



DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
WASHINGTON DC

OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

United States Air Force
Record of Decision
For the

F-35A Operational Beddown - Pacific

The United States Air Force (USAF) issues this Record of Decision (ROD) for implementation of the F-35A Operational Beddown – Pacific. This ROD is prepared in accordance with the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) at Title 40 Code of the Federal Regulations (CFR), § 1505.2, *Record of Decision in Cases Requiring Environmental Impact Statements* and the USAF Environmental Impact Analysis Process (EIAP) at 32 CFR § 989.21, *Record of Decision (ROD)*. Specifically, this ROD:

- States the USAF Decision;
- Identifies the alternatives considered by the USAF in reaching the decision and specifies the environmentally preferable alternative;
- Identifies and discusses relevant factors that were considered in making the decision and states how those factors entered into its decision;
- States whether all practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental harm resulting from the selected alternative have been adopted, and if not, why they were not; and
- Identifies the mitigations adopted, states whether all reasonable and practicable means to avoid, minimize, or mitigate significant adverse impacts from the selected alternative were adopted, or, if not, why they were not adopted, and summarizes the applicable monitoring and enforcement program adopted for those mitigations.

The USAF Decision

The USAF will implement the Proposed Action (Preferred Alternative, (“preferred location,” *ab initio*) FEIS, ES.4, pg. ES-4 and Section 2.1.3, pg. 2-3)) including the mitigations identified in this ROD. The USAF considered all relevant operational, environmental, economic, and technical factors discussed in the *F-35A Operational Beddown – Pacific Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS)*, dated February 2016 (*Federal Register*, Vol. 81, No. 43, pg. 11557) in making this decision, as well as other relevant factors and supporting materials. Comments from the public, inputs from regulatory agencies, and others, were also considered.

Description of Alternatives Considered

Two alternatives were analyzed in the EIS – the Proposed Action (Preferred Alternative) and the No- Action alternative.

Proposed Action (Preferred Alternative)

Under the proposed action, the USAF will base two squadrons of F-35A aircraft (48 Primary Assigned Aircraft [PAA], and 6 Backup Aircraft Inventory [BAI]) at Eielson AFB, Alaska

(FEIS, Sec. 2.2.2, pg. 2-15). To facilitate the basing and operations, an additional 2,765 military and civilian personnel will be assigned to Eielson AFB, together with associated military dependents, resulting in an increase in total base population from the current baseline of 4,986 to 7,751 (FEIS, Table 2.2-8, pp 2-16). Construction and/or modification of facilities for maintenance and operation of the aircraft, as well as associated infrastructure and utilities, will be accomplished on a phased schedule, with completion planned in time to accommodate the arrival of the first F-35A aircraft in late 2019. The two operational squadrons will be additive to existing operations and missions currently based at Eielson AFB. The F-35As will conduct training from the base and in the existing airspace of the Joint Pacific Alaska Range Complex (JPARC). No new airspace will be established as part of this Proposed Action.

No Action (Environmentally Preferable)

Under the No-Action Alternative, no beddown of F-35A aircraft would occur at Eielson AFB or within the PACAF Area of Responsibility (AOR), at this time (FEIS, Sec. 2.2.1, pg. 2-3). Thus, no F-35A associated on-base construction or personnel increases would occur. All current missions at Eielson AFB would continue, and environmental impacts would remain the same as those currently being experienced. The No-Action alternative is considered the environmentally preferable alternative.

Factors Considered in Reaching a Decision

Need for and Purpose of the Proposed Action: The beddown and operation of the F-35A within the PACAF AOR meets the President and Secretary of Defense's directives to reduce vulnerabilities and provide rapid worldwide deployment. The PACAF F-35A beddown will serve as a stabilizing presence within the region by providing efficient and effective response to threats and reinforcing the Combat Air Force core competencies of air and space superiority, global attack, precision engagement, and agile combat support.

