

RECORD OF DECISION

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

FOREIGN MILITARY SALES PILOT TRAINING CENTER AT EBBING AIR NATIONAL GUARD BASE, AR

INTRODUCTION

The Department of the Air Force (DAF) will establish a permanent Foreign Military Sales (FMS) Pilot Training Center (PTC) at Ebbing Air National Guard (ANG) Base, Arkansas. The DAF bases this decision in part on the evaluations presented in the *Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the Beddown of a Foreign Military Sales (FMS) Pilot Training Center (PTC) at Ebbing Air National Guard Base, Arkansas or Selfridge Air National Guard Base, Michigan*. The DAF considered the information, analyses, and public comments received and contained in the FEIS, along with other relevant matters.

This Record of Decision (ROD) is issued in accordance with the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations that implement the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) at Title 40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Section 1505.2 (*Record of decision in cases requiring environmental impact statements*). The DAF considered all the alternatives, information, and analyses, and objections submitted by States, Tribal, and local governments, and other public commenters for consideration by the DAF in developing the FEIS.

This ROD documents:

- The decision;
- The alternatives considered;
- The reason for the selection;
- The environmentally preferable alternative;
- Relevant factors and how those factors entered into the decision;
- Whether all practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental harm from the selected alternative have been adopted, and if not, why not; and
- Mitigations

Since the alternative selected will involve use of a civil airport, Fort Smith Regional Airport (FSRA), where FAA has jurisdiction by law, the FAA is an action agency¹. FAA's jurisdiction by law is specific to the Airport and Airway Improvement Act of 1982 (49 U.S.C 47101) and Section 163 of the 2018 FAA Reauthorization Act where FAA has approval authority for specific Airport Layout Plan (ALP) changes for certain airport proposals or projects. ALP approval, consistent with provisions under these laws and relevant implementing regulations, is a major federal action requiring FAA compliance with NEPA. If FAA's Office of Airports receives a request from the City of Fort Smith for approval of certain changes to their ALP, FAA would be responsible for environmental review under NEPA and may rely on the information and analyses in the U.S. Air Force final FMS PTC EIS for its decision-making purposes. Therefore, the Office of Airports, on behalf of FAA, agreed to serve as a Cooperating Agency pursuant to 40 CFR § 1501.8 for the development of the FMS PTC EIS.

DECISION SYNOPSIS

The FMS PTC beddown will include construction, demolition, and renovation of various facilities on Ebbing ANG Base (*FEIS, Vol 1, Section 2.2.3, Pg. 2-11, Figure 2.2-3*). Aircraft operating out of the selected location will include 12 Republic of Singapore (RSAF) F-16s, relocated from Luke Air

¹ FAA's action is a separate but connected action per 40 CFR 1501.9(e)(1). As such, the FAA determination whether to approve a request for a change to an airports ALP under 49 U.S.C. 47101 is not the same as the Air Force proposed actions under the authority of other laws.

RECORD OF DECISION

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

FOREIGN MILITARY SALES PILOT TRAINING CENTER AT EBBING AIR NATIONAL GUARD BASE, AR

Force Base, Arizona, and up to 24 F-35 aircraft from various foreign nation partners. Aircraft would use existing designated airspace for training (*FEIS, Vol 1, Section 2.2.1, Pg. 2-5, Figure 2.2-2*). The DAF has selected Ebbing ANG Base because the base previously accommodated F-16 aircraft and can accommodate the Proposed Action with minimal renovation, new construction, and displacement of current mission(s) to meet critical F-16 and F-35 timing.

BACKGROUND

The EIS was prepared to support the Secretary of the Air Force's approval of a proposed action to provide a centralized location for FMS training and pilot production. Multiple nations have agreements with the DAF to purchase F-35 aircraft and require a location suitable for initial F-35 training before returning to their home country. The RSAF is among the nations purchasing F-35s and plans to base several of their aircraft in the United States for an indefinite period; the RSAF also desires to consolidate its F-16 and F-35 pilot training at one location. In the FEIS, the DAF evaluated the proposed FMS PTC action at Ebbing ANG Base and Selfridge ANG Base, assessing the F-16 and F-35 aircraft operations, associated facilities, and the increase in personnel.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

As more fully described in the FEIS (*Vol. 1, Sections 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, and 2.5*), the DAF identified Ebbing ANG Base as its Preferred Alternative, Selfridge Air National Base as a reasonable action alternative, and a no action alternative for consolidating and operating the FMS PTC at a single location.

