

Powder River Training Complex
Commonly Asked Questions
September 15, 2010

QUESTION: Why is this expansion needed?

Answer: **Realistic and effective training.** Twenty years ago, enemy surface-to-air threats generally reached 20 to 30 miles and B-1s bombed targets from less than a mile away. Today, enemy threats reach hundreds of miles and B-1s shoot missiles over similar ranges. To be able to train realistically, we simply need more space to practice the kinds of engagements our Airmen expect to see in combat. This will increase the likelihood of successfully accomplishing our combat missions and help bring our aircrew home alive.

QUESTION: The proposed airspace goes over an area where I currently fly general aviation aircraft. Does this mean I have to stop flying in that area?

Answer: **No. The proposed expansion does not include any restricted areas that ban civilian aviation.** Military aircraft and general aviation aircraft will need to deconflict from one another in the same way we do today in the current airspace.

QUESTION: Many counties depend upon regional air ambulance and helicopter medical evacuation (MEDEVAC) capability in order to transport patients who are in danger of losing life, limb, or eyesight. Will the USAF give these flights priority over its scheduled military training?

Answer: **Just like in the current airspace, the FAA gives airspace priority to emergency responders.** For these types of cases, military aircraft would be notified and directed to vacate any areas needed by emergency responders. This procedure is in accordance with our existing memorandums of agreement already on file.

QUESTION: Will the infrastructure exist (assigned civilian compatible frequencies, repeaters, etc.) for air ambulance and MEDEVAC operators on life-saving missions to be able to directly communicate their need for airspace with the authority (FAA, military controllers, etc.) in charge of this airspace?

Answer: **Infrastructure already exists for emergency communication.** Air ambulance and MEDVAC pilots can contact FAA controlling agencies to ensure they receive priority access to the airspace. Additionally, pilots can obtain information via published frequencies for the airspace or prior to flight with a FAA flight briefing available 24/7 by toll-free phone (1-800-WXBRIEF (992-7433)). Real-time communication with some FAA controlling agencies is limited in some areas beneath the airspace. In these cases, or in case of an emergency where none of these options

are possible, pilots can still contact military aircraft directly via radio on "Guard" frequency (VHF 121.5 or UHF 243.0). Military pilots monitor guard from take off to landing.

QUESTION: How can civil pilots find out when the airspace is active and who will they call "real time" to see if there are aircraft in the airspace and to get potential flight following (website/phone number)?

Answer: **The proposed airspace would follow the same procedures used today.** The airspace will be scheduled in advance and any airspace scheduled outside the charted times would be published by NOTAM not less than 2 hours prior to activation. Pilots can obtain this information from FAA Flight Service by calling 1-800-WXBRIEF (992-7433). They can also access the FAA NOTAM website at www.faa.gov/pilots/flt_plan/notams/. In flight, they can use flight following for air traffic advisories or priority clearance through the airspace, if required. In an emergency, they can also call on VHF Guard Frequency (VHF 121.5 or UHF 243.0) to broadcast their intentions and deconflict their routing. All military aircraft monitor guard frequencies in flight. B-1s monitor VHF and UHF guard frequencies. These processes and procedures are normal for any licensed pilot.

QUESTION: How can private pilots avoid potential wake vortices from B-1's flying low-level?

Just like in the current airspace, all private and military pilots are to "see and avoid" other aircraft while flying under Visual Flight Rules (or VFR). Over the last 20 years in the existing airspace, Ellsworth AFB has experienced no mid-air collisions, no hazardous air traffic reports, no Terrain Collision Avoidance System (TCAS) violations, and no airspace violations using these procedures. The proposal would utilize these proven procedures in the extended airspace. FAA Advisory Circular No. 90-23F, Aircraft Wake Turbulence, also addresses this subject and includes recommendations related to operational procedures to avoid wake vortices.

QUESTION: Is chaff harmful to livestock?

