
Final
Environmental Assessment
Proposed Joint Permanent Air Facility
United States Customs and Border Protection
Office of Air and Marine At Libby Army Airfield
Fort Huachuca, Sierra Vista, Cochise County, Arizona



Prepared for:



**U.S. Customs and
Border Protection**

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July 2015

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PROJECT HISTORY: The Department of Homeland Security (DHS), U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) proposes to construct, operate, and maintain a joint permanent CBP Office of Air and Marine (OAM) facility at Libby Army Airfield (LAAF), Fort Huachuca, Arizona. The mission of CBP OAM is to protect the American people and Nation's critical infrastructure through the coordinated use of integrated air and marine forces to detect, interdict and prevent acts of terrorism and the unlawful movement of people, illegal drugs and other contraband toward or across the borders of the United States. CBP OAM performs this critical mission by providing real-time surveillance information and maritime and aerial support to the homeland security efforts of DHS, as well as to those of Federal, State, local, and tribal agencies.

CBP OAM, formerly part of U.S. Border Patrol (USBP) Air Operations, has operated at LAAF on Fort Huachuca since 1999, providing support to the USBP's Tucson Sector mission to manage operational control of the border. CBP OAM currently operates from a temporary facility, constructed in 2008, that is located on the southeast side of LAAF.

To comply with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) Regulations for implementing NEPA, and DHS Management Directive (MD) 023-01, the Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared in coordination with Federal and State agencies to identify and assess potential impacts associated with construction and operation of the proposed facility.

PROJECT LOCATION: The preferred alternative is located on the south side of LAAF, Fort Huachuca, Arizona, on the southwest end of the airfield. The project area comprises approximately seven acres of land located on a tarmac and taxi way shared by Arizona and Missouri Air National Guard facilities. The existing temporary facility is located on a similar property located on the southeast end of the airfield.

PURPOSE AND NEED: The purpose of this action is to establish a joint permanent air operations facility at LAAF, Fort Huachuca, Arizona to support the USBP's Tucson Sector mission to manage operational control of the border. CBP OAM provides air support to USBP Tucson Sector ground units and other law enforcement agencies to interdict foreign national smuggling operations, detect and report other illegal air or ground activities, and engage in Search and Rescue (SAR) operations.

The primary project need is for sufficient land with access to a taxi strip that will allow for development of a facility to support current helicopter and unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) operations. The facility will need to have the capacity to accommodate at least six aircraft and 69 personnel. At a minimum, the facility would require hangars, support buildings, vehicle and aircraft parking, and related utilities and ancillary features. The airport and associated airspace

must be able to support unmanned aircraft system (UAS) operations and provide proximity to the U.S. - Mexico International Border in the Tucson Sector.

The facility site must have a high level of physical security and 24-hour occupational access will be required to meet mission objectives and protect enforcement assets. The site must be cost effective to improve. All construction and operations must be consistent with Fort Huachuca Real Property Master Plan.

ALTERNATIVES:

Alternative 1: Proposed Action

CBP proposes relocating operations to a joint permanent air operations facility to fulfill its mission along the U.S. – Mexico International Border. Under Alternative 1, CBP would have a real estate permit with Fort Huachuca for about seven acres of land at the southwest end of the South Taxiway for the construction and operation of the proposed joint permanent facilities (Figure ES-1).

The proposed action would include the construction of a joint permanent facility for 69 personnel to support the existing Sierra Vista Air Unit (SVAU) and UAS operations and would provide office space. The SVAU assigned to Fort Huachuca will consist of three AS-350 helicopters. The UAS Squadron permanently assigned to the Installation will consist of three MQ-9 Predator aircraft. Fort Huachuca's Real Property Master Plan Update (2007) estimates current combined flight operations (departures and landings) of 160,000 per year at LAAF and SVMA. Air operations for the proposed action may occur on a 24 hour/day, 7 day/week basis, resulting in approximately 22 air operations daily for a total 8,030 air operations annually (U.S. Army 2007b). This would represent 5 percent of the current flight operations at the LAAF/SVMA airport.

