

RECORD OF DECISION/FINDING OF NO PRACTICABLE ALTERNATIVE

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT (EIS) *T-7A RECAPITALIZATION AT SHEPPARD AFB, TX*

INTRODUCTION

The Department of the Air Force (DAF) will replace the existing T-38C aircraft with the beddown of the T-7A aircraft at Main Operating Base (MOB) 5, Sheppard Air Force Base (AFB), Texas. DAF considered the information, analyses, and public comments on and contained in the *Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for T-7A Recapitalization at Sheppard Air Force Base, Texas*, along with other matters, to make its decision.

This Record of Decision (ROD) is issued per the Department of Defense National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Implementing Procedures Part 4.1, *Decision documents*, and the DAF NEPA Implementing Procedures Part 4.1, *Decision documents*. DAF is the lead agency for this EIS. The U.S. Department of the Army is a cooperating agency because of their ownership of Falcon Range, where some T-7A flight operations would occur.

This ROD documents:

- DAF's decision;
- Alternatives considered;
- Factors considered in the decision; and
- Mitigations.

DECISION SYNOPSIS

The Air Education and Training Command (AETC) operates the T-38C from five pilot training installations: Joint Base San Antonio (JBSA)-Randolph in Texas, Columbus AFB in Mississippi, Laughlin AFB in Texas, Vance AFB in Oklahoma, and Sheppard AFB in Texas. DAF expects to procure approximately 350 T-7A aircraft from Boeing and deliver these aircraft to the five T-38C pilot training installations. Following AETC recommendations, the Secretary of the Air Force approved Sheppard AFB to be the fifth installation to undergo recapitalization.

Recapitalization will take place over an approximate 4-year period and will replace all T-38C aircraft assigned to Sheppard AFB with T-7A aircraft; transition aircraft operations at Sheppard AFB and associated special use airspace (SUA) from the T-38C to the T-7A; temporarily change the number of personnel and dependents in the Sheppard AFB region; and construct and upgrade facilities to support pilot training and aircraft operation and maintenance.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

The EIS analyzed three action alternatives (i.e., Alternatives 1, 2, and 3) and the No Action Alternative. The three action alternatives considered different numbers of T-7A aircraft and associated numbers of T-7A operations at Sheppard AFB and associated SUA. Under Alternative 1, which is described in detail in the FEIS (*FEIS, Pgs. 2-5 to 2-7, Section 2.2.2.2*), Sheppard AFB would receive up to 108 aircraft. For Alternative 2, fully described in the FEIS (*FEIS, Pg. 2-7, Section 2.2.2.3*), Sheppard AFB would also receive up to 108 T-7A aircraft, but with a higher number of operations than Alternative 1. The No Action Alternative serves as a baseline against which the impacts of the action alternatives are evaluated and is described in the FEIS (*FEIS, Pg. 2-9, Section 2.3*). The DAF has selected Alternative 3 for implementation which is described below.

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Alternative 3. Sheppard AFB will receive up to 131 T-7A aircraft with each aircraft to perform the same number of operations as the current T-38C. The higher number of aircraft associated with Alternative 3, compared to the other two action alternatives, is intended to provide DAF with flexibility for future capacity needs.

The FEIS provides the annual number of T-38C and T-7A aircraft (*FEIS, Pg. 2-8, Table 2-6*) and operations for Alternative 3 (*FEIS, Pg. 2-8, Table 2-7 and FEIS Appendix A, Pg. A-5, Table A-4*).

T-7A aircraft are scheduled to be delivered to Sheppard AFB from the manufacturer beginning in 2034 and continuing through 2037. As T-7A aircraft are delivered and placed into service, T-38C aircraft will be withdrawn from service between 2034 and 2036.

