

Record of Decision

THE BRAC BEDDOWN AND FLIGHT OPERATIONS OF REMOTELY PILOTED AIRCRAFT AT GRAND FORKS AIR FORCE BASE, NORTH DAKOTA

This document records the decision of the United States Air Force (USAF) with regard to the beddown and flight operations of Unmanned Aircraft Systems including Remotely Piloted Aircraft (RPA)¹ at Grand Forks Air Force Base (GFAFB), North Dakota. In making this decision, the information, analyses, and public comments contained in the *Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the BRAC Beddown and Flight Operations of Remotely Piloted Aircraft at Grand Forks AFB, North Dakota*, were considered, along with other relevant matters.

This Record of Decision (ROD) is prepared in accordance with the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) at Title 40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 1505.2, *Record of Decision in Cases Requiring Environmental Impact Statements*. Specifically, this ROD:

- States the USAF's Decision (page 19);
- Identifies the alternatives considered by the USAF in reaching the decision (see pages 4 through 9) and specifies the environmentally preferable alternative (see page 9);
- Identifies and discusses relevant factors (*e.g.*, statutory mission, national security policy, operational, environmental, economic and technical) that were considered in making the decision among the alternatives and states how those considerations entered into this decision; and
- States the mitigations adopted, determines whether all practicable means to avoid, minimize or mitigate environmental harm from the selected alternative have been adopted, and summarizes the applicable monitoring and enforcement program adopted for the applicable mitigation (see page 15).

BACKGROUND

As a result of the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Commission directives, the USAF will realign installations to produce a more efficient and cost effective base structure for achieving national military objectives. In September, 2005, the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission (DBCRC) submitted findings to the President for approval by Congress. The findings became law on November 9, 2005.

Regarding RPA, the following BRAC directives involving GFAFB were included in the 2005 DBCRC Report:

¹ The RPA is one component of the unmanned aircraft system (UAS). UAS is the acronym used by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), accordingly adopted by the FAA as the official acronym. In addition to the aircraft, the UAS also includes a flight control station and the control data link. The USAF separates UASs into five categories. Categories one through three weigh less than 1,320 pounds and are considered small UASs. The Predator and Global Hawk are in groups four and five, which are called large UASs, characterized as being greater than 1,320 pounds.

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Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

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1. REPORT DATE 17 SEP 2010		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED 00-00-2010 to 00-00-2010	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Record of Decision: The BRAC Beddown and Flight Operations of Remotely Piloted Aircraft at Grand Forks Air Force Base, North Dakota				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Deputy Asst Secretary of the Air Force (Installation),1670 Air Force Pentagon,Washington,DC,20330-1670				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

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Modify infrastructure at Grand Forks AFB to accommodate the emerging UAS mission. The Secretary of Defense will maintain eight to twelve (8-12) KC-135 aircraft at Grand Forks Air Force Base to facilitate an efficient and cost effective beddown of UASs. The Secretary will keep the tankers in place until the UASs are operational at Grand Forks, but not later than 31 Dec 2010 unless otherwise required by the Department of Defense (DoD) for National Emergencies. Grand Forks will remain an active Air Force installation with a new active duty/Air National Guard association unit created in anticipation of emerging missions at Grand Forks.

The current generation of RPA and UASs has been in development for DoD applications since the 1980s. As of February, 2006, the DoD had more the 3,000 UASs, approximately 2,000 of which are supporting ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Similarly, RPA flight hours have increased from about 5,000 hours in 1996 to 109,000 hours in 2005. Flight hours have continued to climb dramatically and, in August, 2008, the Predator (MQ-1), a single type of RPA, had exceeded 400,000 flight hours. In March, 2009, the Predator exceeded 500,000 flight hours. The USAF Global Hawk and Predator are both considered large RPAs. The Global Hawk has a range of over 12,000 miles at speeds of more than 400 mph, and performs missions similar to a low earth orbit. The Predator has a range of 460 miles at speeds up to 135 mph and is a medium-altitude long-endurance RPA.

