

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT/
FINDING OF NO PRACTICABLE ALTERNATIVE (FONSI/FONPA)**

**Environmental Assessment
Addressing the Privatization of Military Family Housing
at
Ellsworth Air Force Base, South Dakota**

Introduction

Federal actions that potentially involve significant impacts on the environment must be reviewed in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and all other applicable laws. The U.S. Air Force (USAF) has completed an Environmental Assessment (EA) to address the potential environmental consequences associated with conveying military family housing (MFH) units, granting leases of land, and transferring responsibility for providing housing at Ellsworth Air Force Base (AFB) to a private developer (the Project Owner [PO]). This FONSI/FONPA incorporates the EA by reference.

The USAF operates and maintains approximately 104,000 MFH units at its installations throughout the United States. More than 38 percent of all such units do not meet current modern standards and require either major improvement or replacement. At most installations, the demand for adequate on-installation housing exceeds supply. The lack of adequate MFH forces many military members and their families to live in on-installation housing that is in need of repair, renovation, or replacement; or requires them to live off-installation where the cost and quality of housing can vary considerably. Often, the cost to military members and their families to live off-installation is 15 to 20 percent greater than the cost to live on-installation. The USAF estimates that as much as \$7.6 billion would be needed to bring its on-installation housing up to current standards.

In recognition of these problems, Congress enacted Section 2801 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1996 (Public Law 104-106, codified at Title 10 of the United States Code Sections 2871–2885). Also known as the Military Housing Privatization Initiative (MHPI), this provision of law creates alternative authorities for improvement and construction of MFH. The MHPI was designed and developed to attract private sector financing, expertise, and innovation to provide necessary housing faster and more efficiently than traditional military construction processes would allow.

Consistent with the USAF Housing Privatization Program, Headquarters Air Combat Command (ACC) proposes to convey MFH units, grant leases of land, and transfer responsibility for providing housing and ancillary supporting facilities at Ellsworth AFB to the PO. The Proposed Action is part of the Northern Group MHPI, which includes Ellsworth AFB; Cavalier Air Force Station, Grand Forks AFB, and Minot AFB, North Dakota; Mountain Home AFB, Idaho; and Cannon AFB, New Mexico.

Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to vest responsibility in a private developer for MFH at Ellsworth AFB. The need for the Proposed Action is to provide affordable, quality housing and ancillary facilities to military members and their families through replacement and renovation of existing family housing units as appropriate so that they meet current USAF standards.

The goal of the Northern Group MHPI is to provide uniformed services members and their families with access to safe, secure, quality, affordable, well-maintained housing in a military community where they choose to live. MFH privatization would help accelerate housing improvements, alleviate housing shortages, and reduce waiting times for adequate housing, ultimately improving morale of USAF

personnel and their families. All the USAF-owned MFH units on Ellsworth AFB have been constructed in the past 6 years and are in excellent condition.

Description of the Proposed Action

Under the Proposed Action, Ellsworth AFB would execute agreements with the PO to convey real property, lease land, and have the PO assume responsibility to operate a rental housing development for the benefit of USAF and other personnel. Under agreements with the Air Force, the PO would be responsible to plan, design, develop, renovate, demolish, construct, own, operate, maintain, and manage all necessary assets for MFH and designated ancillary supporting facilities. Additionally, the PO would be required to implement and follow appropriate environmental management laws, efforts, and plans regarding resources including land, soil, water, air, vegetation, hazardous materials and wastes, and cultural resources. In exchange for providing housing, the PO would be entitled to rental income based on each occupant's Basic Allowance for Housing.

There are 283 MFH units on Ellsworth AFB constructed since 2004 that would be conveyed "as is" under the Proposed Action. It is currently estimated that the end-state requirement of the Proposed Action would be 497 MFH units, resulting in an additional 214 units to be constructed within the first 6 years of the Proposed Action. MFH neighborhoods included in the conveyance would be Prairie View (100 units), Rushmore Heights (183 units), and the former Black Hills Estates area, where new MFH units would potentially be constructed. The former Black Hills Estates area contained 500 occupied housing units until 2008, but these housing units were demolished by 2009. The 2008 Ellsworth AFB Housing Community Profile (HCP) indicates that the installation ideally should have no more than 621 MFH units. A subsequent determination was made to construct 80 percent of the number of units identified in the HCP; therefore, the current end-state number of housing units under the Proposed Action is 497 units. Specific transactions that would occur between Ellsworth AFB and the PO as part of the Proposed Action are as follows:

- Ellsworth AFB would convey all 283 existing USAF-owned MFH units to the PO.
- Ellsworth AFB would grant 50-year leases for three parcels of land totaling 279 acres.
- The PO would continue use of 283 units in their present condition and construct 214 new units, for an end-state total of 497 units. In addition, the USAF Housing Privatization Program has identified several desired features for new construction and renovation of MFH, its privatized communities, facilities maintenance, and property management for Ellsworth AFB. These features could include construction of a community center/clubhouse, housing management office, storage facilities for new MFH units, and additional playgrounds and trails.
- Tot lots, playgrounds, a half-basketball court, bus stops, neighborhood sign marquees, common mailbox clusters, and the housing maintenance facility would be conveyed to the PO.
- The PO would be responsible for ensuring that maintenance of conveyed areas complies with provisions in the installation's current Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan and Integrated Cultural Resources Management Plan. The Government retains the right to access and manage those natural and cultural resources covered by such plans.

