

3 EXISTING ENVIRONMENT

This chapter describes the existing environment or future baseline that may be affected by the Proposed Action. The future baseline includes the continuation of approved onshore training events in the CNMI as described in prior NEPA documents (DON 2010a, 2015c). The baseline also includes construction and operations associated with the U.S. Air Force’s Divert project (U.S. Air Force 2016, 2020). Additionally, projects under the U.S. Air Force’s Agile Combat Employment program would also continue, which would include the clearance of vegetation and restoration of the runway and other engineered surfaces at North Field. This chapter is organized in 14 sections: Public Access, Land Use and Recreation; Socioeconomics; Biological Resources; Cultural Resources; Visual Resources; Transportation; Noise; Air Quality; Public Health and Safety; Utilities; Topography, Geology, and Soils; Groundwater and Hydrology; and Surface Waters and Wetlands.

3.1 Public Access

The Military Lease Area (northern two-thirds of Tinian and shoreline areas immediately adjacent to Tinian) is currently available to residents of Tinian and tourists during festivals and holidays and for fishing and boating, commercial ranching, cultural activities, recreation, tourism, and subsistence activities like hunting and gathering of both plants and animals. Access to the Military Lease Area is restricted only when needed to comply with safety and security requirements during military training activities, consistent with the terms of the 1983 Lease Agreement.

Current military training on Tinian includes large training events like Valiant Shield (June 2024), which occurs over a period of approximately four weeks. During these large training events, access has been restricted around North Field, with closure of the taxiway between runways Able and Baker and the two ends of runway Baker for the duration of training activities. No access has been permitted on runway Baker during aviation operations and airdrops. Small and medium training events, typically lasting a few weeks, are also conducted throughout the year on Tinian in conjunction with at-sea training. The portion of the Cope North exercises that have previously occurred in the CNMI (February 2025) is an example of a medium training event. In addition, Seabee units conduct training at Camp Tinian and the Military Lease Area throughout the year.

The USAGM, formerly the International Broadcasting Bureau, operated two broadcast facilities in the Mariana Islands—one on Tinian and one on Saipan. The Tinian site is located within the Military Lease Area. The Saipan site is situated in the southwest area of the island adjacent to the Commonwealth Utilities Corporation Agingan wastewater treatment plant. Both USAGM sites supported international shortwave radio transmissions and are collectively referred to as the Robert E. Kamosa Transmitting Station. Public access to both sites is restricted due to the presence of sensitive communications infrastructure and federal security requirements.

3.2 Land Use and Recreation

The island of Tinian encompasses approximately 25,000 acres. Land use on Tinian includes residential and commercial uses on privately owned land, with the population primarily located in the village of San Jose. Commercial uses include grocery and dry goods stores, restaurants, agriculture, hotels, TNI, and the Port of Tinian. Public land uses include civic and government functions, homesteads, conservation areas, and recreation. Recreation on Tinian is outdoor-focused and includes land uses such as beaches and parks, and recreational activities such as

visiting cultural resources, swimming, fishing, snorkeling, diving, boating, wild plant collection, and bicycling.

Since the 1983 Lease Agreement, several land use agreements have defined DoD management of the Military Lease Area (see Appendix E for a description of these agreements). The Lease Back Area was leased back to the CNMI by the U.S. Government for agricultural and other uses. Roads within the Lease Back Area and a 10-acre youth camp parcel within the area were returned to the CNMI, but DoD retains use rights and easements over these areas. The Lease Back Area is no longer managed as a separate section within the Military Lease Area and will only be referenced in a limited capacity regarding past actions and/or agreements. The youth camp area within the Military Lease Area is not currently being used as a youth camp. A 936-acre Natural Resources Conservation Area has also been dedicated within the Military Lease Area. The DoD also negotiated with the Commonwealth Ports Authority to lease an area south of the Military Lease Area on the northern end of TNI under the U.S. Air Force’s Divert Activities and Exercises program.

The Department of Public Works manages all public lands within the CNMI in accordance with the 2019 and 2021 updated Public Land Use Plan. The plan provides guidance and planning for capital improvements over a 5-year planning horizon (CNMI Department of Public Lands 2019) and identifies five categories of public land uses as shown in Table 3.2-1. Approximately 90 percent of land on Tinian is considered public land with 67 percent of that public land in the northern half of the island leased to the military and the other 33 percent located on the southern half of the island. Figure 3.2-1 shows the land uses on Tinian and land-based recreational sites.

Table 3.2-1 Tinian Land

<i>Tinian</i>	<i>Acres¹</i>	<i>% of Total Land</i>	<i>Public Land Acres</i>	<i>% of Public Land</i>
Total Land Area	25,115	—	—	—
Private Land	2,434	10	—	—
Public Land	22,681	90	—	—
-Grant of Public Domain Land	—	—	1,604	7
-Designated/In Use Public Land	—	—	1,278	6
-Undesignated/Not in Public Use Public Land	—	—	2,874	13
-Leased Public Land	—	—	1,572	7
-Covenant/Military Leased Public Land	—	—	15,353	67

Legend: % = percent.

Note: ¹ Acreages are from CNMI Department of Public Lands 2019.

Source: CNMI Department of Public Lands 2019.



Figure 3.2-1 Existing Land Uses and Land-Based Recreation Sites on Tinian

3.2.1 Land Uses and Recreation Outside of the Military Lease Area

Existing land uses south of the Military Lease Area include the Port of Tinian, TNI, agricultural, residential, commercial businesses (restaurants, hotels, grocery stores, offices), a power plant, civic buildings, open space, mining, a waste disposal site (Puntan Diablo disposal site), homestead designated areas, parks, and conservation land (3,358 acres along the cliff line on the southeast side of island). Most of Tinian's population and commercial activities are in San Jose near the Port of Tinian. The Tinian Dynasty Hotel and Casino, a large resort, operated on the island until its permanent closure in 2016. A new 40-unit hotel and casino, the Tinian Diamond Hotel and Casino, opened in 2023, but the casino closed in 2024. The CNMI government leased a parcel on the southeast end of the port to Bridge Investment Group for potential commercial development, although the project has not been approved or constructed.