The USAF defines an RPA as a powered aircraft that does not carry a human operator, uses aerodynamic forces to provide lift, can fly autonomously or be piloted remotely, can be expendable or recoverable, and can carry a lethal or nonlethal payload. Generally, a UAS is comprised of the RPA, a flight control station, and an information and retrieval or processing station. A pilot remotely operates the aircraft from the flight control station.

Two types of RPA are proposed to beddown and be operated from GFAFB: the Global Hawk (RQ-4) and the Predator (MQ-1). RPA, such as the Global Hawk and Predator, have the capability for multiple site operations using two flight control stations. One station is utilized when the aircraft is making take-offs and landings, and the other station takes over flight controls in order to carry out the mission of the RPA. These flight control stations may be located at the same airfield or located in different parts of the world. Air Combat Command (ACC) would operate the Global Hawk from GFAFB. The Predator aircraft would be located at GFAFB and the 119th Wing (119 WG) would perform both launch and recovery operations at GFAFB and remote RPA flight operations from Hector International Airport in Fargo, North Dakota, with maintenance assistance from contractor staff supporting ACC at GFAFB.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The public involvement process and Interagency and Intergovernmental Coordination for Environmental Planning (IICEP) and agency consultation accomplished by the USAF are discussed in the Final EIS (Section 1.5, Chapter 6 and Appendix C). The major elements of public involvement for this EIS process included:

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- Issuance of two Notices of Intent (NOI) to prepare an EIS in the Federal Register (Vol. 73, No. 182, Page 54139 and Vol. 73, No. 189, Page 56562) on September 18, 2008, and September 29, 2008;
- Development of a project website: www.grandforksuaseis.com
- Notification of scoping meetings through distribution of flyers and four different press releases;
- Completion of four public scoping meetings held in Grand Forks, Devils Lake, Langdon and Carrington on October 6, 7, 8, and 9, 2008, respectively;
- Initiation of direct contact with potentially interested and affected government agencies, Native American tribes, government representatives, and citizens through a postcard distributed the week of January 11, 2010. The postcard announced the public hearings and the availability and location(s) of the Draft EIS. The postcard also provided a brief overview of the proposed action and included maps of areas potentially impacted. (see Appendix C of the Final EIS);
- Establishment of regular and meaningful consultation and collaboration with tribal officials within the ROI in compliance with EO 13175 *Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments*.
- Issuance of a Notice of Availability (NOA) for the Draft EIS in the Federal Register (Vol. 72, No 61, Page 15135) on January 15, 2010, thus initiating the 45-day public review period for the Draft EIS. The USAF actively solicited comments during this review period (January 15, 2010, through March 1, 2010);
- An informational meeting was conducted on February 8, 2010, in Grand Forks. Public hearings were conducted in Devils Lake, Carrington, Langdon, and Grand Forks, on February 9, 10, 11, and 12, 2010, respectively, to present the Draft EIS, environmental analysis, and provide the opportunity for public and agency involvement (Chapter 6 presents Comments and Responses); and
- Issuance of a NOA of the Final EIS and start of the 30-day wait period in the *Federal Register* (Vol. 75, No 141, Page 43161) on July 23, 2010

The USAF considered relevant issues raised during the agency and public review period for the Draft EIS. A total of 174 members of the public and agency representatives attended the four public hearings and the informational meeting. At the hearings, 10 members of the public provided oral comments and 3 people provided written comments. In addition, 26 comments were received via the project website or via regular mail. These comments, the transcripts of the public hearings, and responses to comments are contained in Chapter 6 of the Final EIS.