No. The constituents of chaff and chaff debris are either inert or already prevalent in the environment. While chaff made 10 years ago contained lead, no chaff used or manufactured today contains lead. The chemical composition of a B-1's RR-188 training chaff is aluminum-coated glass fibers. The glass fiber dipoles are generally 1 mil (25.4 microns) in diameter, including the aluminum coating which is 0.12 mil thick. In other words, each single piece of chaff is smaller than a single strand of (short length) human hair. Chaff contains naturally occurring elements in very low concentrations and the dispersion rates of chaff falling to the earth further mitigate the effects. **Based on reviews of numerous toxicological studies, the principal components of chaff**

(aluminum, silica glass fibers, and stearic acid) will not pose an adverse impact to human and environmental health. Several studies were conducted on cattle and goats that showed they would avoid eating clumps of chaff that were placed directly into their food and only consumed chaff when coated with molasses and thoroughly mixed with food. Those animals that did ingest the chaff showed no signs of health effects. Additional information on Chaff will be included in the DEIS and can currently be found at www.accplanning.org/chaff_and_flares.html.

QUESTION: I'm concerned about fires from flare usage. How will your procedures avoid starting a forest fire?

Answer: **In the last 20 years of B-1 aviation in other ranges across the country, there have not been any cases of fires started by B-1 flares.** Current military defensive flares are not explosive--they are magnesium pellets that when ignited, burn for a short period (approximately 5 seconds) at approximately 1,202 degrees Fahrenheit burning out after falling approximately 500 feet. To minimize the risk of a flare caused fire, the Air Force is proposing flare usage at 2000' above ground level and higher. To further minimize risk, fire danger beneath each individual MOA would be monitored using the National Fire Danger Rating System. Flare use would be suspended if an "Extreme Fire Danger" condition exists beneath the airspace.

QUESTION: Would the proposed airspace expansion require the removal of the existing communications towers or windmills (i.e., cell, radio, microwave, etc.) which are within the confines of the proposed airspace expansion?

Answer: No. The proposed action would not include removal of any towers. The Air Force would continue to avoid existing or new communications towers as they do today.

QUESTION: Would the proposed airspace expansion hinder the day-to-day operation of the existing communications towers (i.e., cell, radio, microwave, etc.) which are within the confines of the proposed airspace expansion?

Answer: No. The PRTC expansion would not have any anticipated impact on day-to-day operations of existing or new communications towers.

QUESTION: Would the proposed airspace expansion require work stoppage on existing wind turbine farms which are currently under development and to be located within the confines of the proposed airspace expansion and/or would the proposed airspace expansion prohibit the development of future wind turbine farms which may be placed within the confines of the proposed airspace expansion

Answer: **The process of obtaining approval for wind turbine construction would not change from what is currently required.** The Air Force does not directly authorize or prohibit these items, but does participate in the FAA's Obstruction Evaluation Process. Any new structures would be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. No recommendation for FAA objection is made unless a specific unacceptable impact is identified. Present wind turbine farms would be charted and avoided. Wind turbine farms with windmills greater than 100' in height would continue to be charted on airspace maps as obstructions to flight as they are today. The Air Force will address any potential impacts in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS).

QUESTION: Would aircraft flying in the vicinity of wind turbine farms negatively impact the mechanical operation and/or electrical generating capacity of these machines?

Answer: Impacts to wind turbine farms caused by B-1 and B-52 over flight will be analyzed in detail in the Environmental Impact Study (EIS). The Air Force studied the wake turbulence effects of low-level B-1 and B-52 over flights on private ranch windmills in a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for the Realistic Bomber Training Initiative. The study concluded that **wake vortices, under normal flight operations, and in all but rare atmospheric conditions, fail to generate sufficient velocities to damage structures** (RBTI FEIS, Aug 06). The use of training chaff and flares would not be expected to impact their operation.

QUESTION: How often will these training missions take place?

Answer: **Training within the proposed PRTC would occur daily, mostly Monday through Friday, approximately 240 days per year.**

QUESTION: What missions are flown at low level altitudes and how many?

