

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

**For the Environmental Assessment for the modification of existing wetlands
adjacent to the runway to reduce Bird Aircraft Strike Hazard risk at
Ellsworth Air Force Base, South Dakota**

Pursuant to provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Title 42 United States Code (USC) Sections 4321 to 4347, implemented by Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) Regulations, Title 40, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) §1500-1508, and 32 CFR § 989, Environmental Impact Analysis Process (EIAP), the U.S. Air Force (Air Force) assessed the potential impacts on the natural and human environment associated with modification of existing wetlands adjacent to the runway to reduce Bird/Wildlife Aircraft Strike Hazard (BASH) risk at Ellsworth Air Force Base (EAFB), SD.

Introduction

The goal of the BASH program at EAFB is to preserve war fighting capabilities by reducing wildlife hazards to aircraft operations. EAFB is located within major migration routes for many bird species. Open water on and around the airfield attracts migrating waterfowl which can place birds in the direct path of flight operations.

The Air Force's Proposed Action involves the removal and/or modification of three separate wetland areas within the airfield perimeter fence that represents a BASH risk. The wetland modification and/or removal is necessary to ensure the successes of EAFB's flight missions, which are negatively impacted by wildlife habitat adjacent to the runway. The wetlands being modified or removed are North Slough, South Slough, and Pond 2, totaling approximately 9.3 acres of wetlands. Wetland modification may include a variety of engineered solutions to retain the stormwater management function of the wetlands while removing wildlife attractants. Specific construction methods that may be utilized as part of the Proposed Action include, but are not limited to, culvert extensions, maintaining open drainage features with a hardened bottom, and sharpening drainage features and/or pond edges.

An environmental assessment (EA) was prepared to analyze the potential environmental consequences of the Proposed Action and incorporate environmental protection measures to avoid or reduce adverse environmental impacts. The EA, incorporated by reference into this finding, considers all potential impacts of the Proposed Action and the No-Action Alternative. The EA also considers cumulative environmental impacts with other projects in the Region of Influence (ROI).

Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action

The purpose of this project is to reduce BASH risk associated with wetland areas adjacent to the runway at EAFB. The project is needed due to wildlife's demonstrated recurrent use of wetland areas adjacent to the runway. The successes of EAFB's flight missions hinge on the operational readiness of the airfield, which is negatively impacted by wildlife habitat adjacent to the runway.

Description of the Preferred Alternative/Proposed Action

Implementing the Proposed Action would permanently remove all wildlife habitat features from wetlands within the North Slough, South Slough, and Pond 2 Project Areas. The Proposed Action may include a variety of engineered solutions to retain the stormwater management function of the wetlands while removing wildlife attractants. The final design will meet Unified Facilities Criteria (UFC) requirements for airfield grade, including DoD UFC 3-260-01 *Airfield and Heliport Planning and Design* (4 February 2019), and meet safety standards set forth in the EAFB BASH Plan and AFI 91-212 BASH Management Program (1 June 2021). Specific construction methods that may be utilized include extending culverts within the channels, maintaining open drainage in the channel by constructing hardened bottom and non-impounding check dams, and sharpening and/or armoring the edges of ponds.

Description of Alternative 1

Alternative 1 would completely modify wetlands in the North Slough (Wetland E), South Slough (Wetlands D1 and D2 only), and Pond 2 (Wetland A only). This alternative mitigates wildlife habitat within about 1,500 feet of the runway and associated movement areas (i.e., Alert Facility ramp) in excess of 2,000 feet of the runway. This alternative significantly reduces wildlife habitat in the airfield environment, greatly improves safety for military aircrew operating from the airfield and reduces the need for active hazard wildlife management. Alternative 1 predominantly addresses goals outlined in AFI 91-212; however, this alternative does not address the goals outlined in the BASH Plan and would leave wildlife attractants within the perimeter fence (WEZ 2). This alternative would still require personnel to be on the airfield to address wildlife hazards.

Description of Alternative 2

Alternative 2 would completely modify wetlands in the North Slough (Wetland E), South Slough (Wetlands D1 only), and Pond 2 (Wetland A only). This alternative would significantly mitigate wildlife habitat within about 1,500 feet of the runway; however, this alternative would still allow wildlife attractants within 500 feet of an Aircraft Movement Area (i.e., Alert Facility ramp) and WEZ 2. This alternative only partially addresses goals within the BASH Plan and AFI 91-212. While wildlife habitat attractants would be reduced, this alternative would still require active hazard wildlife mitigation on the airfield.

Description of Alternative 3

Alternative 3 would require the installation and maintenance of deterrent exclusionary devices (e.g wire grids or bird balls) as well as additional on-site wildlife staff presence within all areas of the North Slough, South Slough, and Pond 2. This alternative only minimally addresses goals within the BASH Plan and AFI 91-212 and, while it does exclude/conceal wildlife habitat in the airfield environment, it requires increased wildlife staff to ensure exclusionary techniques are effective. Implementing this alternative would also have associated annual costs.

