

DRAFT FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)

Air Force Construction of Consolidated HELO/TRF/AMU Facility at Minot Air Force Base, Ward County, North Dakota

Pursuant to provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Title 42 United States Code (USC) Sections 4321 to 4347, implemented by Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) Regulations, Title 40, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) §1500-1508, and 32 CFR §989, Environmental Impact Analysis Process, the U.S. Air Force (Air Force) assessed the potential environmental consequences associated with the construction of a two-story consolidated Helicopter (Helo) Operations (OPS)/Tactical Response Force (TRF)/Aircraft Maintenance unit (AMU) and Alert Facility at Minot AFB, Ward County, North Dakota.

The purpose of the project is to construct a two-story consolidated facility housing various operational support, maintenance, TRF alert crew living space, and Helicopter Squadron (HS) operations and alert crew training space for the 54th HS, 582nd Helicopter Group (HG) and TRF personnel. This project is needed to address the concerns related to insufficient response times for Emergency Security Response (ESR) missions when the HS and TRF units operate as a combined arms team. This need is driven by the requirement from U.S. Strategic Command mission directives of a 100 percent manned combined arms team that supports nuclear weapons movements (convoys) and 24/7 ESR alert in support of TRF recapture/recovery operations.

The Environmental Assessment (EA), incorporated by reference into this finding, analyzes the potential environmental consequences of activities associated with the Air Force Construction of Consolidated HELO/TRF/AMU Facility at Minot Air Force Base, Ward County, North Dakota, and provides environmental protection measures to avoid or reduce adverse environmental impacts.

The EA considers all potential impacts of the Preferred Alternative, Alternative 1, Alternative 2 and the No-Action Alternative. The EA also considers cumulative environmental impacts with other projects in the Region of Influence.

THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

Alternative 1 includes constructing a consolidated two-story HELO/TRF OPS/AMU and Alert Facility which includes construction of a 12,545 square meters (SM) [135,033 square feet (SF)] helicopter facility (consolidated facility to house various operational

support, maintenance, TRF alert crew living space, and training space). The consolidated facility will also require 54,056 SM [581,854 SF] of impervious surfaces, including apron and taxiway support facilities, privately owned vehicles (POV) parking, TRF parking, access roads, sidewalks, curbs, and gutters.

The location of the consolidated facility and supporting structures for the Preferred Alternative is planned for an empty field north of the existing taxiway in an open area at the southeastern end of the airfield, approximately 1,400 feet north of Taxiway L. This location of the Preferred Action does not have any conflicts with other existing or future land uses and meets the runway access requirement.

This alternative is considered the Preferred Alternative because of the advantages that the infill scenario has for development, the location's proximity to base support, ability to house all ESR and TRF activities in a single facility, and the reduction of mission response time for TRF alert crews.

The Preferred Alternative does have some disadvantages, including possible cost and scheduling impact for project construction due to the need to coordinate the median paving work.

ALTERNATIVE 1

Alternative 1 was created with emphasis on consolidation, functional relationships, unit integrity, safety, aircraft movement, and parking. Alternative 1 is located on the farthest southeastern edge of Flightline District 4A. This site was chosen with the goal of complementing the requirements of the alert functions and aircraft support in a balanced approach and in an isolated location. This site allows for facility reuse and reduction of the number of buildings past their prescribed longevity.

Alternative 1 consists of four new developments:

- Armory
- 12-Bay hanger/HELO/OPS
- TRF vehicle barn
- Storage facility

Including apron and taxiway support facilities, POV parking, TRF parking, access roads, sidewalks, curbs, and gutters.

While Alternative 1 relies heavily on military construction support, it provides flexible phasing for future development of projects within the alternative parking apron (APA) and for facility infill along the ramp.

Advantages to this alternative are that it provides for the most immediate aircraft support needs and taxi-through parking and adequate distance between the overflow parking apron (OPA) for helicopter operations and base support.

Disadvantages include remaining unmet aircraft support needs, the interference with B-52 operations due to helicopter storage on the APA, and tight proximity of two different aircraft types (rotary and fixed wing). This Alternative also has the possibility to encounter unknown environmental hazards and increased construction costs as a result of potential subsurface pockets of fuel contamination.

ALTERNATIVE 2

This Alternative is located on the south end of Flightline District 4A and was designed with a “Green Grass” development approach that emphasizes consolidation, a campus-like design concept, and added operational safety. The concept of this alternative improves the fixed wing ability to move in a less constricted manner due to its isolated location from rotary wing aircraft on the south side of the airfield.

Some of the considerations for this alternative included: unit integrity and consolidation, reduced reaction times, travel distance/use of time, and future mass parking apron (MPA)/OPA enhancements.

Alternative 2 consists of four new facilities:

- Armory
- Combined alert/OPS/12-bay hangar
- TRF vehicle barn
- Storage facility

All Alternative 2 facilities are situated in a quadrilateral orientation and include apron and taxiway support facilities, POV parking, TRF parking, access roads, sidewalks, curbs, and gutters.

Alternative 2 also provides the same advantages seen in Alternative 1.

Disadvantages of this Alternative include isolation of the facility from the mission support activities and community amenities, increased distance between the rotary and fixed wing facilities, increased cost due to the lack of reuse of existing facilities and

increase in ground disturbance for infrastructure installation, inadequate time to meet all aircraft needs, distance between the OPA for helicopter operations and base support, as well as the close placement to the installation boundary. Similar to the Preferred Action and Alternative 1, Alternative 2 also contains the possibility to encounter unknown environmental hazards resulting in increased construction costs as a result of potential subsurface pockets of fuel contamination.

NO-ACTION ALTERNATIVE

Under the No-Action Alternative, the Preferred Alternative (or any of the action alternatives) would not occur. The No-Action Alternative would not include the construction of any new buildings or structures, the 54th HS, 582nd HG and TRF personnel would continue to use the current inadequate facilities in place.

The helicopter and TRF operations are executed in six different facilities at Minot AFB, which is not conducive to effective operations and cause delays in response times. The facilities are not sized adequately for the projected 100 percent manning, and the fixed wing and rotary wing airframes are collocated on the airfield. Space within many of the buildings is limited and personnel are working in densely crowded quarters in buildings that are antiquated and, in many cases, in need of recurring repairs.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The analyses of the affected environment and environmental consequences of implementing the Preferred Alternative presented in the EA concluded there are no significant impacts associated with the Preferred Alternative. By implementing standing environmental protection measures and operational planning, the Air Force will be in compliance with all terms, conditions and reporting requirements for implementation of the reasonable and prudent measures stipulated by the *United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)*, the conditions stipulated in *section 106 and/or section 110 of the NHPA*, with Air Force Instruction 32-7061, and the Environmental Impact Analysis Process (EIAP) (32 CFR 989).

The Air Force has concluded that no significant adverse effects would result to the following resources as a result of the Preferred Alternative: *air quality, greenhouse gases, biological resources, soils/topography, land use, noise, safety, transportation, cultural resources, and water resources*. No significant adverse cumulative impacts would result from activities associated with the Preferred Alternative when considered with past, present, or reasonably foreseeable future projects.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)

Based on my review of the facts and analyses contained in the attached EA, conducted under the provisions of NEPA, CEQ Regulations, and 32 CFR §989, I conclude that the Preferred Alternative would not have a significant environmental impact, either by itself or cumulatively with other known projects. Accordingly, an Environmental Impact Statement is not required. The signing of this Finding of No Significant Impact completes the environmental impact analysis process.

SIGNATORY NAME, Rank/Title

Date