In order to maintain capable and ready forces required for national defense, the USAF must integrate the F-35A mission while transitioning from the legacy fighter aircraft programs. The purpose of the Proposed Action is to maintain efficient and effective combat capability and mission readiness in the PACAF AOR as the USAF faces deployments across a spectrum of conflicts, while also providing for homeland defense. Beddown and operation of the F-35A at a PACAF AOR base represents a major step toward this goal. This action assures availability of combat-ready pilots in the PACAF AOR flying the most advanced fighter aircraft in the world.

The Secretary of the Air Force determined there was a need to locate F-35A aircraft in the PACAF AOR based on the following:

- Supporting the Pacific re-balance as directed by the President and the Secretary of Defense to counter threats arising in the Pacific arena;
- Supporting the location of robust fifth-generation aircraft capability to offset similar threats in the PACAF AOR;
- Supporting future peacekeeping requirements or conflicts that may occur in the Pacific region; and
- Providing adequate war planning response times in the PACAF AOR.

Public Involvement: The public involvement accomplished by the USAF is discussed in the Final EIS (Section 1.3). The public and other agencies and entities were included and informed as follows:

- Notice of Intent (NOI): *Federal Register*, Vol. 80, No. 43, pg.11983 (March 5, 2015)
- Scoping Period: March 5, 2015 – May 25, 2015
- Scoping meetings were held at the following locations:
 - North Pole, Alaska (March 24, 2015)
 - Fairbanks, Alaska (March 25, 2015)
 - Delta Junction, Alaska (March 26, 2015)
- Notice of Availability (NOA) for Draft EIS: *Federal Register*, Vol. 80, No. 172, pg. 53513 (September 4, 2015)
- Public Comment Period: September 4, 2015 – October 20, 2015
- Public Hearings were held at the following locations:
 - North Pole, Alaska (September 21, 2015)
 - Delta Junction, Alaska (September 22, 2015)
 - Fairbanks, Alaska (September 23, 2015)
- NOA for Final EIS: *Federal Register*, Vol. 81, No. 43, pg. 11557 (March 4, 2016)

Consultations: As part of the impacts analysis on various aspects of the human environment, consultations with various entities were conducted. Information developed during consultations aided in informing this decision, as well as the public, regarding potential effects.

Consultation with Alaska Native Organizations and Tribes

In accordance with the *National Historic Preservation Act*, its implementing regulations at 36 CFR § 800, *Department of Defense (DoD) American Indian and Alaska Native Policy*; DoD Instruction 4710.02, *Interaction with Federally Recognized Tribes*; and Air Force Instruction (AFI) 90-2002, *Air Force Interactions with Federally-Recognized Tribes*, Alaska tribes were invited to consult on a government-to-government basis and asked to provide information on any properties of religious and cultural significance that could be affected by the proposed action (FEIS, Sec. 4.8, pg. 4-51; Appendix C-7). In addition, information was shared with and consultation opportunities offered to Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANSCA) Corporations. No specific concerns were identified by Native Alaskans, and no project-specific meetings were requested.

Consultation with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Regarding Threatened/Endangered Species and Other Sensitive Species

On August 11, 2015, the USAF sent a letter to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) initiating informal consultation and included attachments describing the Proposed Action and preliminary findings of effects (FEIS, Appendix C, pg. C-233). As no listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat are present in the area of potential effect for the Proposed Action Alternative, the USAF's finding for threatened or endangered species (or their associated preferred or critical habitat) was "no effect." In addition, the USAF found that other species of special concern (including species protected under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act), though present in the area of potential effect, would not be adversely impacted. The USFWS declined to respond in writing, and did not request further consultations.

Consultation with the Alaska State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) Per the Requirements of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Acts

Based upon initial analyses of potential effects from the Proposed Action, the USAF transmitted a letter delineating initial findings of effect, with supporting analyses/information, to the Alaska SHPO on July 31, 2015. The Area of Potential Effect included areas underlying the northern JPARC airspace where most F-35A training will be conducted, as well as areas on base that would be affected during construction of facilities/infrastructure to accommodate the beddown, and airfield operations on and from the base once full operational capabilities are attained. After the USAF completed more detailed analyses and provided additional information as requested by the SHPO, the Alaska SHPO concurred in the USAF findings of no effect/no adverse effect on January 21, 2016 (FEIS, pg. 4-54; Appendix C, pg. C-49).