Description of the No-Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, North Slough, South Slough, and Pond 2 Project Areas would remain in their current state. Per the EAFB BASH Plan, the 28 Bomber wing (BW)/ Flight Safety Office (SEF) and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Wildlife Services

(WS) would continue vegetation maintenance and active wildlife control measures to reduce BASH risk.

The Air Force has identified the Proposed Action as the preferred alternative.

Summary of Environmental Findings

The Air Force has concluded that the Proposed Action would have no effect on airspace, land use, the Air Installation Compatible Use Zone (AICUZ), noise, safety and occupational health, geology, soils, farmland, visual resources, socioeconomic resources, environmental justice, groundwater, hazardous materials/toxic substances, or cultural resources. Through implementation of the Proposed Action, approximately 9.3 acres of wetlands will be impacted. The Air Force is committed to no net loss of wetlands consistent with Executive Order 11990. EAFB acquired authorization for the Proposed Action from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act (CWA), Nationwide Permit (NWP) No. 14., and committed to comply with the two special conditions of that NWP. The Air Force will renew this authorization, and recommit to any special conditions if applicable, prior to the start of any work. In addition, South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources advised obtaining a permit from the Air Quality or Minerals and Mining Program to address source and fugitive emissions, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service stated that unavoidable wetland impacts should be mitigated, preferably through wetland restoration, and requested the submittal of a mitigation plan prior to ground-disturbing activities. Short-term negligible to minor adverse effects would be expected on stormwater infrastructure and air quality. These effects would primarily occur as a result of construction activities and would cease upon completion of the project. Long-term minor beneficial effects would be expected on biological resources and contaminated sites.

The analyses of the affected environment and environmental consequences of implementing the Preferred Alternative/Proposed Action presented in the EA concluded that by implementing environmental protection measures EAFB would be in compliance with applicable environmental regulations and requirements.

Mitigation

As the proponent for the Proposed Action, EAFB will be responsible for ensuring that the mitigations listed above in the environmental findings section and in the EA are in place prior to taking any specific action. EAFB will oversee and verify mitigations are fully funded and in place and being carried out, as identified in this FONSI/FONPA. It is expected that mitigation will generally consist of wetland creation and/or enhancement, purchase of mitigation bank credits from another approved Mitigation Bank, or a combination. Floodplain mitigation, should it be required, would likely consist of floodplain creation and/or preservation within the same watershed. Mitigation will be finalized during the project's permitting and final design phase and before construction begins.

Public Review

Early stakeholder engagement with relevant agencies and federally recognized tribes was conducted at the beginning of the EA process. A public notice of availability was posted in the *Rapid City Journal*, *Black Hill Pioneer*, and *Native Sun News* in October 2022, announcing the

availability of the Draft EA for public review and comment. The documents were also made available for review on the internet on the EAFB military website. The Air Force received zero comments from public agencies during the review period.

Tribal consultation letters were mailed to federally recognized tribes in August of 2022. Additional attempts were made to contact the tribes via email after letters were sent. Two tribes responded, the first having no comment and the second asked some clarifying questions which were answered promptly. Appendix A, of the subsequent EA, includes records of all correspondence with the tribes.

Finding of No Significant Impact

Based on my review of the facts and analyses contained in the attached EA, conducted under the provisions of NEPA, CEQ Regulations, and 32 CFR §989, I conclude that through the use of off-site mitigation to offset impacts to wetlands and the floodplain, the Proposed Action achieves the needs of this project and would not have significant environmental impacts, either by itself or cumulatively with other known projects. Accordingly, an Environmental Impact Statement is not required. This analysis fulfills the requirements of NEPA, the CEQ's NEPA regulations at 40 CFR §§1500-1508 and the Air Force EIAP regulations at 32 CFR § 989. The signing of the Finding of No Significant Impact completes the EIAP.

Finding of No Practicable Alternative

Pursuant to Executive Orders (EOs) 11988 and 11990, and taking into consideration all environmental, economic, and other pertinent information submitted, I find that there is no practicable alternative to the Proposed Action, which will impact floodplains and wetlands, as described in the attached EA. However, through the use of off-site mitigation, impacts to wetlands and the floodplain will not be significant. Other alternatives listed above do not fully satisfy all of the screening requirements and therefore are not practicable alternatives. This finding fulfills the requirements of the referenced Executive Orders and the EIAP regulation, 32 CFR § 989.14 for a Finding of No Practicable Alternative.