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The USAF consulted and coordinated with Native American tribes and Federal and State agencies throughout the environmental impact analysis process. In addition to coordinating with the tribes and Federal and State agencies, the USAF coordinated closely with the North Dakota Army National Guard throughout the EIS process for use of the existing range at R-5401/Camp Grafton South. The USAF has been in coordination with Native American tribes regarding this project since September 2008. This coordination has involved formal letters, formal Government to Government consultation, face to face meetings, and invitations to scoping meetings and public hearings. This coordination resulted in the receipt of letters from the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians and the Spirit Lake Indian Tribe. Both of those letters indicate that the tribes have no concerns with issues in the EIS. Agencies reviewing all of the resource areas described in the EIS were contacted early in the process through IICEP, as well as via the Draft and Final EIS notification. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. EPA did not indicate that the proposed action or any of the action alternatives would adversely impact protected species. The U.S. EPA indicated that the only protected species that has been documented at Camp Grafton South is the Piping Plover. They stated that the plover is known to occur around water. Because of the reflectivity issues associated with lasers, the USAF has determined lasers will not be used if standing water is present at any of the proposed target locations. The state historic preservation officer (SHPO) did not indicate that the proposed action or any of the action alternatives would adversely impact structures listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) or structures potentially eligible for the NRHP. Federal and State agency response letters are contained in Chapter 6 of the Final EIS.

ALTERNATIVES ANALYZED

As a result of the BRAC guidance, the USAF was instructed to move existing KC-135R tanker aircraft to other USAF Base locations by December 31, 2010, using a phased approach. This approach for the distribution of the KC-135R aircraft was selected in order to maintain the existing support structure at GFAFB for future USAF mission consideration. Secondly, the USAF was instructed to utilize base infrastructure to accommodate the emerging RPA missions. Components of the North Dakota Air National Guard (NDANG) 119 WG and an ACC Global Hawk unit would also be located as tenants at GFAFB. The USAF plans to utilize GFAFB as an operating location for Global Hawk and Predator RPA in conjunction with other existing and future Air Mobility Command (AMC) missions and operations and the newly developed U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) RPA mission. The CBP is a tenant to the AMC host wing at GFAFB.

Headquarters (HQ) ACC established Beale AFB, California, as the first Global Hawk Main Operating Base (MOB) in the continental United States (CONUS). The second Global Hawk MOB is proposed to be established at GFAFB in Fiscal Year (FY) 2010. Eight Global Hawk aircraft, four Mission Control Elements (MCEs), and two Launch and Recovery Elements (LREs) are currently proposed for GFAFB. The Global Hawk unit at GFAFB would be an active duty unit with a FY13 manpower estimate of 771 personnel.

The 119 WG's RPA mission would be supported through an Active Duty association with up to 59 ACC supplied contract maintenance personnel under 119 WG oversight.

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Approximately, 77 BOS personnel would support the mission at GFAFB. Delivery of the Predators could begin in the summer of 2011 and would include eight Predators, one Launch and Recovery Ground Control Station (LRGCS), one Predator Primary Satellite Link (PPSL), spares and associated support equipment. Two Ground Control Station (GCS) units are currently in place at Hector International Airport in Fargo, North Dakota. At Fargo, the 119 WG currently utilizes approximately 275 officer, enlisted, and contracted personnel.

The current airspace structure around GFAFB does not provide suitable airspace necessary to permit the planned family of RPA aircraft to operate and train. The existing airspace above R-5401/Camp Grafton South is insufficient in horizontal and vertical dimensions and is not currently certified for RPA training with lasers. The USAF aeronautical proposal dated November 2, 2009 proposes to modify existing airspace structure in the vicinity of GFAFB that would allow RPA to operate and train in the most cost effective manner. Alternative A (Draft EIS proposed action), Alternative B, Alternative C, and Alternative D were comprehensively evaluated in the Draft EIS and reviewed by the public and agencies. Following that review, the USAF identified Alternative C, with mitigations, as the USAF preferred alternative. The mitigated preferred Alternative C proposes modification to the existing airspace structure around GFAFB and in an existing Military Operations Area (MOA) as necessary to perform RPA operations and training in proposed restricted areas (RAs) or other FAA designated airspace. Although the USAF is proposing changes to the airspace structure around GFAFB, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) is the governing body that has the regulatory authority and responsibility to not only create restricted area but also create other types of special use airspace as charted on the official sectional aeronautical charts.

