

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)

High Frequency Beyond Line of Sight (HF BLOS) Antenna Project

Newport Test Annex, Stockbridge Test Annex

AFRL/RI, Newport, Stockbridge New York

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, the U.S. Air Force (Air Force) assessed the potential environmental consequences associated with the installation and operation of High Frequency Beyond Line of Sight Antenna facilities at the Newport Test Annex (NTA) and the Stockbridge Test Annex (STA). Analysis of an additional walk-up tower at the NTA (Irish Hill Facility) and potential demolition of structures in disrepair at the NTA have also been considered in this analysis.

The Environmental Assessment (EA), incorporated by reference into this finding, analyzes the potential environmental consequences of activities associated with constructing a new facility or renovation of existing facility to improve the current HF BLOS capabilities at both the NTA and the STA. This assessment provides environmental protection measures to avoid or reduce adverse environmental impacts.

The EA considers all potential impacts of the Proposed Action, the No-Action Alternative and several other alternatives which were eliminated from detailed analysis in planning. The EA also considers cumulative environmental impacts with other projects in the Region of Influence.

PROPOSED ACTION (Preferred Alternative) Construction of new facilities; optional demolition of existing facilities.

The Proposed Action includes the construction of two new research antenna transmitter/receiver facilities, and the optional demolition of adjacent existing facilities in disrepair. HF BLOS primary function is to communicate between the STA, the NTA and Kirtland AFB, NM; approximately 2,000 miles. An additional 80' walk up tower will also be constructed to continue experimentation in the microwave RF frequency range (30 MHz to the 300 GHz), THz range and Optical frequency range. This tower will perform the same types of experimentation that is currently underway at the NTA.

ALTERNATIVE 2: NO-ACTION ALTERNATIVE

Under the No-Action Alternative, the Proposed Action (construction of new HFBLOS facilities and an additional walk-up tower) at the Tanner Hill site and Stockbridge site will not proceed. Under this alternative, AFRL/RI will be unable to enhance the missions at the NTA, and STA. The HF mission will eventually cease as HF modernization programs elsewhere make AFRL/RI's facilities antiquated and obsolete. HF modernization programs have been identified as a priority by both the Chief of Staff of the Air Force (CSAF) and the Vice-Chief of Staff of the Air Force (VCSAF) to address gaps identified by combatant commanders that could adversely impact our ability to meet mission requirements.

The No-Action Alternative cannot be considered reasonable as it fails to address the purpose of and need for the action as described in Section 1. However, it will be carried forward for further analysis, consistent with CEQ regulations, to provide a baseline against which the impacts of the Proposed Action and alternatives can be assessed.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT ELIMINATED FROM DETAILED ANALYSIS

Construction and operation of the proposed facilities at other AFRL and DOD sites within reasonable proximity to the STA/NTA are/were considered for this project. However additional infrastructure, equipment and resources for security and operations at some of these sites, including major undertakings to retrofit or install proper facilities, would be required to achieve operation similar to the current state of those sites in the proposed action.

As a result, these alternatives were considered and discussed but eliminated from detailed analysis in the assessment.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

When considering the proposed action and no action alternative, there is little opportunity for either alternative to have significant adverse impacts on the natural or human environment. The construction of the facilities in the proposed action does not significantly alter the landscape, character or general operations at either the STA or the NTA, while enhancing the capabilities of research used in essential warfighting technology.

While the proposed action is largely similar to other actions which have proven to have little to no significant impact to the natural environment, or human environment, previous analysis of radio frequency operations at the NTA by The U.S. Air Force School of Aerospace Medicine (AFSAM) Consultative Service Division specifically requested that changes to the operations of these facilities be reported to AFSAM for analysis for consultation. Consultation resulted in recommendations which will ensure the safety of staff and the public are maintained throughout the operational life of the proposed facilities.

The analyses of the affected environment and environmental consequences of implementing the Proposed Action presented in the EA concluded that by implementing standing environmental protection measures and operational planning, the Air Force will be in compliance with all terms and conditions and reporting requirements.

There are no wetlands or floodplains present within the proposed project area. Potential impacts outlined in the EA include the periodic increase in noise associated with the construction and demolition of existing buildings. The locations and nature of the projects will not have adverse impacts on water resources but could provide a potential benefit to storm water processing abilities of the Newport Site as a net gain of green space is anticipated with the demolition of buildings and return of those areas to landscape. There are no currently listed Threatened or Endangered Species at either of the GSU's in consideration. Migratory birds and eagles may be present on the properties where the project areas occur. However, the project areas specifically are already improved lands

and do not impact regions with habitat characteristics consistent with those required by the species.

Soil excavations for the project will be short duration and occur in the 6-8 ft depth range for construction of new facilities as well as demolition and removal of existing buildings. Hazardous waste and materials will be present on the site as the result of construction and demolition. Removal of hazardous wastes to approved landfill facilities and proper management of hazardous material will be facilitated by AFRL/RI staff and contractors. An asbestos abatement plan will be developed and executed prior to demolitions.

The Air Force has concluded that no significant adverse effects will result to resources as a result of the Proposed Action. Resources analyzed with no significant impact are as follows: air quality, greenhouse gases, biological resources, geology and earth resources, land use, coastal zone resources, noise, public health and safety, transportation, socioeconomics, environmental justice, and water resources. No significant adverse cumulative impacts will result from activities associated with the Proposed Action when considered with past, present, or reasonably foreseeable future projects.

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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 the Proposed Action: Construction of new facility, demolition of existing facility, will not have a significant environmental impact, either by itself or cumulatively with other known projects. Accordingly, an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

The EA accompanies this FONSI and should be referenced for more specific information. The EA was available for public comment for a 30-day period from 18 August 2022 through 18 September 2022. Postings to online access were made available in the Newport Free Library, 7390 Main Street, Newport, New York, The Oneida Public Library at 459 Main Street in Oneida NY and a physical copy was filed at the Jervis Public Library at 613 N Washington St in Rome NY. The public review announcement appeared in the Utica Observer Dispatch and the Herkimer Telegram. The USAF sent the draft EA and FONSI to relevant federal, state, local agencies, and federally recognized Native American Tribes.