

RECORD OF DECISION
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT
B-21 MAIN OPERATING BASE 1 BEDDOWN AT DYESS AFB, TEXAS
OR ELLSWORTH AFB, SOUTH DAKOTA

INTRODUCTION

The United States Air Force (USAF) will beddown the B-21 Main Operating Base 1 (MOB 1) at Ellsworth AFB, South Dakota. The USAF based this decision on the evaluations presented in the *B-21 Main Operating Base 1 (MOB 1) Beddown at Dyess AFB, Texas or Ellsworth AFB, South Dakota Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)* (*Federal Register* Vol. 86, No. 52 page 14908, EIS No. 20210030, March 19, 2021). The USAF considered the information, analyses, and public comments contained in the Final EIS (FEIS), along with other relevant matters.

The USAF is issuing this Record of Decision (ROD) per 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*).¹ The USAF is the lead agency for this EIS.

This ROD documents:

- The USAF's decision;
- The alternatives considered;
- The environmentally preferable alternative;
- Relevant factors and how those factors entered into the decision;
- Whether the USAF adopts all practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental harm from the selected alternative, and if not, why not;
- Mitigations; and
- A Finding of No Practicable Alternative (FONPA) to avoid or reduce wetland and floodplain impacts.

DECISION SYNOPSIS

The USAF will beddown the B-21 MOB 1 under the USAF Global Strike Command at Ellsworth AFB, South Dakota. The B-21 MOB 1 beddown will include construction, demolition, and renovation of various facilities and infrastructure projects on Ellsworth AFB, including the construction of a Weapons Generation Facility (WGF) at the South WGF Site location, as shown as location 5 in Figure 2.5-4 (*FEIS, Vol. I, Page 2-24*). B-21 aircraft operating out of Ellsworth AFB will utilize the Powder River Training Complex (PRTC) for training and will adhere to the legal descriptions for the PRTC Military Operating Areas (MOAs) published in the National Flight Data Digest (effective date: September 17, 2015) (*FEIS, Vol. I, Page 2-8; §2.3.3*). Additionally, the B-21 MOB 1 mission will bring approximately 3,500 military personnel and 4,200 dependents to the area, but will eventually displace the personnel associated with the current B-1 mission.

¹ Note: The environmental analysis was underway prior to the September 14, 2020, effective date of the CEQ's final rule updating its regulations for implementing the procedural provisions of NEPA. Accordingly, the USAF adhered to the regulations in place when EIS development began, pursuant to 40 CFR 1506.13.

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BACKGROUND

The Department of Defense (DoD) is developing a new bomber aircraft, the B-21 “Raider,” which will eventually replace existing B-1 and B-2 bomber aircraft. The B-21 will have both conventional and nuclear roles and will be capable of penetrating and surviving in advanced air defense environments. The B-21 will operate under the direction of the USAF Global Strike Command. In the EIS, the USAF evaluated the proposed MOB 1 beddown of the B-21. The B-21 MOB 1 beddown will establish B-21 Operations Squadrons and a B-21 Formal Training Unit, a WGF, and new infrastructure, and will increase numbers of support and operations personnel. The EIS considers two alternative locations for the MOB 1 beddown of the B-21 and evaluates impacts where training and operational activities would occur.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

As more fully described in the FEIS (*Vol. I, Pages 2-1 through 2-6, §2.2*), the USAF identified two alternative B-21 MOB 1 beddown locations: Dyess AFB, Texas and Ellsworth AFB, South Dakota. The FEIS (*Vol. I, Pages 2-6 through 2-9, §2.3*) also describes the common elements that the B-21 would bring to each base, including personnel, airfield operations, airspace and range utilization, and the WGF.

For the Dyess AFB Alternative (*FEIS, Vol. I, Pages 2-10 through 2-16, §2.4*), the MOB 1 beddown would include approximately 2.8 million square feet of new construction projects, 46,000 square feet of renovation projects, and 72,000 square feet of demolition projects. Additionally, the FEIS analyzed one location at Dyess AFB for the WGF. For military aircraft flying out of Dyess AFB, the FEIS analyzed the Lancer MOA, the Pecos MOA, and all associated Air Traffic Control Assigned Airspaces (ATCAAs) for aircraft training operations, and considered PRTC and the Brownwood MOA for supplemental training airspaces (*FEIS, Vol. I, Page 2-8, §2.3.3*).

