



U.S. Army Corps Of Engineers

Norfolk District



News Release

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Corps revises Danger Zone regulations around Plum Tree Island National Wildlife Refuge in Poquoson

NORFOLK, Va. – The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (the Corps) has revised the Danger Zone regulations in effect since July 15, 2004 for the navigable water around Plum Tree Island National Wildlife Refuge in Poquoson, Va.

The revised regulations, effective April 1, state that no activity shall be conducted within the designated area that disturbs the sub-aqueous soil. Prohibited activities include, but are not limited to anchoring, clamming with rakes, shovels or hoes, dredging, prop dredging, the intentional/unintentional beaching or grounding of vessels, or walking on the bottom. The setting/hauling of crab pots, gill nets and purse seining are exempt from these regulations.

The Danger Zone covers the southern part of the old bombing range where unexploded ordnance is known to exist. Heavy erosion has exposed what appear to be bombs or Jet Assisted Takeoff (JATO) bottles in the shallow water surrounding the refuge. The Corps has installed Danger/No Trespassing signs and nautical day marks to designate the restricted area. Conducting unauthorized activities within the Danger Zone area is a violation of federal law and may result in a fine of up to \$500 and up to 6 months in prison.

A public notice was issued on this new revision and placed on the Norfolk District website http://www.nao.usace.army.mil/Regulatory/harborsecurity/Plum_order_2005.pdf, with the Corps issuing the following warning to mariners:

**ALL MARINERS ARE HEREBY WARNED OF THE POTENTIAL HAZARDS
ASSOCIATED WITH THE FORMER BOMBING RANGE AND ADVISED TO REMAIN
CLEAR OF THE DESIGNATED DANGER ZONE AREA AT ALL TIMES.**

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PLUM TREE ISLAND

These efforts are needed to restrict public access in the shallow water around Plum Tree Island until the Corps can complete a munitions investigation to fully analyze the risk posed by the former military bombing range.

Public access has never been permitted on any part of Plum Tree Island -- the former bombing range.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers continues to work closely with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, the Virginia Marine Resources Commission and the City of Poquoson to coordinate these efforts. Approximately 203 "No Trespassing" signs were posted around Plum Tree Island in December 2004. Day marks were also installed 300 feet from the original shoreline or range boundary. In some cases, these day marks are posted as far as 600 feet from the current shoreline.

The U.S. Army Corps designated the area around Plum Tree Island National Wildlife Refuge a temporary Danger Zone in July 2004. The initial regulatory action prohibited all navigational access to the refuge and the shallow water surrounding it.

Restrictions will remain in place until the Corps can complete a study to evaluate the risks associated with what are believed to be unexploded ordnance items in the intertidal zone at Plum Tree Island. The study will begin this summer and take 12 to 18 months to complete. The Corps will evaluate both the explosive hazards and potential chemical hazards associated with the munitions. The study will also identify those areas of the refuge that must remain closed to the public, and the areas where the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service could potentially offer compatible wildlife-related recreational opportunities.

Plum Tree Island National Wildlife Refuge, formerly Plum Tree Island Range, was used for aerial bombardment and gunnery practice from 1917 to the late 1950s. It is located in the Chesapeake Bay and consists of approximately 3,482 acres of low dunes and marsh, interspersed with small circular ponds created by the aerial bomb impacts. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service acquired the original 3,276 acres in 1972, and has since acquired two tracts, totaling 226 acres, which were not part of the former bombing range.

For more information, contact Adriane James, Army Corps of Engineers, at (757)-201-7701, or Joe McCauley, USFWS, at (804) 333-1470. Request for site photos can be made to: Terri_Edwards@fws.gov . Terri Edwards phone number: 413-253-8324.

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