Integrated training activities (ITAs) would involve other USAF assets operating with RPA no more than four times per year. ITAs are defined as any training that is coordinated and occurs between the RPA and a piloted participating aircraft. These activities could include various training scenarios and laser training and coordinated close air support training. Aircraft directly participating would be expected to include KC-135, B-52, B-1, F-16, A-10, F-15E, or other military aircraft. Estimated flight hours for integrated training would be 20 hours of airspace time per quarter (80 hours/year). The airframes listed above typically operate in a two ship formation for 40 flight hours per quarter (160 flight hours/year).

These integrated training sorties would be conducted on five consecutive days per quarter, over the course of one week, for a period of four hours per day. Each quarter, a separate airframe with KC-135 tanker support would be the focus of integrated training. An example would be first quarter B-52, second quarter B-1, third quarter, F-16, and fourth quarter A-10 or F-15E. Aircraft participating in integrated training would operate in the existing Devils Lake and Tiger MOAs and air traffic control assigned airspace (ATCAAs), including special use airspace (SUA) which overlies the proposed restricted areas (RAs). ATCAAs, MOAs, and RAs would concurrently be active during such integrated training.

Occasional users could be CBP Predator-B aircraft flown out of GFAFB for training scenarios. The future interest or participation of occasional users of the proposed RA is unknown at this time. Other occasional users would be any RPA that could be brought to the area for test,

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research, or for operational testing and evaluation flights. The existing ATCAA, all of the Tiger MOA and the western portion Devils Lake MOA, would remain unchanged to fulfill the needs of current airspace users.

Improvements at GFafb and modification to airspace would allow RPA, facilities, personnel and the necessary infrastructure, including operational and training airspace at GFafb and in the surrounding region to accommodate the RPA missions. The ground-based improvements at GFafb necessary to support the RPA mission include various construction, demolition and renovation projects.

The USAF has established a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the North Dakota Army National Guard for use of R-5401/Camp Grafton South. The range would be operated per the approved Range Management Plan. At R-5401/Camp Grafton South, no site work is required besides the installation of warning signs and the placement of temporary placard or former vehicle and structural type targets within the areas pre-certified by the Optical Radiation Safety Branch of the 711th Human Performance Wing. The Optical Radiation Safety Branch of the 711th Human Performance Wing has formally certified the Range Management Plan and the range (R-5401) for laser use. The USAF is awaiting FAA decision on RPA flight operations to utilize the Camp Grafton South Laser Range.

The Final EIS evaluates the creation of new RAs in and around GFafb and Camp Grafton. As stated in Section 1.5 of the Final EIS, FAAJO 7400.2G paragraph 23-1-2, states that RAs are “established when determined necessary to confine or segregate activities considered hazardous to nonparticipating aircraft.” The USAF’s aeronautical process states that it does not consider UAS operations to be hazardous operations (AP 2009, page 1). The FAA and the USAF continue to discuss the scope of the USAF’s aeronautical proposal and anticipate discussions will continue after a ROD for this EIS is signed. As a cooperating agency and the agency with sole jurisdiction over the airspace, the FAA will complete an independent review and evaluation of the USAF’s EIS and ROD. The FAA has informed the USAF that, under current Orders, the FAA does not anticipate being able to adopt those portions of the EIS that propose creation of RAs for non-hazardous operations (AP 2009, page 1). According to the purpose and need, as described in Chapter 1, the USAF has broadly analyzed the environmental impacts associated with actual RPA operations irrespective of any subsequent air space classification. The USAF recognizes that supplemental environmental analysis could result, pending the outcome of FAA Headquarters review.

