

Proposed Powder River Training Complex

Additional Commonly Asked Questions

Current as of 31 March, 2014

Purpose: This document is meant to help answer many of the frequently asked questions regarding the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Circular of the modified Aeronautical Proposal for the Powder River Training Complex (PRTC).

NOTE: No final decisions have been made and none will be made until the National Environmental Policy Act process is complete.

Q1) What is the “FAA Circular?” What difference does it make whether FAA takes action on the proposal or not?

A1) Special Use Airspace non-rulemaking circulars are prepared and distributed by the FAA to ensure wide dissemination to the potentially affected aviation user community and provide a minimum of 45 days for public comment. A circular should contain sufficient information to assist interested persons in preparing comments on the aeronautical impact of the proposal. It does not replace or substitute for an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). While the Circular focuses on aeronautical impacts, the EIS evaluates a much broader group of impacts to include, but not limited to, aeronautic, air quality, water quality, safety, noise, social-economic, environmental justice, land use, cultural and historic preservation, etc.

Q2) I thought the PRTC proposal was withdrawn, so why is the FAA now continuing the proposal?

A2) The Air Force (AF) has continued to develop the PRTC proposal since the public hearings and comment period conducted in 2010. There were more than 2000 individual comments on the Draft EIS, which was based on the initial aeronautical proposal. The AF has been analyzing those comments and suitable responses, as well as appropriate mitigation, as it drives to the final decision on the proposal. Currently, the FAA is circularizing a modified Aeronautical Proposal; that process seeks to identify any remaining or unknown Air Traffic Control conflicts. Those impacts will be considered along with the environmental impacts analyzed in the Final EIS before a final decision is made.

Q3) Why haven't we seen any new developments to the proposal since 2010?

A3) The AF and FAA have been conducting numerous meetings and discussions to minimize the impacts of PRTC to all National Airspace System (NAS) users which resulted in the modified aeronautical proposal. Additionally, the AF is finalizing the consultations with other parties, including federal, state and tribal stakeholders, under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. Additionally, the AF, based on the new National Strategy, the future AF aircraft structure and budgetary concerns revalidated the requirements for PRTC. Once all these critical consultations are complete, then the AF will finalize the EIS.

Q4) When I look at the FAA Aeronautical Proposal, how does that differ from the AF's original proposal?

A4) Per the discussions with the FAA, the distance between PRTC and several airports has been extended to reduce or mitigate any conflicts for public aviation operating near the borders. Also, the upper airspace limit of the proposal has been lowered to allow more cross country air traffic. Finally, the ceilings of portions of the proposed airspace have been lowered even further to allow for more efficient arrivals and departures for the busiest airports.

Q5) When PRTC is active, won't all air traffic be affected?

A5) The AF is committed to minimize any impacts to the extent feasible to other NAS users. The GAP Military Operating Areas (MOA) would only be active during Large Force Exercises (LFE), which would take place for no more than a total of ten days each year. Further, AF policy is to accommodate instrument arrivals/departures at affected airports with minimum delay. The AF is further committed to installation of a communications system that would recall military aircraft from portions of the airspace to allow Instrument Flight Rule operations arrivals and departures, air ambulance service and other recognized priority aviation missions. Additionally, the AF has vertically stratified the proposed MOAs to deconflict operations below 12,000' Mean Sea Level so this airspace could be returned to other NAS users each day once the low level portion of the military operations is complete.

Q6) What provisions are made for VFR and ground activities that low level flight may interrupt?

A6) VFR operations are permitted within the PRTC. AF is further committed to providing the same consideration for ground activities that it provides under the current Powder River MOA by placing short term low flight restrictions in certain areas during calving/branding season or other significant occasions (such as events on the ground involving Indian Tribe gatherings, festivals, and religious ceremonies).

Q7) What is the LFE and how will affect general and commercial aviation?

A7) A professional football team begins practices in different groups; linemen in one area, running backs in another, defensive backs in another, etc. The AF trains in the same manner, B-52s at Minot, F-22s at Langley, F-16s in Sioux Falls, etc. Just as the pros bring all the different disciplines together for the final scrimmage of the practice, the AF does the same by bringing the different aircraft together for a scrimmage which we call an LFE. PRTC brings the volume of airspace together for LFEs up to three days per quarter for a total of no more than 10 days per year.

Q8) Why is PRTC so large?

A8) The AF must train to the full spectrum of operations; from counter-insurgency operations through major combat. Over Afghanistan, the B-1 is typically the only aircraft available to NATO forces. While PRTC seems big, it is about one tenth the size of Afghanistan where our counter-insurgency tactics, techniques and procedures (TTP) have been developed. The size of PRTC allows aircrews to receive a mission, move rapidly to the location and then find, fix, track and simulate engaging a target using these

refined TTP. On the other end of full spectrum operations of major combat, enemy air defense systems can reach out over 100 miles to detect AF aircraft. During LFEs, the distances afforded by the PRTC would allow the AF to train under realistic scenarios and configured airspace to support full spectrum operations against these modern threat air defense systems. PRTC provides the Air Force with the properly sized, realistic airspace required to train for the complete spectrum of operations.

Q9) Why can't these actions take place in current airspace at other locations across the United States?

A9) The current PRTC can only support about 45 percent of the sorties flown by Ellsworth AFB. The expanded airspace would support nearly 85 percent of the sorties locally. Instead of wasting time, as well as wear and tear on the aircraft, flying to other locations, aircrews would gain increased combat readiness valued at approximately \$23M/year by flying in the proposed local training areas, which would allow more crews to get more training with the same number of authorized flight hours. Additionally, there are only a limited number of locations that have the size to support LFE. Their relatively distant locations or already-established test and training flight priorities, or both, would result in even fewer opportunities for crews to receive this valuable training.