In flight T-7A pilot training will occur in the vicinity of Sheppard AFB airfield and within the same SUA currently used by the T-38C. That SUA consists of Military Operating Areas Hollis, Washita, Westover 1, and Westover 2; Restricted Area Falcon Range (R-5601); and Military Training Routes Instrument Route (IR)-103 and Visual Route (VR)-158, VR-159, VR-1139, VR-1140, VR-1141, VR-1142, VR-1143, and VR-1146. No changes to SUA configurations (i.e., size, shape, or location) or their active times are proposed for T-7A recapitalization. The T-7A will be limited to sub-sonic speeds in all phases of pilot training.

Aircraft operations include daytime, evening, and nighttime T-7A operations. Evening operations are performed from dusk until 10 p.m., and nighttime operations occur between 10 p.m. and 7 a.m., as defined for aircraft noise modeling. The T-38C currently operates during all three periods at Sheppard AFB.

An increase of approximately 100 personnel and 190 dependents (e.g., spouses, children, and other family members), who would accompany the personnel, is projected during the aircraft transition period when DAF will train pilots with and maintain two types of aircraft. After the aircraft transition period, numbers of personnel and their dependents will be approximately the same as that for the current T-38C flight training program because of physical space limitations to support additional maintenance and training staff (*FEIS, Pgs. 2-1 and 2-2, Section 2.2.2.1.1*).

Several construction and renovation projects will provide modern facilities and infrastructure to support T-7A aircraft maintenance, training, and operational requirements. Construction and renovation are scheduled to begin in 2031 and 2032 and complete prior to the arrival of the first T-7A aircraft. The proposed construction and renovation projects are as follows (*FEIS, Pgs. 2-2 to 2-5, Section 2.2.2.1.2 and Table 2-1*):

- Expand and renovate Building 2326 to provide a Ground-Based Training System (GBTS) facility for flight simulation instruction and equipment storage space.
- Construct a Unit Maintenance Trainer (UMT) facility/maintenance hangar.
- Construct pavement to expand the size of the flightline ramp.
- Construct a new hush house pad.
- Replace shelters, construction of additional shelters, remove/repaint taxi lines, and install electrical for proper lighting and tie-down grounding points at each shelter.
- Construct an addition to the egress shop (Building 2521).
- Install jet blast deflectors.

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- Paint new markings to reconfigure the airfield and install new mooring and anchor rods to accommodate the T-7A's larger dimensions.
- Renovate interior of squadron operations building (Building 2320).
- Modify interior components of an existing hangar (Buildings 2404, 2406, 2408, or 2410).
- Remove Centralized Aircraft Support Systems (CASS) service modules. CASS lines will be cut, capped, and vaults will be filled with concrete.
- Repair/prepare existing aircraft pavement for a compass rose and trim pad.
- Construct a concrete pad and provide utilities for a storage container to store T-7A ejection system explosive components.
- Expand the existing hammerhead paved area to fit the wider wingspan of four T-7A aircraft.
- Perform interior electrical modifications to Building 2518 to store and maintain night vision goggles.

MITIGATION

DAF is committed to working with Wichita County and the city of Wichita Falls, Texas, as well as the North Texas Regional Planning Commission, the city of Burkburnett, and others to analyze compatible land use surrounding Sheppard AFB under T-7A operating conditions. This working relationship will extend to the municipalities surrounding Fort Sill and Falcon Range, including the city of Lawton (*FEIS, Pg. 2-15, Section 2.6*). As part of that commitment, DAF will partner with local governments to perform the following tasks:

- Prepare an Air Installations Compatible Use Zones Study update at an appropriate time to be determined to address any changes in land area within the greater than 65 dB DNL noise contours for Sheppard AFB and potentially with Falcon Range, as appropriate.
- Coordinate with state and local agencies on recommendations regarding compatible land use and potential encroachment concerns inside and outside of the DNL footprint, as applicable (i.e., large-scale developments, transportation projects that could encourage development, or tall structures such as cell towers that could penetrate airfield imaginary surfaces).
- Encourage municipalities to promote the most compatible land use by updating local zoning ordinances and building construction standards, especially for high-noise areas (*FEIS, Pg. 2-15, Section 2.6*).