At present, joint permanent facility planning is in progress (Figure ES-2). Therefore, this EA considers a conceptual alternative that will allow for environmental clearance of the maximum area required to meet the project's purpose and need. The following facilities description was prepared for the Description of Proposed Action and Alternatives (DOPAA): 40,000-square feet (SF) of hangar area, 14,000-SF Administration/Operation Center, 44,250-SF Apron/Ramp, 20,000-SF of paved parking, 5,000-SF for storage parking, 43,250-SF of hardstand, and a 5,200-SF utilities building. The proposed Air Facility would require additional utilities including, but not limited to, electrical/data quad duct, electrical, communications dish(s), and antenna(s). Other supporting items such as fencing, sidewalks and lighting may be required. Planning for facility space also takes into account the possibility that operation and mission requirements may dictate the need to host temporarily a wide variety of other aircraft.

Seven acres of land is available from AANG for site planning and design. All of the seven acres of land could be disturbed during facility construction, including excavation, grading, paving and landscaping. It is estimated that heavy construction equipment could operate for up to four weeks during the site preparation stage. Construction materials are anticipated to be supplied by local or regional vendors. Total construction time could be two years.

The proposed action includes transfer of the existing temporary facility. The disposition of the temporary facility will include removal of some operational structures including the above ground ancillary structures, storage buildings, satellite dishes, and antennae. The fabric hangars and the mobile administrative buildings will remain in place, as well as the concrete apron and taxiway. All removed structures will be either re-used on the new facility or disposed of as surplus property or waste.

Alternative 2: No Action Alternative

Under Alternative 2, the No Action Alternative, CBP OAM would continue the operation and maintenance of the existing temporary facility south of the Southeast Taxiway at LAAF. No new facilities would be constructed and existing personnel and air operations would continue. However, the lease agreement on the current, existing temporary CPB OAM facility is set to expire. CBP OAM was notified that LAAF does not intend to consider renewal of the lease, citing long-range land use planning conflicts. A new lease agreement on the existing site will be required, despite the land use planning conflicts, to accommodate the No Action Alternative. In the worst case the existing facilities will no longer be available for use, CBP will have to vacate the facility, and CBP operations will terminate.

The existing facility is comprised of an airfield apron and taxiway, temporary hangars with ancillary structures, temporary office structures and parking area. The hangar area specifically includes two hangars of canvas or fabric skin construction. One hangar houses predator drones, and the other hangar houses helicopters. The concrete apron supports the hangars and other ancillary structures that are all temporary in nature, including: mobile flight operation command centers, mobile fuel tankers in secondary containment, storage buildings, and predator drone and helicopter staging. Adjacent to the concrete apron are three mobile diesel powered generators, satellite dishes, and other antenna structures. The administrative complex consists of mobile offices with associated utilities, small storage buildings, and a gravel parking area. Alternative 2 currently accommodates 69 personnel and six aircraft (three AS-350's and three MQ-9).

The No Action Alternative does not satisfy purpose and need. Since CBP OAM was notified that LAAF does not intend to consider renewal of the lease, it is likely that the existing facilities will no longer be available for use, and CBP operations will be disturbed.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES: The following paragraphs provide a summary of the affected environment and consequences associated with the No Action and Proposed Action Alternatives.

Alternative 1: Proposed Action Alternative

Alternative 1, the Proposed Action Alternative would include construction and operation of a joint permanent CBP OAM facility at LAAF. Alternative 1 would allow for relocation of existing CBP OAM operations to meet mission requirements.

Alternative 1 would result in no impact or negligible impact to surface waters, floodplains, vegetation, wildlife, cultural resources, climate, noise, roadways and traffic, aesthetic and visual resources, hazardous materials, socioeconomics, or environmental justice and the protection of

children. Alternative 1 may result in minor permanent impacts to land use, soils, and sustainability and greening as a result of facility construction on approximately seven acres. Minor temporary construction impacts are also anticipated to wildlife, air quality, noise, and health and human safety.

Alternative 1 could result in direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts related to groundwater use. Total water use associated with 69 personnel at the CBP OAM facility, their household domestic use, and induced water use generated by the presence of CBP OAM operations is estimated to result in 43.91 acre feet per year (AF/YR) of groundwater withdrawal from the Sierra Vista Subwatershed. A portion of this water use would affect natural discharge, ultimately resulting in a 0.08 percent decrease in the baseflow of the San Pedro River. Additionally, one-time construction use would result in 6.74 AF of groundwater withdrawal.