For the Ellsworth AFB Alternative (*Vol. I, Pages 2-17 through 2-24, §2.5*), the MOB 1 beddown would include approximately 4.3 million square feet of new construction projects, 1.7 million square feet of renovation projects, and 110,000 square feet of demolition projects. Additionally, the FEIS analyzed two locations at Ellsworth AFB for the WGF: the North WGF Site and the South WGF Site. As stated in the FEIS (*Vol. I, Page 2-8 §2.3.3*), military aircraft flying out of Ellsworth AFB would utilize the PRTC for training operations.

The EIS also evaluated a No Action Alternative (*FEIS, Vol. I, Pages 2-25 through 2-27, §2.6*). With the No Action Alternative, the B-21 MOB 1 would not beddown at either Dyess AFB or Ellsworth AFB and the B-1 mission would continue at both bases at their current levels. Baseline conditions, described as the affected environment in FEIS, Vol. I, Chapter 3 for each resource area, would continue under the No Action Alternative. The No Action Alternative analysis in the EIS provides a benchmark for comparing the potential environmental effects of the action alternatives.

ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

The USAF considers the Dyess AFB and Ellsworth AFB Alternatives to be equally environmentally preferred for socioeconomic resources, environmental justice, and noise. For socioeconomic resources specifically, the EIS identifies beneficial socioeconomic impacts to both

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bases and their associated regions from the proposed increase in personnel associated with the B-21 MOB 1 beddown. For noise associated with aircraft training operations, the B-21 would typically fly at higher altitudes than the B-1. Noise modeling indicated that noise levels at end-state would be lower than the current conditions at either base. This noise reduction would reduce the total number of residents exposed to noise levels greater than 65 dB, including environmental justice and sensitive populations. Because the B-21 is a new airframe, the EIS used B-2A noise source data for noise modeling (*FEIS, Vol. I, Page 3-18, §3.2.1.3*). The USAF will conduct noise modeling with operational B-21 noise source data to corroborate the accuracy of the FEIS results once the B-21 is operational and noise source data are measured.

For cultural and physical resources, the No Action Alternative is the environmentally preferred alternative due to potential long-term impacts from demolition of historic structures at Ellsworth AFB and potential impacts to wetlands and/or floodplains at both installations.

For the remainder of the environmental resources evaluated in the EIS, all three alternatives are equally environmentally preferred because impacts associated with those resources would generally be the same among the alternatives.

BASIS OF DECISION

The USAF selected Ellsworth AFB for the B-21 MOB 1 beddown based on operational analysis; results of site surveys; environmental, economic, and technical factors; environmental impacts as analyzed in the FEIS; input from the public and government agencies; and military judgment factors. The USAF compared potential impacts from the beddown at Dyess AFB and Ellsworth AFB, but did not find a substantial difference in impacts between the two locations. Thus, this decision is in support of the Secretary of the Air Force's preferred strategic basing alternative of Ellsworth AFB for MOB 1, as announced through the USAF's Strategic Basing Process (Air Force Instruction [AFI] 10-503, *Strategic Basing*).

Of the two subalternatives analyzed for the WGF at Ellsworth AFB (*FEIS, Vol. I, §2.4.3 through 2.4.5*), the USAF decided to locate the WGF at the South WGF Site, due to its proximity to the alert apron to meet time-sensitive requirements, favorable topographic conditions, and minimal site constraints.

In addition to the analyses, and as required the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021, the USAF also considered military family readiness factors. As applicable to the subject basing action, Section 2883 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021 requires the Secretary of the Air Force in determining whether to proceed with the action to take into account, among other factors as the Secretary considers appropriate, the following three military family readiness considerations: housing, health care, and interstate portability of licensure and certification credentials.

By authority delegated from the Acting Secretary of the Air Force by memorandum dated 2 June 2021, this ROD documents that the Deputy Assistant Secretary (Installations) considered the following:

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- **Housing.** As documented in the FEIS (*FEIS, Vol. I, Pages 3-142 through 3-144, §3.5.2.3*), the Department of the Air Force considered the extent to which USAF and private sector resources are available. The USAF continues to analyze and plan for the long-term regarding the adequate mix of such housing to adequately support the expected population.
- **Health Care.** The Department determined that health care resources will need to be increased to support the expected population and is conducting analysis and planning to ensure sufficient medical care from Air Force and private sector resources are available.
- **Interstate Portability of Licensure and Certification Credentials.** Using the Support of Military Families analytic framework, the results of which are publicly available at <https://www.af.mil/> in the Background Information section under the Support to Families tab, the Department of the Air Force determined that South Dakota statutes contain barriers to licensure and certification portability.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Public involvement was integral to the development of the FEIS. The USAF considered public and agency comments, including those received during scoping and the Draft EIS public comment period, which included virtual public hearings.

