

Maintaining Military Missions: Coordinated Approach to Sea Level Rise Infrastructure Impacts

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Historically, many military installations have been strategically located on the US Southeast coast to take advantage of ocean access, near year-round training climate, access to rail and highway networks, availability of large tracts of land. Some of those strategic benefits are now in the process of becoming possible problems as sea levels along the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico rise and are expected to continue to rise.

Beaufort, SC is one of these coastal communities with military facilities. Both quantitative data from NOAA and empirical observations demonstrate that Sea Level Rise (SLR) may have serious impacts directly on one of the local military facilities and indirectly on the other two. Local governments have a long and successful history of coordinating planning decisions with the Marine Corps and the Navy, shown by the ongoing work (since 1999) on developing and then implementing Joint Land Use Studies (JLUS), which are funded jointly by the Department of Defense and local governments.

As a result of the JLUSes completed in 2015 for Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island (PI) and Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort (MCAS) and the encouragement of the Department of Defense's Office of Economic Adjustment (OEA), implementation of the plans' recommendations include a major component on SLR. Other organizations in the area have already begun work on planning with SLR as a criteria, this project will incorporate the findings and the professionals and elected officials involved. To ensure that the needs of both the local communities and the military facilities are accommodated, in this preliminary study we are concentrating on the need for infrastructure improvements to maintain the operational viability of PI and MCAS. Since the two facilities have a cooperative agreement with the regional water and sewer utility (rather than providing their own services), this agency is part of the team. As well, the South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT), the Lowcountry Council of Governments (LCOG) and the Lowcountry Regional Transportation Authority/Palmetto Breeze in their roles as providers and planners of roads, highways, bridges and public transit will help determine what is needed to continue to move people and supplies to and from the facilities; some roads are already under water (or nearly so) during full moon/new moon high tide incidents.