Because all the proposed construction and renovation projects, except the GBTS facility, will be constructed within a floodplain, each project will be designed to avoid and minimize floodplain impacts and flood damage to facilities to the extent possible. For the proposed UMT facility/maintenance hangar, the floor and any associated flood-susceptible utilities will be constructed a minimum of 3 feet above the 100-year flood elevation. Doing so will require an earthen rise to be placed beneath the facility measuring approximately 3 to 5 feet above the site's current elevation and approximately 3 feet above the eastern taxiway elevation. Similar floodplain mitigation measures will be developed for the other proposed projects as their designs advance (*FEIS, Pg. 2-15, Section 2.6*).

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Other DAF mitigation measures include best management practices and those requirements to comply with related revisions to the Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan; Spill Prevention, Control, and Countermeasure Plan; Integrated Solid Waste Management Plan; Hazardous Waste Management Plan; Integrated Pest Management Plan; the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Construction General Permit; and updates to and compliance with the Bird/Wildlife Aircraft Strike Hazard Plan (*FEIS, Pgs. 3-1 to 3-121, Section 3*).

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All the proposed construction and renovation projects, with exception to the proposed GBTS facility, will occur within the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)-designated 100-year floodplain or Colorado State University-modeled 100- and 500-year floodplains. Direct impacts from construction within a floodplain are unavoidable, and there are no practicable alternatives for the proposed construction and renovation projects outside of a floodplain. Many existing facilities serving the T-38C flight training mission, including a portion of the airfield, are already within a floodplain. DAF cannot locate the proposed facilities outside of the floodplains without requiring great distances between existing and proposed facilities and losing mission synergies. Floodplain displacement resulting from construction and renovation within the floodplain is expected to have no impact on flood potential in the area.

Consistent with Executive Order (EO) 11988, *Floodplain Management*, the publication of the Notice of Intent to prepare this EIS, published on July 3, 2024, initiated early public review of the proposed action and alternatives. DAF contacted federal, state, and local regulatory agencies with special expertise in floodplains during the public scoping and Draft EIS public comment periods. These agencies included FEMA, the Wichita County Community Floodplain Administrator, and the city of Wichita Falls Floodplain Management Program. Feedback on floodplain impacts was considered during the development of this EIS and is summarized in Appendix D of the FEIS.

Therefore, pursuant to EO 11988, and considering all supporting information, I find that there is no practicable alternative to this action and that these projects include all necessary measures, as outlined in the FEIS (*FEIS, Pgs. 3-117 and 3-118, Section 3.8.2.1*) to minimize harm to the existing environment.

DECISION

Alternative 3 is selected to provide DAF with flexibility for future capacity needs, after considering the potential environmental consequences, comments and concerns of the public and other key stakeholders, and other factors related to national defense, including current military operational needs and costs. DAF will, by this decision, replace all T-38C aircraft at Sheppard AFB with up to 131 T-7A aircraft, limiting initial delivery to 108, per the Secretary of the Air Force Strategic Basing Decision approving Sheppard AFB as the fifth T-7A MOB.

DAF will execute all portions of T-7A recapitalization at Sheppard AFB including the operations and changes to the number of personnel and dependents as defined for Alternative 3. The final facilities implementation (construction and renovation) will depend on the funding level and priorities in the overall T-7A program.

The Proponent will track, monitor, and implement all mitigation measures committed to in this ROD. To track mitigations, AETC will develop a Mitigation Monitoring Plan within 90 days of

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this ROD that identifies specific mitigative actions, identifies principal and subordinate organizations with responsibility for oversight and execution of specific mitigations, and documents timelines for implementation and completion of mitigations.

MICHAEL E. SAUNDERS, P.E., SES, DAF
Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Air Force
(Energy, Installations, and Environment)

Date