The FEIS (*Vol. I, Pages 1-3 through 1-7, §1.4*) discusses public involvement and the FEIS Vol. II Appendix A provides public involvement documentation as well as a summary of comments received during the Draft EIS public comment period and the responses to those comments. Public notices and meetings included:

- **Notice of Intent:** The USAF published a Notice of Intent to prepare the EIS in the *Federal Register* on March 6, 2020. The USAF also published notices in local newspapers near Dyess AFB and near Ellsworth AFB, as well as underneath associated airspace.
- **Scoping Period:** The scoping period began on March 6, 2020, and ended on May 9, 2020. The USAF canceled the six scheduled scoping meetings that were set to occur in South Dakota and Texas from March 31, 2020, to April 9, 2020, as listed in the original NOI that was published on March 6, 2020 (Federal Register Vol. 85, page 13148). This cancellation was a direct result of the National Emergency declared by the President on Friday, March 13, 2020, in response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in the United States and the Center for Disease Control's recommendations for social distancing and avoiding large public gatherings. In lieu of the in-person scoping meetings, the USAF notified the public that all public scoping meeting materials would be posted on the project website on March 27, 2020, and hardcopies would be sent out by request. The USAF also extended the public commenting deadline to May 9, 2020, to allow more time for the public to review the materials and submit comments. For more information regarding accommodations made due to COVID-19, see FEIS Section 1.4.2.
- **Draft EIS Notice of Availability:** The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency published the Notice of Availability (NOA) of the Draft EIS on September 25, 2020, EIS No. 20200190.

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- **Public Comment and Review Period:** The USAF initiated public review of the Draft EIS on September 25, 2020, with a formal notice published in the *Federal Register* by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The public comment period closed on November 9, 2020. The USAF made the Draft EIS available at public libraries and on the project website for review by the public and federal, state, and local agencies. The USAF held virtual public hearings via Zoom on October 15 and 17, 2020, for Dyess AFB and October 20 and 22, 2020, for Ellsworth AFB.
- **FEIS NOA:** The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency published the FEIS NOA on March 19, 2021, in the *Federal Register* Vol. 86, No. 52, pages 14908–14909, EIS No. 20210030. The USAF also published notices in local newspapers, as well as national tribal newspapers. The FEIS NOA publication initiated the mandatory 30-day waiting period prior to ROD signature.

COORDINATION AND CONSULTATION

As described more completely in the FEIS (*Vol. I, §3.7 and §3.8; Vol. II, Appendices E and F*), the USAF coordinated and consulted with federal and state agencies and federally recognized tribes (tribes) throughout the EIS process.

Government-to-Government Consultation

In accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), Executive Order (EO) 13175, U.S. Department of Defense Instruction 4710.02, and Department of Air Force Instruction 90-2002, the USAF notified all potentially affected tribes, via mail, of the USAF's intent to prepare the EIS and requested their level of interest in participating in government-to-government consultation. The Ysleta del Sur Pueblo and Comanche Nation tribes responded that they had no properties affected and/or declined government-to-government consultation. The USAF has completed government-to-government consultations with potentially affected tribes for the B-21 MOB 1 beddown. The FEIS describes this consultation more completely in Vol. II, Appendix F.

Agency Coordination and Consultation

The USAF coordinated and consulted with federal and state agencies responsible for relevant resources (cultural, biological, etc.) by mailing notification letters during the scoping period (*FEIS, Vol. II, Appendices A, E, and F*).

NHPA Consultation with State Historic Preservation Officers

In compliance with Section 106 of the NHPA, the USAF consulted with the South Dakota State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) and interested parties regarding its determination of effects to historic properties for the B-21 MOB 1 beddown construction and flight operations activities at Ellsworth AFB (*FEIS, Vol. II, Appendix F*). The Area of Potential Effects included the proposed disturbance areas of the B-21 MOB 1 beddown, including demolition, construction, and renovation of facilities and structures on Ellsworth AFB. The proposed undertaking would require the demolition of three historic properties (buildings 7258, 7260, and 7262), renovation of a fourth historic property (building 7504, or PRIDE Hangar), and new construction for the WGF.

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The South Dakota SHPO concurred with the USAF's determinations for the modification of the PRIDE Hangar on February 4, 2020, and for the adverse effects on the demolition of buildings 7258, 7260, and 7262 on June 23, 2020. In addition, on January 22, 2021, the South Dakota SHPO concurred with findings from a 2020 archaeological survey of the South WGF Site, which did not identify any archaeological sites. On February 16, 2021, the USAF and South Dakota SHPO concluded the Section 106 consultation, with the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement, which includes stipulations to mitigate the adverse effect resulting from demolition of the three historic properties.