Unavoidable Impacts Taken into Consideration in the Decision

Acoustic Environment/Noise

In the JPARC: No significant adverse impacts attributable to proposed F-35A training in the JPARC were identified; however, a slight increase in the number of sonic booms and in supersonic/subsonic noise overall is unavoidable. Existing and pending flight avoidance area designations and other operational restrictions on USAF and USAF hosted aircraft in the JPARC will continue to minimize adverse impacts (FEIS Sec. 4.2.2.2, pg. 4-28; Appendix D-1),

At Eielson AFB and Vicinity: Changes in the acoustic environment (increases in noise) constitute the primary adverse impact to areas on Eielson AFB and in the immediate vicinity (FEIS, Sec. 4.3.2.1, pg. 4-18). The Air Force models aircraft flight and maintenance operations to calculate the Day-Night Average Sound Level (DNL) noise zones (delineated in 5 dB intervals from 65 dB DNL to 85 dB DNL) for each alternative in order to evaluate the intensity and effects of the change in aircraft operations. The noise zones are used as indicators of annoyance and compatibility of land uses.

Under the No-Action Alternative, the modeled 65-70 dB DNL noise zone extends to the northern boundary of the base, but does not encompass any off-base areas. Under the Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative, the 65-70 dB DNL noise zone would encompass areas extending approximately one mile north of the base boundary (FEIS, Sec. 4.3.2.1, pp. 4-18 and 4-19). Consequently, an estimated 73 households (178 people) located within this off-base area will lie within the 65 -70 dB DNL noise zone. In addition to residential areas newly affected, the Moose Creek Baptist Church is also located within the 65-70 dB DNL noise zone, and will experience a 5-dB DNL increase over current conditions/No-Action Alternative.

Under the No-Action Alternative, none of the on base housing areas are within the 65-70 dB DNL (or greater) noise zone (FEIS, Figure 4.3-6, pg. 4-20). Under the Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative, approximately two-thirds of the base housing areas will lie within the 65-70 dB DNL noise zone, while the only portions of the installation subject to noise levels above 70 dB DNL will be the industrial/ commercial areas immediately adjacent to the flight line. The 70 -80 dB DNL noise zone does not extend beyond the installation boundary.

The three on-base schools: Anderson Elementary, Crawford Elementary, and Ben Eielson Junior/Senior High School, would be impacted by noise generated by F-35A aircraft operations. As discussed in the FEIS (Section 4.3.2.1, Table 4.3-10, pg. 4-25), an average of three to four classroom speech interference events per hour would occur with windows closed or open,

respectively, once the Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative is implemented. The increased aircraft noise intrusions in classrooms would increase learning disruptions, per the FEIS (Section 4.3.2.1, pg. 4-25). Though the base schools meet the average indoor noise guidelines, the noise generated by the F-35A operations will increase the number of speech interference events (FEIS, Table 4.3-9, 4-24), particularly during major flying exercises (e.g., Red Flag – Alaska) that may occur during the school year (Spring and Fall).

Under the assumptions made for future aircraft operations in the FEIS analysis of impacts on the Acoustic Environment (FEIS, Appendix E.3, pg. E-52), there will be changes in projected noise levels and consequent adverse effects at Eielson AFB.

Wetlands/Floodplains

Approximately 17 acres of wetlands will be destroyed during construction of F-35A support facilities on Eielson. There is no practicable alternative to locating new facilities in these wetland areas, as the facilities must be located adjacent to the existing flight line, utilities, and other infrastructure (FEIS, Sec. 4.10.2.1, pg. 4-63). The loss of a small percentage of the wetlands (17 acres of wetlands of the total estimated 9,435 acres of wetlands within the base boundaries) is under the preferred alternative unavoidable.

Construction of F-35A support facilities and associated infrastructure on Eielson AFB will be sited within approximately 56 acres of the 100-year floodplain of the Tanana River (FEIS, Sec. 4.12.2.1, pg. 4-72). As is the case with wetland impacts, there is no practicable alternative to locating new construction or conducting operations in floodplain areas, as many of the facilities must be located in close proximity to each other, as well as in close proximity to the flight line and utilities such as water, sewer, electrical power, and steam/heat distribution.

