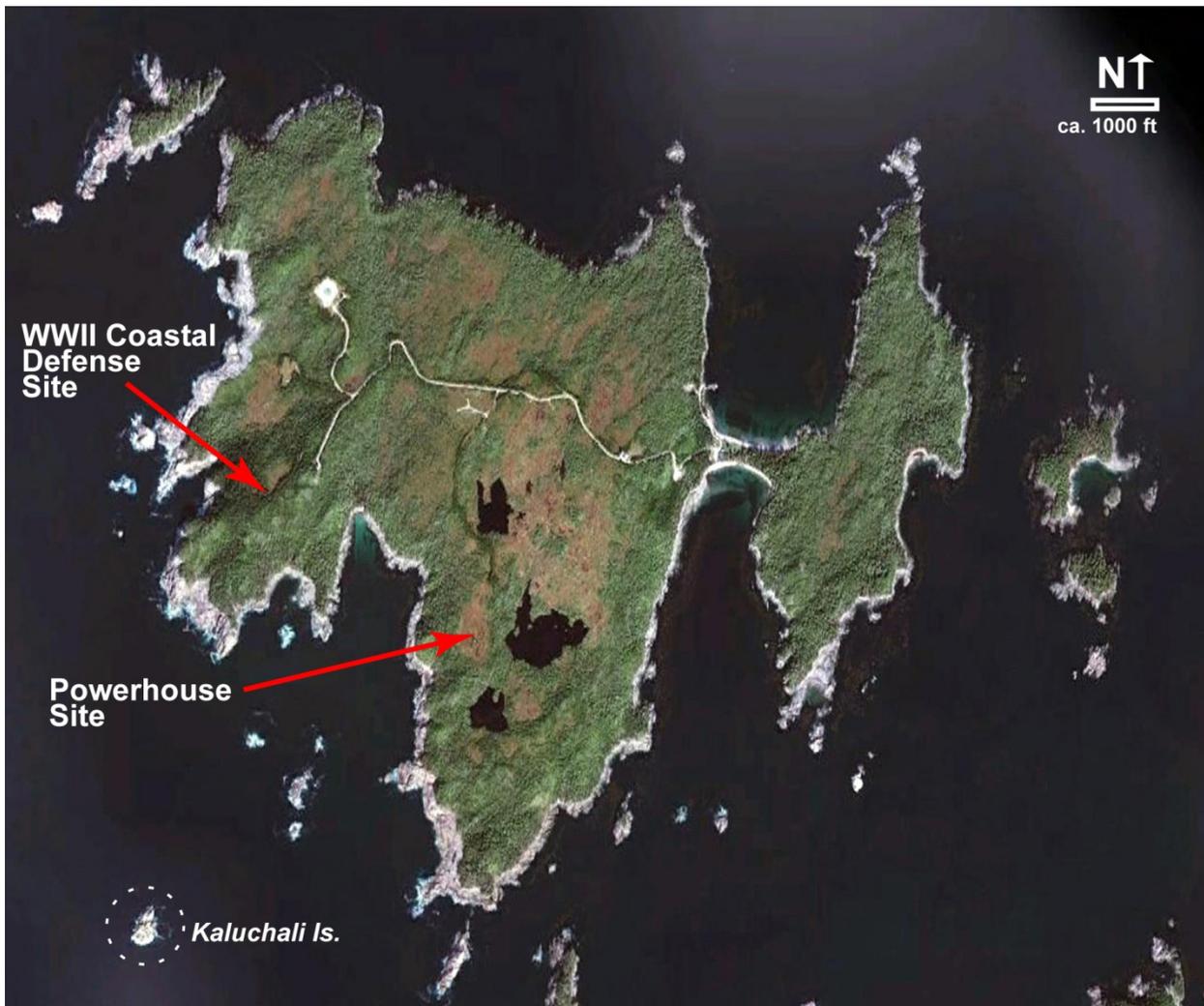


Figure 3. Aerial photo of Biorka Island, showing distribution of vegetation and the rocky nature of the coastline (2010 imagery via Google Earth Pro).

Bald eagles in Alaska are not listed under the ESA, but are protected by the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act; even an unintentional disturbance of an active eagle nest may be a violation of this act. Numerous bald eagle nesting sites have been observed on Biorka Island, primarily along the coast. Figure 4 shows the locations of nesting sites identified by the USFWS in a 1993 survey. While nesting sites are often reused year after year, about 5 percent of nesting pairs abandon their previous nest site and re-establish a new nest elsewhere in any given year (Schempf 2010). In Southeast Alaska, the nesting season generally begins in early March with courtship and nesting site selection, and ends by September when the fledglings will have left the nest. A late start or selection of an alternate nesting site can delay the nesting period, although, if an existing nest is not occupied by June, it generally will not be used that year (Lewis 2013).