Section 7 Consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

In compliance with Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, the USAF informally consulted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in South Dakota regarding impacts to federally listed threatened and endangered species. In a letter dated May 20, 2020, consultation with the North and South Dakota Field Office determined that "the project, as currently planned, does not involve any federally listed threatened or endangered species or their habitats" (*FEIS, Vol. II, Appendix E*). No threatened or endangered species exist on Dyess AFB; therefore, consultation was not required.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

As described in the FEIS (*Vol. I, Pages 2-31 to 2-44, §2.8*), the B-21 MOB 1 beddown at Ellsworth AFB would result in significant impacts to cultural resources due to the adverse effects on historic properties associated with the demolition of buildings 7258, 7260, and 7262 (*FEIS, Vol. I, §3.8.2*). However, the USAF and South Dakota SHPO executed a Memorandum of Agreement on February 16, 2021, stipulating the mitigation measures that resolves adverse effects to historic properties (*FEIS, Vol. II, Appendix F*). Implementing these mitigation measures reduces impacts to cultural resources to less than significant.

The B-21 MOB 1 beddown could impact several resource areas, but not significantly. For example, the USAF would limit typical impacts associated with construction and demolition projects by complying with environmental regulations (e.g., permitting) in all aspects. The increase in aircraft operations and building construction at Ellsworth AFB would increase criteria pollutant emissions. Nitrogen oxides (NO_x) emissions would increase, although the proposed net changes would be less than the *de minimis* thresholds for NO_x. Construction footprints for facilities, infrastructure, and the WGF include floodplains and wetlands. If construction activities cannot avoid floodplains and wetlands, the USAF will coordinate with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to obtain a permit under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act.

As analyzed in the FEIS (*Vol. I, Page 3-14, §3.1.2.3*), flight operations would increase by up to 15.8 percent at Ellsworth AFB. Total flight operations at the PRTC would increase by 41.1 percent. This could lead to increased congestion and/or scheduling impacts of the airspace. However, the B-21 MOB 1 mission would not likely adversely impact airspace because the B-21 is projected to use a range of higher altitudes, which are currently underutilized. Additionally, as the program develops, the USAF may adapt Special Use Airspace use and distribution to better accommodate the B-21 training mission.

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The B-21 MOB 1 beddown would result in positive impacts to environmental justice and sensitive populations due to decreased noise levels from aircraft operations at Ellsworth AFB, as analyzed in the FEIS (*Vol. I, §3.2.2 and §3.6.2*). Because the B-21 is projected to generally fly higher and quieter than the B-1, the noise in the area and the number of acres and people impacted would decrease overall.

MITIGATION

The USAF considered mitigation by avoiding, minimizing, or reducing potential impacts to be a priority in the development of the proposed B-21 MOB 1 beddown and operations at Ellsworth AFB. Specific measures to avoid, reduce, or minimize impacts were built into the beddown alternatives; will apply to construction, operation, and maintenance involved in the action; or will be implemented as compensatory measures.

The FEIS (*Vol. I, Pages 2-28 through 2-30, §2.7*) identified other management actions to facilitate implementation of the decision. Management actions are different from mitigation measures because regulations or USAF guidance and instructions require such actions. Compliance with laws and regulations administered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and other regulatory and/or state environmental quality agencies are mandated and some have mitigating effects, but these laws and regulations are not considered discretionary with respect to USAF decision making and will be implemented.

To track mitigations, the USAF Global Strike Command 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. The USAF will not implement an impact-inducing action related to the B-21 MOB 1 beddown before the applicable mitigation measure described in this ROD is funded and put in place.

The Mitigation Plan will:

- Identify specific actions;
- Identify the organization responsible for each action; and
- Present the timing of each action.

The USAF will implement the following mitigations, listed below by resource area.

Noise

- The USAF will conduct noise modeling with operational B-21 noise source data, when available, to corroborate the accuracy of the FEIS results, which used the B-2A noise source data for noise modeling (*FEIS, Vol. I, Page 3-18, §3.2.1.3*) because noise source data for the new B-21 airframe are not yet available.

Air Quality

- Once the B-21 is operational and emissions factors are measured, the USAF will prepare air quality calculations with operational B-21 emissions factors to corroborate the accuracy

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of the FEIS results, which used Air Conformity Applicability Model (ACAM) emissions factors for the B-2A (*FEIS, Vol. I, Page 3-81, §3.3.1*) because validated emissions factors for the new B-21 airframe are not yet available.