Based on the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Flood Insurance Rate maps, the southern third of the flight line, where the F-35A facilities will be located, would be inundated during a 100-year flood event to a depth of 8 to 10 feet. Most flood-proofing measures, such as raising floor levels or pavement levels sufficiently to avoid flooding, are thus impracticable or infeasible.

The activities on/within 56 acres of floodplain lying within the base boundaries will not adversely impact overall floodplain values of the Tanana River floodplain, but the loss/impairment of a small portion of the floodplain is unavoidable.

Mitigation Measures that Will Be Implemented as a Part of this Proposed Action

JPARC Airspace: Mitigations identified and agreed to in the Alaska Military Operations Area EIS ROD (USAF 1997) and the Joint Pacific Alaska Range Complex (JPARC) EIS ROD (USAF 2013) pertaining to operations in the JPARC airspace are incorporated by reference. These mitigations have been compiled in the *11th Air Force Alaska Airspace Handbook* to familiarize military pilots with operational restrictions in JPARC. The handbook is updated regularly, based upon operational needs; the edition dated February 2014 was used as the basis for identifying these mitigations in the FEIS (Appendix D-1). These specific restrictions, limitations, seasonal adjustments, and avoidance areas must be adhered to by all USAF and USAF hosted military pilots. All mitigations in place (including any added during regular updates) will apply to F-35A aircraft flight operations in the JPARC airspaces when the F-35As become operational at Eielson AFB.

Eielson AFB and Vicinity: As identified in the FEIS (Section 4.3.2.1, pg. 4-13), in general, interior noise levels are reduced due to the attenuation provided by the construction measures for cold climates. Though these measures are not specifically employed to reduce interior noise, they typically have the effect of reducing noise (from exterior levels to interior levels) by 27 dB DNL with windows closed and 17 dB DNL with windows open (Section 4.3.2.1, pg. 4-18). The measures employed to increase energy efficiency thus reduce the average indoor noise level to less than 45 dB DNL—the goal for interior average noise levels specified in the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Noise Guidebook (2009). No additional mitigation of noise impacts on existing residential areas will occur (FEIS, Sec. 4.3.3, pg. 4-35).

On-Base Schools: As noted above for dwellings/residential facilities, building construction requirements in Interior Alaska include increased insulation ratings in walls and roofs and the use of double pane windows and similar features to reduce heat loss to provide an acceptable level of comfort for occupants/users. This holds true for commercial/institutional buildings as well. No additional noise attenuation measures are needed to reduce average interior noise levels below the suggested 45 dB DNL level for the on-base schools located within the 65-70 dB DNL noise zone, particularly when windows are kept closed.

Wetlands and Floodplains:

The loss of 17 acres is a small percentage of the estimated 9,435 acres of wetlands within the base boundaries. The loss of wetlands is unavoidable, consequently the USAF will mitigate the loss through the purchase of wetland credits from existing mitigation banks or payment of in-lieu fees, as determined during the Clean Water Act section 404 permitting process. The USAF will complete all mitigation requirements (e.g., payment of fees or purchase of credits) prior to initiation of any construction or other actions that will affect wetlands.

As noted above, there is no practicable alternative to locating a portion of the new facilities required to beddown and support F-35A operations at Eielson AFB in the floodplain, nor is it practicable to relocate existing facilities currently lying within the 100-year floodplain (FEIS, Sec. 4.12.2.1, pg. 4-70; Appendix D-6, pg. D-33). In addition, no flood-proofing measures are available or feasible for incorporation in facility designs. As an example, it is not feasible to raise the floor or ground-level elevations of existing and new facilities by 12 feet, the level required to elevate them sufficiently to avoid inundation during the projected 100-year flood level (FEMA Flood Zone maps). Flood-hardening measures incorporated in hangar designs are limited to reinforcing facility anchoring to prevent movement during a flood. This measure, combined with opening hangar bay doors during flood events, allowing flow-through of floodwaters, will minimize damage that may occur if these structures were dislodged from their foundations during a flood event.

