



**DEFENSE SUPPORT INITIATIVES COMMITTEE**  
OKALOOSA, SANTA ROSA AND WALTON COUNTIES

JULY 30, 2024

MEMORANDUM, SEE DISTRIBUTION

SUBJECT: EASTERN GULF TEST & TRAINING RANGE PROTECTION

The Defense Support Initiatives Committee is a long-standing successful military advocacy group located in Okaloosa County in Northwest Florida. As the largest military test and training range in the continental United States, we understand the importance of the eastern Gulf of Mexico for both our national security and the coastal way of life in Florida. The Eastern Gulf Test and Training Range is utilized by all military services and plays a vital role in our national security—accommodating water-to-land transitions, high-altitude supersonic air combat training, air-to-air missile testing, air-to-ground targeting, drone targeting, hypersonic weapons testing, space launches, and other activities. The EGTTTR is vital for testing the next generation of air armaments, and for training in realistic combat-surrogate conditions.

The DSI is concerned with the threat of expanded offshore oil drilling. Totalling 180,000 square miles of Department of Defense controlled airspace, the EGTTTR provides more uninterrupted surface and airspace than all other ranges in the lower 48 combined. Its size and strategic placement creates a critical military asset that cannot be replicated anywhere else. No other area in our nation offers the same combination of unrestricted space, land-water contrast, and adjacent support infrastructure.

It is these very characteristics that prompted Congress to originally protect the Eastern Gulf of Mexico from offshore drilling encroachment. Additionally, common sense suggests that we should not be extracting and transporting highly flammable products alongside live fire, munitions testing, or missile shooting. Similarly, we shouldn't be constructing immovable oil or wind infrastructure in areas used for underwater mine warfare training and countermeasure operations.

The 96th Test Wing, Eglin Air Force Base in Okaloosa County is the Air Force's test and evaluation organization for air-delivered weapons, navigation and guidance systems, Command and Control systems, and AF Special Operations Command systems. The wing provides expert development and evaluation of the systems throughout their lifecycle to ensure warfighters have technologically superior, sustainable and safe systems. In 2022, Team Eglin's economic impact was over \$9.2 Billion; while Florida's military economic impact was over \$96.6 Billion. If military access to the Gulf Range dwindles, not only is our national security threatened but Florida loses its standing as a prime location for military installations and the resultant defense industry.

Simply put, offshore drilling activities and military missions are not compatible. While a 2020 Presidential Executive Order currently protects this national asset, the environment, and the tourism and defense industries, an Executive Order can be overturned. Therefore, permanent protections are required. The Administration must renew its commitment to protect the military's Gulf Test and Training Range. Our national security depends on it.

Under Section 12(a) of the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act, the President can permanently withdraw areas of the U.S. from development of future offshore drilling. We strongly request and encourage this permanent protection of the eastern Gulf of Mexico.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey R. Riemer, Maj Gen USAF Ret.  
Chairman

Kay Rasmussen, CECd  
Manager

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DISTRIBUTION

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