

WALTER B. JONES
3D DISTRICT, NORTH CAROLINA

ROOM 2333
RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
TELEPHONE: (202) 225-3415

COMMITTEES:
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
COMMITTEE ON FINANCIAL SERVICES

DISTRICT OFFICE:
1105-C CORPORATE DRIVE
GREENVILLE, NC 27858
(252) 931-1003
(800) 351-1697

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3303

March 30, 2007

The Honorable Donald Winter
Secretary of the Navy
1000 Navy Pentagon
Washington, DC 20350-1000

Dear Secretary Winter:

I have long been an extremely strong supporter of Navy/Marine Corps aviation, and will continue to be as long as I have the privilege to represent North Carolina's 3rd District in Congress. I am also proud to say that I fought hard to bring additional squadrons of F/A-18 E/F "Super Hornets" to Havelock, North Carolina's Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, and I was pleased when the Navy made the decision to do so. Furthermore, I fully recognize the need to construct an Outlying Landing Field to facilitate aviator training.

However, I am troubled by the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) which the Navy prepared to justify its preference to locate the OLF at Site C in Washington County, North Carolina. After reviewing the SEIS and consulting with preeminent bird strike experts including the former Chief of the U.S. Air Force's Bird Aircraft Strike Team - Dr. Russel P. DeFusco - I am particularly concerned that Site C poses significant risks to pilots, planes, wildlife and taxpayers.

Site C is located next to Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge and its extraordinary concentrations of tundra swans, geese, ducks and other migratory birds. Dr. DeFusco's research makes clear that bird-aircraft strike "risks from large and flocking species at the preferred site and in the immediate surroundings are extremely high." To mitigate the avian hazards at Site C, the Navy would have to employ extensive on-site monitoring, habitat management, fencing, and active harassment. The Navy also has proposed using lethal control measures including poisoning large numbers of wild birds - a strategy which the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission and Governor Mike Easley recently warned could be disastrous for waterfowl and other non-target species. In addition, the Navy would have to mitigate avian hazards in the approach, departure and traffic pattern airspace out to approximately five miles from the landing surfaces. This would require modifying or eliminating agricultural practices, wetlands, and bird habitat in the surrounding area. Even with these measures in place, local and migratory movement patterns would still draw birds to the area, requiring the Navy to use radars to actively manage flight operations - especially during spring and fall migrations and winter.

In Dr. DeFusco's expert opinion, the bottom line regarding Site C is this:

“Bird activity will be severe enough and often enough to significantly impact operations and training in the area . . . [forcing the Navy] to curtail flying during times and over specific locations when and where birds are determined to be significantly hazardous to continued operations. Such conditions can have severe adverse effects on the Navy's flying mission. In my opinion, a situation like this should never be created and then mitigated when the option to avoid the situation altogether exists by choosing a more suitable site. The site selected by the Navy is a particularly hazardous one. My recommendation is that the Navy reconsider their selection, further research the issue, and determine a safer alternative site from which to operate.”

I could not agree more. Spending a quarter of a billion dollars to construct an outlying field on a site with severe operational restrictions is not a wise use of American taxpayers' hard-earned money. Threatening the viability of one of the world's last great waterfowl habitats—especially if done through extreme measures such as poisoning large numbers of wild birds — is unjustifiable. And needlessly putting the lives of Navy and Marine Corps aviators at risk is simply unacceptable.

North Carolina is without question the most military friendly state in the nation. We're happy to be the home of the OLF, but Site C is not the best choice for taxpayers, the wildlife or the pilots. Therefore, I strongly encourage you to reconsider your decision.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Walter B. Jones". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long, sweeping underline.

Walter B. Jones
Member of Congress