Preferred Alternative. Ebbing ANG Base would receive up to 36 total aircraft (12 RSAF F-16s and 24 F-35s) incrementally during the period from about 2023 through 2029. Primary flight operations would occur at Ebbing ANG Base and associated designated airspace. No changes to established Special Use Airspace configurations (i.e., size, shape, or location) are proposed to support the operations of the FMS aircraft. While a personnel increase of 384 and 801 dependents was analyzed in the FEIS, the current requirement is now 625 personnel and 1,308 dependents. However, based on further analysis, this increase does not constitute either a substantial change to the proposed action that is relevant to environmental concerns or a significant new circumstance or information relevant to environmental concerns and bearing on the proposed action or its impacts. Concurrently, 23 facilities sustainment, restoration, and modernization projects would occur at Ebbing ANG Base to provide modern facilities and infrastructure to support the FMS aircraft's maintenance, training, and operational requirements. (*FEIS, Vol. 1, Section 2.2.3*). The number of training operations would vary over the implementation period and would continue to include daytime training operations and introduce up to 600 additional annual nighttime training operations (*FEIS, Vol. 1, Table 2.2-4, Page 2-9*). The nighttime operations would occur at Ebbing ANG Base and within associated airspace.

Because the DAF's Preferred Alternative includes construction of infrastructure necessary to support the FMS PTC within the Fort Smith Regional Airport (FSRA) boundary, the City of Fort Smith (the airport sponsor) will need to submit a request to FAA's Office of Airports for approval of changes to their ALP. Therefore, the FAA's Office of Airports proposal would be a direct outcome of responding to the City of Fort Smith's request for approval of a change to their ALP.

The DAF evaluated three different scenarios under the Proposed Action for F-35A and F-35B afterburner use: (1) 5% of departures, (2) 50% of departures, and (3) 95% of departures (hereinafter referred to as the 5%, 50%, and 95% afterburner scenarios). Noise levels are slightly higher under

RECORD OF DECISION

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

FOREIGN MILITARY SALES PILOT TRAINING CENTER AT EBBING AIR NATIONAL GUARD BASE, AR

the 95% afterburner scenario than scenarios in which F-35 afterburner use would be limited to 50% or to 5% of total departures. Each afterburner scenario resulted in a relative amount of land area exposed to aircraft-related noise more than day-night average sounds levels (DNL) of 65 decibels (dB), with lower afterburner use resulting in less land area exposed (*FEIS, Vol. I, Section 3.3.4*).

Alternative 2: Selfridge ANG Base, Michigan. Alternative 2 entails the beddown of the FMS PTC at Selfridge ANG Base, MI. The number of aircraft and personnel, as well as the roll-out timeframe would be the same as the Preferred Alternative, also requiring modern facilities and infrastructure to support the FMS aircrafts' maintenance, training, and operational requirements (*FEIS, Vol. I, Sections 2.3.2 and 2.3.3*). Aircraft operations would use existing designated airspace (*FEIS, Vol. I, Section 2.3.1*).

As with the Preferred Alternative, the DAF evaluated 5%, 50%, and 95% afterburner usage scenarios for Alternative 2, with lower afterburner use resulting in less land area exposed to aircraft-related noise more than DNL 65 dB. Selfridge ANG Base is within a moderate nonattainment area for ozone and a maintenance area particulate matter with a diameter of less than 2.5 micrometers (PM_{2.5}). The annual net change in nitrogen oxide (Nox) emissions from Alternative 2 would exceed the General Conformity Rule (GCR) de minimis value of 100 tons of nitrogen oxide (Nox) per year. Even under reduced afterburner scenarios, the net change in emissions would exceed the GCR emissions de minimis value for Nox.

No Action alternative. The FEIS also evaluated a No Action Alternative (*FEIS, Vol. I, Section 2.5*). With the No Action Alternative, the DAF would not consolidate and relocate the FMS training activities to Ebbing ANG Base or Selfridge ANG Base to establish a permanent PTC at a single location. The affected environment (*FEIS, Vol. I, Section 3*) for each resource area would remain the same under the No Action Alternative.

ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

Of the alternatives considered, the environmentally preferred alternative is the No Action Alternative because taking no action would result in the lowest number of acres and people exposed to noise impacts and the least amount of air emissions from aircraft operations. Additionally, there would be no impacts to environmental resources from construction, such as soil and water resources.

BASIS OF DECISION

The basis of this ROD is the Secretary of the Air Force's decision to relocate 12 RSAF F-16 aircraft from Luke Air Force Base, Arizona, and beddown up to 24 F-35 aircraft from various foreign nation partners, at Ebbing ANG Base, AR. The actual number of F-35s present at the FMS PTC at any one time may vary based on foreign customer need, but the maximum number of F-35s assigned to the FMS PTC will not exceed 24. F-16 and F-35 aircraft would be delivered incrementally from about 2023 through 2029. To implement the FMS PTC, the DAF has selected the Preferred Alternative using the 5% afterburner scenario, which incorporates reduced use of power settings and afterburner to minimize aircraft noise impacts and air pollution emissions.