The CNMI Department of Public Lands Homesteads Division is responsible for reviewing and accepting applications for homesteads on public lands, which are available to eligible residents (CNMI Department of Public Lands 2023a). The homestead program includes village lots up to 1,000 square meters and agricultural lots up to 10,000 square meters, or 0.2 and 2.4 acres, respectively. As of January 2019, there were 528 deeded village homesteads and 384 deeded agricultural homesteads where the owners are currently farming and raising livestock in the lands south of the Military Lease Area (CNMI Department of Public Lands 2019). The Department of Public Lands has planned for future development of both village and agricultural homesteads on Tinian, in an area of approximately 1,549 acres in the southeastern portion of the island (CNMI Department of Public Lands 2019). A new public highway (Route 205) is planned to provide vehicular access to the future Kastiyu homestead area and provide multiple connections to the existing roadways on Tinian (CNMI Department of Public Lands 2019).

Recreation sites frequented by both Tinian residents and visitors are located on the west side of the island and include Unai Leprosarium/Unai Tinian, Unai Kammer, Unai Taga, and Unai Tachogna (Figure 3.2-1). Annual festivals hosted at these beaches include the Pika Festival in February and the San Jose Fiesta in May (Marianas Visitors Authority 2019). These festivals are managed by the Tinian Mayor's Office, which also maintains the cultural sites outside the Military Lease Area including the House of Taga ruins and Suicide Cliff. Other recreational features include parks, the Tinian Community Gym and Sports Field Complex, and the Tinian Community Park and Outdoor Amphitheater. Ocean-based activities on Tinian include fishing, snorkeling, diving, and boating. Known popular dive sites surrounding the island are shown in Figure 3.2-2.

3.2.2 Land Uses and Recreation within the Military Lease Area

Current training within the Military Lease Area consists of units engaging in maneuvers on roads and in offroad areas, simulated live-fire training, aircraft operations and live-fire small arms training using bullet traps (in existing structures only) (DON 2013). Large-scale training events can take place on Tinian for up to four weeks per event and can occur any time of the year. Public uses include tourism, public recreation, subsistence agriculture, and wildlife conservation.



Figure 3.2-2 Tinian Popular Dive Sites

For cultural sites, the most popular destinations include the Tinian Landing Beaches, Ushi Point Field, and the North Field National Historic Landmark. Several annual ceremonies are held to commemorate Iwo Jima in March, Battles of Saipan and Tinian in June and July, end of the War in the Pacific in August, and Memorial Day and Veterans Day in May and November (DON 2020). Other recreational uses within the Military Lease Area include hiking, shoreline fishing, wild plant collection, hunting, gathering, bicycling, and other outdoor activities. All recreational activities occur year-round (Marianas Visitors Authority 2023).

Cattle grazing occurs on the east side of Broadway and along 8th Avenue. Grazing and agricultural uses continue even though permits issued by the Department of Public Lands have expired. Other agricultural uses in the Military Lease Area include subsistence growing and harvesting of fruits and vegetables.

Wildlife conservation is another land use within the Military Lease Area. In 1999, the DON, in cooperation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, CNMI Division of Fish and Wildlife, and the FAA, dedicated 936 acres as a conservation area for the Tinian monarch (*Monarcha takatsukasae*). This existing Tinian Military Retention Land for Wildlife Conservation (also known as the FAA Mitigation Area but hereinafter referred to as the Natural Resources Conservation Area) allows low-impact military training that does not adversely modify habitat. Though the Tinian monarch was removed from the endangered species list in 2004 due to recovery of the species, the conservation area remains an existing land use within the Military Lease Area. In addition, the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service recovery plan for the Mariana common moorhen identifies Lake Hagoi within the northern portion of the Military Lease Area as primary habitat for the moorhen (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 1991). Lake Hagoi is currently restricted from training activities.

The Military Lease Area also includes approximately 300 acres formerly used by USAGM on the northwest side of the Military Use Area. The USAGM operated 13 curtain antennae, each of which consisted of two vertical steel towers between 150 and 400 feet tall with a curtain of horizontal and vertical cables hung between the towers of the same height (DON 2010b). The site also contains administration buildings and equipment. During operation at the USAGM communications site, shore fishing from Puntan Lamanibot Sanhilo (Sanhilo) was restricted due to hazards from electromagnetic radiation and all access to the shoreline along Lamanibot Bay (Dump Coke) from Puntan Lamanibot Sanhilo to Puntal Lamanibot Papa was also restricted.

On August 13, 2024, the USAGM announced the closure of the Robert E. Kamosa Transmitting Station facilities located on both Tinian and Saipan. The Saipan site contains a few buildings and five towers on public land adjacent to a water treatment plant and a golf course. The Saipan site itself is fenced and does not contain public recreation uses.

3.3 Socioeconomics

Socioeconomic considerations include population, demographics, economic activity, and public services. The island of Tinian is small, approximately 12 miles long and 6 miles wide. Residents live in the village of San Jose, located on the southern one-third of the island. The livelihood of the Tinian community is dependent on both commercial markets and subsistence practices and relies on social cohesion to adapt to external factors such as pandemics (e.g., SARS and COVID-19) or natural disasters that adversely affect the economy of the island. Residents rely on many of the natural resources found in the Military Lease Area. Information on local resources and producers (e.g., ranching, fishing, and cultivation or gathering of other traditional food sources or