Over time, this small reduction in baseflow may increase potential for degradation of riparian vegetation and instream habitat, specifically in the San Pedro River National Conservation Area (SPRNCA). This potential habitat loss could affect water related species, including threatened and endangered species. Therefore, CBP is obligated under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act to implement conservation and mitigation measures which will offset adverse effects associated with its proposed action on threatened and endangered species. CBP has contracted with the Army Corps of Engineers to help acquire conservation easements. In addition, CBP proposes to work closely with the Arizona Game and Fish Department under the Sikes Act/Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan (INRMP) to implement monitoring and management actions relative to the conservation easements with a wildlife habitat mitigation goal to ensure effectiveness of the mitigation measures.

Alternative 2: No Action Alternative

Alternative 2, the No Action Alternative, serves as a baseline for evaluation of the impacts of the Proposed Action Alternative. Alternative 2 would result in the continuation of existing CBP OAM operations at LAAF, with a renegotiated lease. As Alternative 2 would not expand existing operations or result in new construction, no additional impacts are anticipated compared to existing conditions.

With either Alternative 1 (Proposed Action) or Alternative 2 (No Action), CBP will need to mitigate 24.78 AF/YR to offset potential impacts related to groundwater use. CBP has contracted with the Army Corps of Engineers to help acquire conservation easements for mitigation. Other specific water conservation measures will be determined as appropriate based on continued coordination with the USFWS. CBP proposes to work closely with the Arizona Game and Fish Department under the Sikes Act/Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan (INRMP) to implement monitoring and management actions relative to the conservation easements with a wildlife habitat mitigation goal to ensure effectiveness of the mitigation measures. Measures will likely include a combination of water conservation, rainwater harvesting, and/or detention basin recharge to meet sustainability requirements.

MITIGATION MEASURES AND BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES:

CBP will follow design criteria to reduce adverse environmental impacts and subsequently would implement mitigation measures to offset adverse environmental impacts. Design criteria to reduce adverse environmental impacts include avoiding or minimizing physical disturbance and construction to sensitive resources, consulting with Federal and State agencies and other stakeholders, and developing appropriate Best Management Practices (BMPs).

BMPs would be implemented as standard operating procedure during all construction activities, and would include proper handling, storage, and/or disposal of hazardous and/or regulated materials. Standard procedures will include the implementation of an Arizona Construction General Permit and Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP); Spill Prevention Control and Countermeasures Plan (SPCC); Dust Control Plan; Fire Prevention and Suppression Plan; and inadvertent discovery procedures from the Installation Cultural Resource Management Plan (ICRMP).

CBP will acquire water conservation easements to offset anticipated water demand within the Sierra Vista Subwatershed that would be associated with the proposed project. With either Alternative 1 (Proposed Action) or Alternative 2 (No Action), CBP will need to mitigate 24.78 AF/YR to offset potential impacts related to groundwater use. During construction of Alternative 1, it will be necessary to also mitigate for construction induced net water use for 3.90 AF, as a one-time water use event (total of 28.68 AF/YR for the construction year). CBP has contracted with the Army Corps of Engineers to help acquire conservation easements for mitigation. Other specific water conservation measures will be determined if possible. CBP proposes to work closely with the Arizona Game and Fish Department under the Sikes Act/Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan (INRMP) to implement monitoring and management actions relative to the conservation easements with a wildlife habitat mitigation goal to ensure effectiveness of the mitigation measures. Measures will likely include a combination of water conservation, rainwater harvesting, and/or detention basin recharge to meet sustainability requirements.

FINDING: Based upon the analyses of the Proposed Action and Alternatives in the EA including BMPs and mitigation measures to be incorporated as part of the Proposed Action, it has been concluded that the Proposed Action will not result in any significant adverse effects to the environment. Therefore, no further environmental impact analysis is warranted.

Digitally signed by Dave Song
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Date

For: _____
Karl Calvo
Executive Director
Facilities Management and Engineering
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7/27/15

Date