SIGNATORY NAME, Rank/Title

Date



REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
CORPS OF ENGINEERS, OMAHA DISTRICT
SOUTH DAKOTA REGULATORY OFFICE
28563 POWERHOUSE ROAD, ROOM 118
PIERRE, SOUTH DAKOTA 57501-6174

September 3, 2020

South Dakota Regulatory Office
28563 Powerhouse Road, Room 118
Pierre, South Dakota 57501

Ellsworth Air Force Base, 28 CES
Attn: Mark Howard
2125 Scott Drive
Ellsworth AFB, South Dakota 57706

Dear Mr. Howard:

We have reviewed your request for Department of the Army authorization for installing storm water pipe to eliminate wildlife hazards in an unnamed tributary. The project is located in the northeast quarter of Section 13, Township 2 North, Range 8 East, Pennington County, South Dakota.

Based on the information you provided, this office has determined that your work is authorized by the Department of the Army Nationwide Permit No. (14), found in the January 6, 2017 Federal Register (82 FR 1860), Reissuance of Nationwide Permits. Enclosed is a fact sheet that fully describes this Nationwide Permit and lists the General Conditions that must be adhered to for this authorization to remain valid. Please note that deviations from the original plans and specifications of your project could require additional authorization from this office. In addition, the following special conditions must be adhered to:

1. Perpetual restrictions (i.e., deed restrictions, restrictive covenants, and/or conservation easements) shall be placed on the mitigation site to guarantee preservation for wetland and wildlife resources. The legal description shall be determined by a registered land surveyor. A certified copy of the document(s) recorded by the Registrar of Deeds for Meade County shall be provided to the South Dakota Regulatory Office prior to the initiation of the culvert installation.
2. Annual mitigation monitoring reports shall be provided to the US Army Corps of Engineers, South Dakota Regulatory Office, 28563 Powerhouse Road, Room 118, Pierre, South Dakota 57501, not later than November 15, 2021, and each consecutive year, not later than November 15, for a period of 5 years, or until the Corps of Engineers determines that the mitigation project is acceptable. The monitoring reports shall, at a minimum, conform to the criteria outlined in the attached Corps of Engineers, Regulatory Guidance Letter No. 08-03, October 10, 2008, Minimum Monitoring Requirements for

Compensatory Mitigation Projects Involving the Restoration, Establishment, and/or Enhancement of Aquatic Resources.

You are responsible for all work accomplished in accordance with the terms and conditions of the Nationwide Permit. If a contractor or other authorized representative will be accomplishing the work authorized by the Nationwide Permit on your behalf, it is strongly recommended that they be provided a copy of this letter and the attached conditions so that they are aware of the limitations of the applicable Nationwide Permit. Any activity that fails to comply with all of the terms and conditions of the Nationwide Permit will be considered unauthorized and subject to appropriate enforcement action.

In compliance with General Condition 30, the attached Compliance Certification form must be signed and returned to the address listed upon completion of the authorized work and any required mitigation.

This verification is valid until the Nationwide Permit is modified, reissued, or revoked. All of the existing Nationwide Permits are scheduled to be modified, reissued, or revoked prior to March 18, 2022.

Should you at any time become aware that either an endangered and/or threatened species or its critical habitat exists within the project area, you must immediately notify this office.

You can obtain additional information about the Regulatory Program from our website:

<http://www.nwo.usace.army.mil/Missions/RegulatoryProgram/SouthDakota.aspx>

The Omaha District, Regulatory Branch is committed to providing quality and timely service to our customers. In an effort to improve customer service, please take a moment to complete our Customer Service Survey found on our website at http://corpsmapu.usace.army.mil/cm_apex/f?p=regulatory_survey. If you do not have Internet access, you may call and request a paper copy of the survey that you can complete and return to us by mail or fax.

If you have any questions concerning this determination, please feel free to contact this office at the above Regulatory Office address, or telephone Jeff Breckenridge at (605) 341-3169, ext. 3621 and reference action ID NWO-2008-00731-PIE.

Sincerely,

Steven E. Naylor
Regulatory Program Manager,
South Dakota

Enclosures

cc:
Ferber Engineering (Muck)

PERMIT COMPLETION AND COMPLIANCE CERTIFICATION

Permit Number: NWO-2008-00731-PIE

Name of Permittee: Ellsworth Air Force Base, 28 CES

Date of Issuance: September 3, 2020

Upon **completion** of the activity(s) authorized by this permit, including any approved mitigation (if required), please sign this certification and return it to the following address:

US Army Corps of Engineers
South Dakota Regulatory Office
28563 Powerhouse Road, Room 118
Pierre, South Dakota 57501

Please note that your permitted activity is subject to a compliance inspection by a US Army Corps of Engineers representative. If you fail to comply with this permit, you are subject to permit suspension, modification, or revocation.

I hereby certify that the work authorized by the above referenced permit has been completed in accordance with the terms and conditions of the said permit, and the approved mitigation was completed in accordance with the permit.

Signature of Permittee

Date