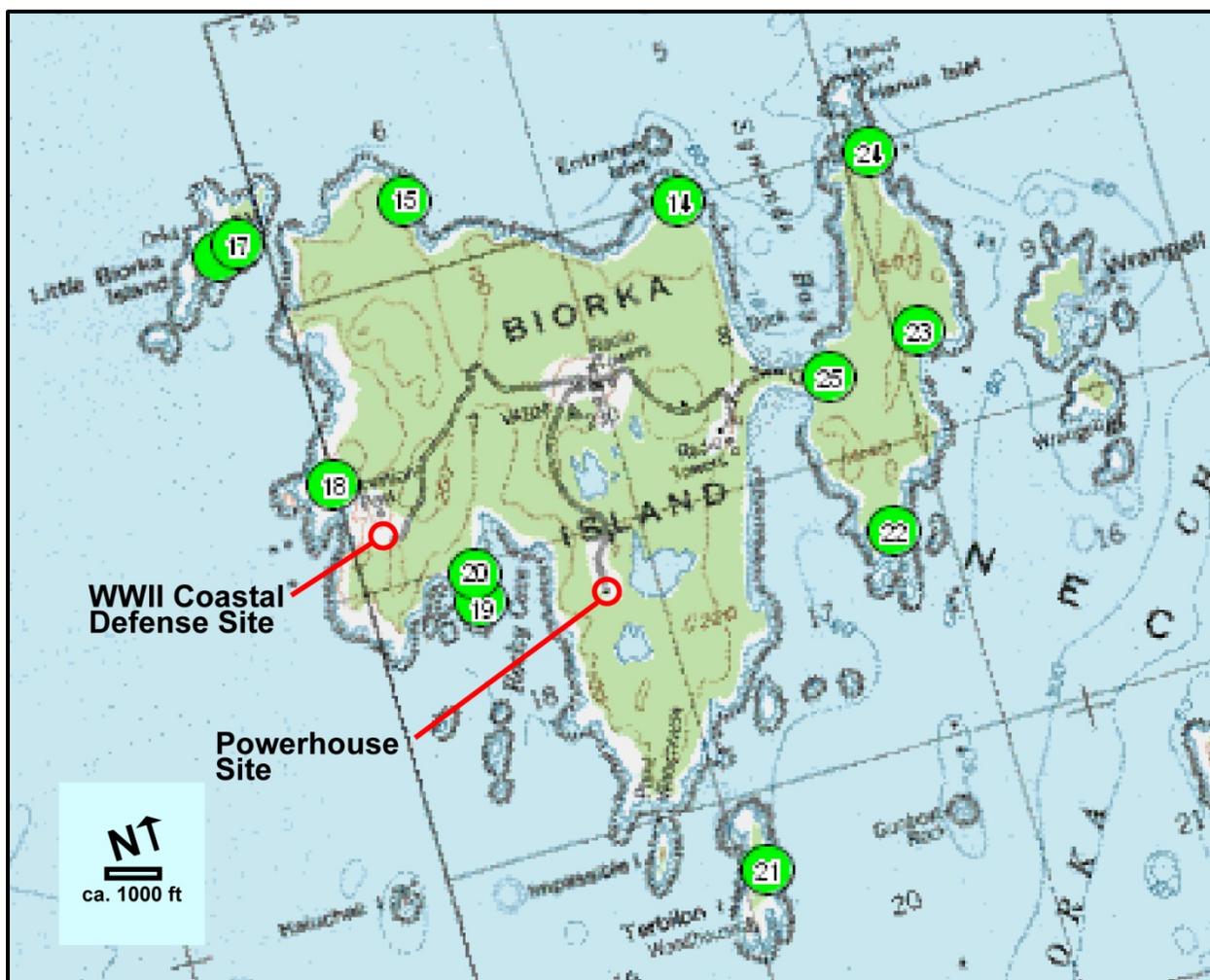


Figure 4. Bald eagle nesting sites (green numbered dots) as located in a 1993 survey (adapted from a graphic provided by the USFWS; Schempf 2010).

3.8 Essential Fish Habitat and Anadromous Streams

The marine waters surrounding Biorka Island are designated by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) as essential fish habitat (EFH) for all five Pacific salmon species and Gulf of Alaska groundfish species (NMFS 2013b). Freshwater streams on Biorka Island are limited to small, intermittent drainages, and the Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADFG) does not report any anadromous streams on the island (ADFG 2013).