Cultural Resources

In accordance with the Memorandum of Agreement between the USAF and South Dakota SHPO signed on February 16, 2021, the USAF will follow these three stipulations prior to the demolition of historic properties. The FEIS, Vol I., Appendix F provides details regarding each stipulation, which will be part of the mitigation plan.

- Stipulation I: Photographic documentation
- Stipulation II: Existing record search and reproduction
- Stipulation III: Possible Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record Documentation (HABS/HAER)

Physical Resources

The USAF will mitigate short-term impacts by:

- Implementing erosion and sediment control measures;
- Designing site drainage around the new facilities to manage the anticipated increased runoff from the increased impervious surface through properly sized stormwater conveyance structures, and by incorporating stormwater management features such as porous pavements and infiltration basins that treat, store, and infiltrate runoff onsite before it can affect downstream water bodies; and
- Placing facilities and structures where military operations would involve handling of hazardous chemicals or fueling operations where spill control valves serve as physical barriers that could prevent releases from flowing into the ponds and offsite streams.

Jurisdictional wetlands and 100-year floodplain areas are present in some construction areas, including the area between the alert apron and the South WGF Site, where the USAF will construct a bridge. If construction activities cannot avoid impacting floodplains and wetlands, Ellsworth AFB will coordinate with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to obtain a permit under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. In general, actions resulting in loss of wetland functions may require compensatory mitigation measures.

WETLANDS AND FLOODPLAINS FINDING OF NO PRACTICABLE ALTERNATIVE

Pursuant to EO 11990, *Protection of Wetlands*, there is no practicable alternative to development within or affecting wetland areas from construction of a portion of the MOB 1 beddown at Ellsworth AFB (*FEIS, Vol. I, §3.9.2.3*). The USAF will construct a bridge over approximately 0.4 acre of jurisdictional wetlands to provide direct access from the alert apron to the South WGF Site. Although design specifications are unknown at this time, the USAF will place the bridge to avoid direct impacts to the wetlands if possible. However, if the bridge design requires construction within the wetlands, Ellsworth AFB will coordinate with the U.S. Army Corps of

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Engineers to obtain a permit under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. Ellsworth AFB will implement any requirements, including mitigations, associated with the permit.

As part of the wetlands mitigations, the USAF will avoid wetlands to the extent practicable and will mitigate wetland impacts through established U.S. Army Corps of Engineers procedures. Before any new construction or related activities located in wetlands, the USAF will prepare an analysis and documentation, in accordance with Clean Water Act Sections 401, 404, and 404(b)(1) guidelines, Department of Defense Instruction 4715.03, and provisions of EO 11990. For any construction activities affecting wetlands, the USAF will comply with Sections 401 and 404 of the Clean Water Act with respect to compensatory mitigation, federal permitting, and state water quality certification.

Pursuant to EO 11988, *Floodplain Management*, there is no practicable alternative to development within the floodplain from construction of a portion of the MOB 1 beddown at Ellsworth AFB (*FEIS, Vol. I, §3.9.2.3*). Construction of some facilities will be in areas that contain floodplains. The floodplain areas are 2 percent (4.4 out of 217 acres) and 8 percent (8.1 out of 98 acres) of the planned construction areas. Additionally, the USAF will construct the bridge from the alert apron to the South WGF Site over approximately 1 acre of floodplains. The 100-year floodplain areas are limited in size, and siting facilities away from these areas will be feasible. The USAF would site facilities to avoid impacting the 100-year floodplains to the extent possible. Any development in floodplain areas will include a stormwater detention cell for stormwater runoff control. The stormwater cell is likely to require flow modulation, erosive velocity control, solids settlement, and maintenance access features. The USAF does not expect that the finished detention cell would fill or obstruct the present flood control channel. New building construction will incorporate best management practices into the design to mitigate impacts to the floodplain in accordance with the Unified Facilities Criteria for Civil Engineering.

DECISION

After considering the potential environmental consequences of the Proposed Action and 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 USAF selects to beddown the B-21 MOB 1 at Ellsworth AFB with the WGF located at the South WGF Site. By implementing the mitigation measures identified in this ROD and adhering to the mitigation plan described herein, the USAF has adopted all practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental harm.

The USAF will, by this decision, beddown the B-21 MOB 1 at Ellsworth AFB with the WGF located at the South WGF Site.

ROBERT E. MORIARTY, P.E., SES
Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Air Force
(Installations)

Date