Description of the No Action Alternative

Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations require inclusion of the No Action Alternative. The No Action Alternative serves as a baseline against which the impacts of the Proposed Action and Alternatives can be evaluated. Under the No Action Alternative, Ellsworth AFB would not implement the Proposed Action. The USAF would continue to own MFH at Ellsworth AFB and provide for the housing needs of military personnel and family members.

Ellsworth AFB has 283 MFH units that have been constructed since 2004. It is anticipated that these newly constructed MFH units would continue to provide adequate housing for many years into the future with only minor maintenance and repairs; however, this would not meet the requirement of 497 MFH units. Ellsworth AFB would likely be required to construct additional units to support housing needs of military personnel and families.

Under the No Action Alternative, Ellsworth AFB would continue to maintain and upgrade MFH and associated infrastructure as required. Ellsworth AFB would continue to obtain funding for MFH renovation projects through the Congressional authorization and appropriations process. Based on historical trends, it is assumed that the amount of Congressional funding for MFH would not change and that the housing maintenance backlog would continue to increase. Any major changes to existing housing or construction of new housing would require that appropriate NEPA analyses be completed before implementing such actions.

Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Study

Other alternatives were reviewed during the EA development process under the requirements of NEPA, but were eliminated from further detailed analysis in the EA because they did not meet the stated purpose and need for the action, were not practicable, or would have led to greater overall environmental impact. Only existing and former MFH areas on Ellsworth AFB were further considered as possible site locations for the Proposed Action.

Summary of Anticipated Environmental Impacts

The Proposed Action and No Action Alternative have been reviewed in accordance with NEPA as implemented by the regulations of the CEQ and 32 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 989 (*Environmental Impact Analysis Process*). The public and regulatory agency scoping process focused the analyses on the following environmental resources: noise, land use, air quality, geological resources, water resources, biological resources, cultural resources, socioeconomics and environmental justice, infrastructure, hazardous materials and wastes, and safety. Long-term moderate adverse effects from the Proposed Action would occur from constructing MFH units inside the 65+ A-weighted decibel (dBA) Day-Night Average Sound Level (DNL) noise contours around the installation's airfield. Long-term minor adverse effects on floodplains would result from potential construction of structures or infrastructure in a 100-year floodplain. Long-term minor to moderate adverse effects would be expected from a potential for vapor intrusion from radon and trichloroethylene (TCE) contamination in groundwater below the housing areas. Ellsworth AFB is located in Meade County, South Dakota, which is in attainment for all criteria pollutants associated with the National Ambient Air Quality Standards; therefore, a Clean Air Act Formal Conformity Determination is not required. Mitigation measures to reduce these impacts are presented below. No significant impacts on any of the aforementioned environmental resources would be expected from the implementation of the Proposed Action. Any potential adverse impacts would be expected to be negligible to moderate. Details of the environmental consequences can be found in the EA incorporated by reference.

Mitigation Measures

Specific mitigation measures would be stipulated between the USAF and the PO if the Proposed Action were implemented. These specific mitigation measures relate to existing aircraft noise at Ellsworth AFB and existing groundwater contamination related to an Environmental Restoration Program (ERP) site at Ellsworth AFB. New MFH units would include noise level reduction (NLR) measures to mitigate impacts associated with noise from existing aircraft activity at Ellsworth AFB. Inclusion of NLR measures would help to mitigate and offset adverse impacts associated with noise. If construction of MFH units in the 100-year floodplain cannot be avoided, any structures built within the 100-year floodplain boundary would be constructed at least 1 foot above the base flood elevation level to elevate

the structure above the base flood elevation within the floodway. Construction of other infrastructure inside the floodplain boundary would be kept to a minimum where possible. The PO would obtain the City of Box Elder's floodplain surveyor certification for structures built in or close to the floodplain. New MFH units constructed in the former Black Hills Estates area would include mitigation systems, as necessary, to address potential radon and TCE vapor intrusion issues. These mitigation systems would help mitigate and offset adverse impacts associated with Operable Unit (OU)-11. A Mitigation Plan discussing these measures in greater detail is included in the EA as an appendix.

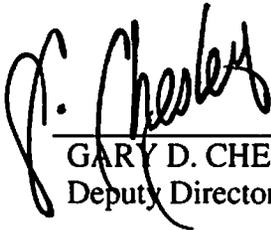
Public Review

Based on the description of the Proposed Action as set forth in the EA, all activities were found to comply with the criteria or standards of environmental quality and coordinated with the appropriate Federal, state, and local agencies. The Draft EA and FONSI/FONPA were made available to the public for a 30-day review period.

Conclusions

Finding of No Practicable Alternative. Pursuant to EO 11988, *Floodplain Management*, AFI 32-7064, *Integrated Natural Resources Management*, and the authority delegated by Secretary of the Air Force Order 791.1, and taking the above information into account, I find that there is no better practicable alternative to this action and that the Proposed Action includes all practicable measures to minimize harm to the floodplain environments. No wetlands would be impacted by the Proposed Action.

Finding of No Significant Impact. Based on the information and analysis presented in the EA conducted in accordance with the requirements of NEPA, CEQ regulations, implementing regulations set forth in 32 CFR Part 989 (*Environmental Impact Analysis Process*), as amended, and review of the agency comments submitted during the 30-day public comment period, I conclude that implementation of the Proposed Action would not result in significant impacts on the quality of the human or natural environment. For these reasons, the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is not warranted. This decision has been made after taking into account all submitted information, and considering a full range of practical alternatives that would meet project requirements and are within the legal authority of the USAF.



GARY D. CHESLEY, Colonel, USAF
Deputy Director, Installations and Mission Support

7 OCT 11

Date