3.9 Cultural and Historic Resources

Two cultural resources are listed as present on Biorka Island in the Alaska Historic Resource Survey (AHRS) database: “Fort Peirce – World War II Observation Post” (XPA-291) and “Biorka Island Loran Station” (XPA-295). The Fort Peirce AHRS entry (created in 1995) states that the existing site consists of a 7,500 square-foot reinforced concrete bunker, two 6-inch gun emplacements, a standing 20-foot by 20-foot wood frame building housing World War II era wooden piping, a water tank, four collapsed wooden structures, seven Quonset huts (some collapsed), a building foundation, a military dump site, remains of an iron tower, some Marsden matting, an automobile frame, power-line cable, and an overgrown road system. Fort Pierce was determined eligible for the National Registry of Historic Places (NRHP) in 1996, significant for its association with World War II and the Sitka Naval Operating Base (OHA 2013).

The other AHRS listing is the Biorka Island Loran radio navigation system station constructed by the U.S Coast Guard in the 1940s. The Biorka Island facility was a secondary Loran station, transmitting radio signals that were electronically synchronized with those of the respective master stations at Ocean Cape, Alaska and Gary Point, Canada. The transmitter is located north of the Fort Pierce command bunker. Associated facilities include a Coast Guard dock, fuel storage tanks, and several Quonset hut-style buildings. There was also an FAA-related function to this facility, and FAA family housing was constructed in the Symonds Bay area. The Biorka Island Loran station was determined eligible for the NRHP in 1996 for its role in coastal navigation in Alaska (OHA 2013).

3.10 Air Quality

No information on local air quality is available. The low density of emission sources in the Biorka Island area suggests generally good air quality

3.11 Noise

The noise levels at the site are generally low and considered comparable to similar remote areas. The major source of noise would presumably be from passing vehicles such as watercraft and aircraft.

4.0 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES OF ALTERNATIVES

4.1 No-Action Alternative

The no-action alternative would avoid the short-term disruptions to the local environment that would be caused by the operation of heavy equipment and excavation of soil. However, the contaminated soil and waste materials would remain in place, which would limit the use of the area by the community and potentially allow the migration of chemical contaminants to the nearby environment.

4.2 Preferred Alternative

Under the preferred alternative, contaminated soils and waste materials would be removed from the site to the extent practicable. The potential environmental consequences are described below.

4.2.1 Current Land Use

Public access to Biorca Island is normally restricted, but the landing and operation of vehicles and heavy equipment on Biorca Island has the potential to conflict with activities by the USCG, FAA, or SEARC. The proposed project would be coordinated with other possible activities on Biorca Island where necessary.

4.2.2 Topography, Soils, and Hydrology

The small areas of excavation would not significantly alter the topography or patterns of overland water flow in the area.

4.2.3 Biological Resources

The planned activities would be highly localized in their impacts and affect an area already altered by the former military facility and past cleanup efforts. A small amount of brush may need to be cleared to access specific features. The activities would have little effect on local wildlife and no long-term negative impact on their habitat. The project sites are surrounded by areas of similar, higher-quality habitat, and any wildlife displaced from the project area by noise and activity should be able to quickly resume their natural behavior.

Nesting birds are likely to be the most vulnerable animal species at the site. The destruction of active nests, eggs, or nestlings is a violation of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA). The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service advises that the period 15 April through 15 July should be considered the nesting window for forest- or shrub-nesting birds in Southeast Alaska (USFWS 2009a). The project activities may overlap this nesting window. One means of avoiding a “taking” of nesting birds under the MBTA would be to perform the necessary brush and tree removal before the start of the nesting window. However, the need for brush clearing as part of the proposed activities should be minimal, due in part to the work performed in 2011. If the proposed work takes place in late summer or early autumn, the potential impact on nesting birds would be negligible.

Bald eagles are known to nest on Biorka Island and are protected from even unintentional disturbance during nesting by the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. The Fort Pierce command bunker site is roughly 900 feet from the closest eagle nest site (#18) marked on figure 4. The 2011 site workers were informed of this nest location but were not able to see it or any other eagle nest from that location due mostly to the tall, dense forest that encircles the work site. For small-scale construction work (a description that could be applied to the excavation activity at the bunker site), USFWS guidance (USFWS 2009c) recommends maintaining a buffer zone of at least 330 feet (100 meters) between all activities and active nest sites, and keeping a natural landscape screen that blocks the eagle's view of the activity from the nest site. The areas around the proposed project work sites will be surveyed for eagle nests during a pre-construction site visit.

The Corps conferred with the National Marine Fisheries Service on Steller sea lion critical habitat prior to the 2011 activities. The NMFS confirmed (in an email message from Kate Savage dated 29 January 2010) that Steller sea lions use nearby Kaiuchali Island and Jacob Rock as haulouts, but that the described activities on Biorka Island were unlikely to disturb Steller sea lions. The Corps contacted the NMFS in 2013 to inform them of the project's continuation and was told that the NMFS's understanding of sea lion usage of the area was unchanged. The Corps determined that the planned activities would have no adverse effect on any species listed under the Endangered Species Act or their critical habitat.

