

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 is held a few times per year for approximately four weeks. During these 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 2024) 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