The USAF will update existing Disaster Preparedness Plans as appropriate, so that personnel working in the structures subject to flooding, as well as the aircraft, moveable equipment and tools, can be evacuated safely and in a timely manner to minimize or eliminate the loss of lives and loss or damage to specialized equipment.

New Construction and Renovation Activities:

During the final design and construction of new or renovated F-35A support facilities, PACAF will ensure that all plans, regulatory requirements, and permits are integrated to mitigate environmental impacts and maintain mandatory compliance.

Permits, standards, and resulting requirements that must be completed prior to the initiation of construction and will be tracked as mitigations, include the following:

- Clean Water Act Alaska Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (APDES) requirements for control of discharges from construction activities
- Section 404 (Clean Water Act) permit stipulations and requirements regarding wetlands impacts, including mitigation for loss of wetlands through in-lieu payments or purchase of wetlands mitigation bank credits (will be more fully developed as a part of the Section 404 permit process, as specified by the permitting authority, Corps of Engineers)
- Drainage design per Engineering Technical Letter 08-06 (adopted from the Federal Aviation Administration [FAA] Advisory Circular 150/5320-5D, Airport Drainage Design)
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (USEPA) 841-B-09-01, Technical Guidance on Implementing the Stormwater Runoff Requirements for Federal Projects under Section 438 of the Energy Independence and Security Act

Obtaining and complying with permits and compliance with permit conditions, plans, standards, and requirements during construction and operations include the following:

- Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act land use controls, as well as disposal requirements for contamination encountered during construction, per the Installation Restoration Program
- Toxic Substance Control Act, Occupational Safety and Health Administration regulations (addresses worker safety during renovation activities where toxic substances such as asbestos or lead-based paint may be encountered)
- Resource Conservation and Recovery Act solid waste management requirements and Eielson AFB Hazardous Waste Management Plan covering hazardous waste management and disposal requirements
- Eielson AFB Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan detailing stormwater best management practices and standard operating procedures
- Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan and Integrated Cultural Resources Management Plan detailing standard operating procedures and other measures for resource protection developed for Eielson AFB.
- Eielson AFB Oil and Hazardous Substances Discharge Prevention and Contingency Plan (addresses spill prevention, contingency planning, and emergency response)

In addition to those listed above, compliance with any new or revised regulations, plans or permit requirements promulgated during follow-on planning, construction, or operations phases of the Proposed Action will be implemented.

Mitigation Planning, Implementation, Monitoring, and Reporting

The USAF will prepare a Mitigation Plan per the requirements of 32 CFR § 989.22(d). Per 32 CFR § 989.22(c), such mitigations are legally binding and must be carried out by the proponent as the proponent implements the construction of facilities and operation of facilities and aircraft. The mitigation measures will be monitored, tracked, and reported per the requirements of 32 CFR § 989.35(a).

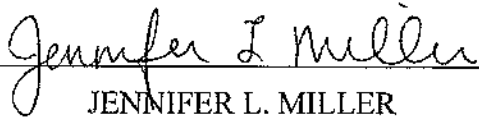
Monitoring also includes verification of predicted impacts to validate underlying assumptions made in the Final EIS and, where assumptions become inconsistent, corrections will be made in accordance with applicable NEPA procedures. As the Proponent for this action, Headquarters Pacific Air Forces is responsible for implementing and monitoring compliance with all mitigations, permits, standards, and related requirements.

Finding of No Practicable Alternative

Based on my review of the facts and analyses contained in the record, I find that there is no practicable alternative to locating facilities and conducting activities in the 100-year floodplain or construction in wetlands.

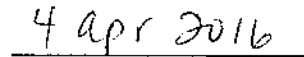
Final Decision

Based on my review of the facts and analyses contained in the record, I find that the Preferred Alternative includes all practicable means to avoid, minimize or mitigate environmental harm. After consideration of relevant operational, environmental, economic, and technical factors, the USAF will implement the Proposed Action (Preferred Alternative) and will proceed with the basing and operation of two F-35A squadrons at Eielson AFB, Alaska.



JENNIFER L. MILLER

Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Air Force
(Installations)



4 April 2016