Except for transportation to and from the island, the project would not enter or perform work within the marine environment and so would have no effect on marine essential fish habitat. No fish-bearing streams are known to exist on Biorka Island, and the project would not have any effect on freshwater essential fish habitat.

The currently planned activities do not involve the discharge of material into wetlands and should have no adverse effects on any wetlands or water bodies. Any incidental, unintended discharge into unidentified wetlands would be authorized under Nationwide Permit #38, "Cleanup of Hazardous and Toxic Waste".

4.2.4 Cultural Resources

The Corps has determined that the planned cleanup activities, including soil excavation and waste removal, would have no adverse affects on historic properties at Biorka Island as the planned activities would not alter or modify the essential physical features (e.g., the concrete bunkers, remaining buildings) of the historic properties. The Corps has sought concurrence with the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) on this concurrence, under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (USACE 2012b).

4.2.5 Air Quality

Air quality may be affected during the project period from the use of heavy equipment, vehicles, and generators. The Corps believes any poor air quality conditions caused by the project would be transient and highly localized, and would dissipate entirely at the end of the project.

4.2.6 Noise

The planned activities at the site and the movement of equipment into and out of the project along local roads and paths would increase the levels of noise in the area during several weeks of the working season.

4.2.7 Coastal Zone Management

Alaska's Coastal Zone Management Program expired on 31 July 2011. Project proponents are no longer required to evaluate projects for consistency with enforceable standards of coastal management plans. The Corps coordinated with the State of Alaska Division of Coastal and Oceans Management (DCOM) prior to the similar 2010 project; DCOM concurred with the Corps' determination that the proposed activity would have no negative effect on the coastal zone (letter dated 29 January 2010; State ID 2010-0110J). The Corps believes that the proposed continuation of the Biorka Island project would likewise have no adverse impact on coastal resources.

4.2.8 Effects on Environmental Justice

Executive Order 12898, "Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations," requires Federal agencies to identify and address any disproportionately high and adverse human health effects of its programs and activities on minority and low-income populations.

The express purpose of the proposed project is to reduce future risks to human health and welfare in the region by removing contaminants and physical risks from the environment. The Corps does not anticipate adverse impacts from this project to the human population.

4.2.9 Cumulative Effects

Federal law (40 CFR 651.16) requires that NEPA documents assess cumulative effects, which are the impact on the environment resulting from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions.

The proposed project would have the ultimate net effect of removing a large mass of chemical contamination from the environment. The immediate incremental impacts of air pollutants and noise from construction machinery would be of short duration and would not contribute to long-term cumulative effects. Given the current restricted public access to the island and its Federal ownership, the restoration of the site would not be expected to encourage development of the area.

4.2.10 Mitigation

Mitigation steps would primarily consist of standard construction best management practices (BMPs) to avoid unnecessary disturbance or damage to the local environment; these BMPs would be developed more fully in the contractor's work plan. Erosion control best management practices may include covering exposed soil with brush, netting, erosion blankets or mulches (e.g., chipped brush), limiting off-road travel, and placing silt fences where applicable to control

sediment runoff from the project site perimeter and to protect any nearby creeks or drainage channels.

All fuels and fluids used in machinery and excavation equipment would be stored at least 50 feet from creeks and beaches. Equipment and trucks containing fuel would park at least 50 feet from creeks and beaches when not in use. Emergency spill response procedures and materials would be provided on all equipment; materials will include sorbent mats, socks, and pads for absorbing fuels and fluids used on site.

Site workers would avoid destroying active bird nests, as described in Section 4.2.3. No active eagle nests have been reported near the proposed work sites, but if new eagle nests are discovered, they should be reported immediately to the Corps.

5.0 PERMITS AND AUTHORIZATIONS

This continuing project would require few resource permits or authorizations. The Corps will seek concurrence from the State Historical Preservation Officer that the soil excavation work would not cause adverse effects to historical properties or cultural resources. The Corps does not expect the project to require discharge of materials into wetlands. If an excavation did extend into a wetland area, the backfilling of that excavation would be authorized by Nationwide Permit No. 38, "Cleanup of Hazardous and Toxic Waste".

6.0 CONCLUSION

The continued environmental cleanup efforts at Biorca Island, as discussed in this document, would have some minor, largely controllable short-term impacts, but in the long term would help improve the overall quality of the human environment. This assessment supports the conclusion that the proposed project does not constitute a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment; therefore, a finding of no significant impact will be prepared.

7.0 PREPARERS OF THIS DOCUMENT

This Environmental Assessment was prepared by Chris Floyd and Diane Walters of the Environmental Resources Section, Alaska District Corps of Engineers. The Corps of Engineers Project Manager is Andy Sorum.

8.0 REFERENCES

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