MITIGATIONS

Mitigations have been identified and those to be carried forward and implemented by the proponent are reflected below. The FEIS (*Vol. I, Section 3*) includes and analyzes mitigations for impacts identified or required by regulation or DAF guidance for each affected resource. The FEIS, Section 3.11, summarizes the mitigation measures. Currently, the DAF has adopted all practicable means to

RECORD OF DECISION

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

FOREIGN MILITARY SALES PILOT TRAINING CENTER AT EBBING AIR NATIONAL GUARD BASE, AR

avoid or minimize environmental harm from the alternative selected. Notwithstanding the mitigations prescribed in this ROD, the DAF has a continuing duty to review the FEIS and consider new information relevant to environmental impacts. The Air Education and Training Command (AETC) proponent shall implement the mitigations listed below by resource area.

The AETC proponent will develop a Mitigation Plan within 90 days of the signature of this ROD that identifies principal and subordinate organizations with responsibility for oversight and execution of specific mitigations identified in this ROD in a measurable fashion. The proponent shall not implement any impact-inducing actions related to the FMS PTC before the applicable mitigation measures described in this ROD are funded and put in place. The proscription includes conducting ongoing monitoring of the amount of afterburner use associated with number of flight operations as analyzed in the FEIS. In addition, and if appropriate, the FAA and City of Fort Smith may review and provide input to the proponent's mitigation and monitoring plan. Thus, the DAF will ensure that AETC coordinates review of their mitigation and monitoring plan with the FAA and the City of Fort Smith.

The Mitigation Plan will include, but not be limited to:

- Specifying measurable mitigations;
- Identification of monitoring type and how and who monitoring will be executed for each mitigation;
- Sequencing of in-process reviews by SAF/IEI at least quarterly and as needed or directed;
- Delineating organization(s) responsible for funding and mitigation implementation;
- Timing (start through finish) of each mitigation; and
- Establishing the process for identifying and making changes to the action or mitigations to influence beneficial results or avoid/reduce adverse results.

Resource Area:

Noise:

- Limiting afterburner usage for F-35s to up to 5% of all takeoffs and ensure pilots record afterburner use for tracking, monitoring, and reporting biannually. As analyzed in the FEIS, F-16 afterburner usage is limited to 70% for all takeoffs.
- Increase the distance between aircraft and noise-sensitive locations by adjusting routing.
 - F-35 aircraft departures from RWY 8 to the Hog MOA airspace complex will maintain runway heading until after crossing the Arkansas river.
 - F-35 aircraft will route directly into the MOA complex from the north rather than the southwest over inhabited areas.
 - Departures of F-35 aircraft from RWY 26 to the Hog MOA complex will maintain runway heading until after crossing into Oklahoma, reducing time spent directly over densely populated areas.
 - When maneuvering to make practice approaches to the airfield, F-35 aircraft will turn no later than the end of the runway rather than several thousand feet past the end of the runway when maneuvering for non-radar-assisted practice approaches.
- F-35 aircraft will conduct reduced-power departures. Full power can be used during departures to get the aircraft to 300 knots, at which the engine power would be reduced

RECORD OF DECISION

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

FOREIGN MILITARY SALES PILOT TRAINING CENTER AT EBBING AIR NATIONAL GUARD BASE, AR

enough to maintain 300 knots during the continued climb.

Cultural Resources

- In response to the Cherokee Nation concern about the project's proximity to the Trail of Tears, and as mitigation for potential impacts to undiscovered archaeological sites, contracting for the construction phase of the project will require monitoring of all ground-disturbing activities by an archaeologist meeting the Secretary of Interior's Standards. At the conclusion of monitoring, a report will be prepared and submitted to the Tribe and the Arkansas State Historic Preservation Officer.

Water Resources

- A wetland delineation and jurisdictional determination in the area proposed for aircraft barrier arresting kits and supporting road infrastructure is required. Barrier arresting kits and supporting access roads shall be designed to avoid any wetlands observed in the wetland delineation.

DECISION

After considering the potential environmental impacts of the alternatives, comments and concerns of the public and other key stakeholders, as well as other factors related to national defense including current military operational needs and costs, the DAF will beddown up to 12 RSAF F-16 aircraft and 24 F-35 FMS aircraft at Ebbing ANG Base, AR.

The total number of projected aircraft operations are defined in Tables 2.2-1, 2.2-2, and 2.2-3 (*FEIS, Vol. 1, Section 2.2.1*) but will occur with reduced power settings and reduced afterburner usage as defined for the 5% afterburner usage scenario.

This decision adopts all practicable means to avoid, minimize, or mitigate the environmental impacts of the decision. The Proponent will ensure implementation and tracking of the mitigations discussed in this ROD, develop a mitigation plan within 90-days of this decision and will ensure all mitigations are implemented in a timely fashion and prior to taking actions having any related effects. The Proponent will execute all other portions of the Preferred Alternative associated with facility construction and personnel increases as defined in the FEIS.

I certify that the Air Force has considered all of the alternatives, information, analyses, and comments submitted by State, Tribal, and local governments and public commenters for consideration by the lead and cooperating agencies in developing the FEIS for the Beddown of a FMS PTC at Ebbing ANGB, Arkansas or Selfridge ANGB, Michigan and rendering this decision.

ROBERT E. MORIARTY, P.E., SES

Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Air Force (Installations)

Date