Answer: Low level missions include low level navigation training at 500 feet above ground level and higher. Low level missions include low altitude threat reaction and avoidance training, show of force/presence training and low level attack training. Potentially, those missions could be conducted anytime the airspace is active as these missions are part of continuation training and must be routinely practiced by aircrew. For the B-1, approximately 20-30% of time in the airspace would be at low altitude between 500 feet above ground level and less than 10,000 feet, approximately 25% of that (5-6% of the total) will be at 500 feet. During large force exercises (LFEs), other aircraft such as the F-16 could spend approximately 36% of their time at altitudes between 500' AGL and 2,000' AGL. These numbers are subject to change as alternatives are refined. Detailed information will be included in the EIS.

QUESTION: Where do the B-1s do supersonic training now?

Answer: Current supersonic training for the B-1 is done at remote ranges such as the Nevada Test and Training Range (NTTR) and the Utah Test and Training Range (UTTR).

QUESTION: How often would supersonic flights occur and how low would they be?

Answer: **Supersonic flights would occur primarily during infrequent Large Force Exercises (LFE).** The Air Force is proposing to fly supersonic above 10,000 feet MSL for small sized fighter aircraft and above 20,000 mean sea level (MSL) for B-1 aircraft. These altitudes reduce a sonic boom's effect, if one is sensed on the ground. Detailed information will be included in the draft EIS.

QUESTION: How would the airspace be used or scheduled by Ellsworth AFB B-1's?

Answer: **Airspace use would be published on the aeronautical charts depicting the military operating area as well as other DoD and FAA publications.** Routine training normally would not be scheduled for the weekend. **Military training use of the airspace outside the published times would be announced with a FAA Notice to Airman (NOTAM).** NOTAMs would be issued no later than 2 hours prior to airspace use. Normally, the airspace would be used by one training mission at a time. Missions could be a single B-1 or formation of two B-1s in each airspace sector. Missions normally would occupy a sector for one hour and would utilize either all high altitude (above 20,000') or high and low altitude airspace. If low altitude training was necessary, the mission normally would be in the low altitude environment for 15 to 20 minutes maneuvering at 500-2000 feet above the ground. All missions would operate in the airspace on a flight plan filed with the FAA and with an Instrument Flight Rules (IFR) clearance. Infrequently, all elements of the proposed airspace could be scheduled simultaneously to allow joint training with multiple aircraft types. These integrated training requirements are called Large Force Exercises (LFEs) and could occur up to once per calendar quarter or 10 days per year.

QUESTION: How would the airspace be scheduled and who would control the MOAs?

Answer: **Just like today, the airspace would be scheduled by the Ellsworth Air Force Base scheduling office.** Ellsworth will provide the scheduled times to the FAA who will in turn issue NOTAMs to inform the public when the airspace would be active. Additionally, the applicable aviation charts will include the normal airspace usage times. Control of the airspace would be retained by the designated FAA Air Route Traffic Control Center (ARTCC). The PRTC would fall under three ARTCC's airspace, Minneapolis, Denver, and Salt Lake City.

QUESTION: Is the Air Force planning to evaluate the number of airports affected by this and would such an evaluation include impacts on general aviation in addition to commercial air traffic?

Answer: **Yes.** These studies will be accomplished by the Air Force and the FAA as part of the environmental impact analysis process and will be taken into consideration.

QUESTION: Would the proposed MOA include the Minot AFB B-52 training mission?

Answer: **Yes**

QUESTION: Is the Air Force considering no-fly areas over houses, towns, near airports, etc?

Answer: **No-fly areas will be managed just as they are today in the existing airspace.** Avoidance areas will be in accordance with FAA Order 7400.4 and 14 CFR Part 91. Areas requiring additional avoidance distance or not covered by standing guidance will be negotiated case-by-case between the 28th Bomb Wing and the organization or individual requesting temporary or permanent avoidance.

QUESTION: When will the Air Force's study be complete?

Answer: The Draft EIS is currently scheduled to be released for public comment in July 2010 with the Final EIS following in the late spring or early summer or 2011.

QUESTION: Will there be other opportunities to comment?

Answer: **Yes.** Once the Draft EIS is released to the public there will be a minimum of a 70 day public comment period. During that period the Air Force will hold formal public hearings. This process is currently scheduled to occur in the late summer/early fall of 2010.