In order to determine the high and low ends of the airspace consequences associated with RA creation, activation and RPA flight operations, as proposed in the Aeronautical Proposal (November 2, 2009), two operational scenarios were evaluated. Under Scenario 1 the airspace would be scheduled from 6,000 feet mean sea level (MSL) to FL180 (FL 180 is determined by meteorological conditions and is approximately 18,000 feet MSL) for training and activated from 0700 to 2200 daily, by NOTAM four hours in advance; other times by NOTAM. Scenario 2 would schedule each airspace segment, such as the proposed Devils Lake RA (R-54XG) from 10,000 feet MSL to 14,000 feet MSL in advance and this segment would be activated only when a training Predator is present.

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Alternative A, Restricted Area Creation, Ground-Based Improvements and Personnel Changes - Airspace Scenarios 1 and 2

Alternative A, referred to as the Proposed Action at the issuance of the Draft EIS, includes the creation of stratified RA within the eastern portion of the Tiger (northern or R-54XD and R54-XE) and Devils Lake (southern or R-54XG) MOAs, the creation of a new RPA stratified airfield RA (R-54XA), and the creation of three stratified RA corridors (R-54XB, R-54XC and R-54XF) for transit to and between the RPA training areas (See Figure 2.4-1 in the Final EIS). Implementation of the Alternative A would allow Global Hawk aircraft to spiral up through the proposed airfield RA (R-54XA) to transit up to Class A airspace. In addition, the Predator would also spiral up through R-54XA to access the northwest or southwest transit RAs (R-54XB and R-54XC). The stratification of RA would allow for civil use of the unscheduled portion of the airspace during military operations. This alternative also includes the proposed expansion of existing RA around R-5401/Camp Grafton South (R-5402) as necessary to permit the proposed RPA operations and training.

More specifically, this alternative includes:

- Creation of stratified RA for RPA training areas;
- Creation of new stratified RA above GFAFB for RPA departure and arrival, herein referred to as the airfield RA (R-54XA);
- Creation of stratified RA for two RPA transit corridors, R-54XB to the proposed northern training area and R-54XC to the proposed southern training area from GFAFB to each of the proposed Tiger (R-54XD and R54-XE) and Devils Lake (R-54XG) training areas and a proposed north-south access corridor (R-54XF) between the two proposed RA training areas;
- Creation of RA above R-5401/Camp Grafton South (R-5402). The R-5402 (Camp Grafton laser extension airspace) and R-54XG are being evaluated under FAA RA criteria because of non-eye safe laser operations. The volume of airspace has been certified by the Department of Defense for laser operations (Air Force Research Laboratory 2009) and is environmentally evaluated in the Final EIS.;
- Construction of one new 4-bay RPA hangar on the Bravo Ramp, installation of two AVGAS tanks, multiple building renovations and airfield and communication infrastructure upgrades at GFAFB; and
- Certification of laser targeting capabilities on R-5401/Camp Grafton South.
- In addition, the beddown of the RPA missions would include approximately 907 personnel to GFAFB (771 Global Hawk support personnel, 59 Predator support personnel and 77 base operations support (BOS) personnel).

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Alternative B – Restricted Area Creation, Ground-Based Improvements and Personnel Changes – Airspace Scenarios 1 and 2

Alternative B includes the same personnel changes and creation of the same stratified RA as described under the Draft EIS proposed action Alternative A. The primary difference between Alternatives A and B is the assumption that a fixed wing AMC mission would not occur at GFAFB and the construction of the new RPA hangar on the Bravo ramp would not be required. Implementation of Alternative B would allow Global Hawk aircraft to spiral up through the proposed airfield RA (R-54XA) to transit up to Class A airspace. In addition, the Predator would also spiral up through R-54XA to access the proposed northwest or southwest transit RAs (R-54XB and R-54XC).

RPA Ground-Based Improvements

The implementation of this alternative would not require the construction of the new RPA hangar on the Bravo ramp and the four RPA proposed for this new facility would be stored in Building 649. Building 649 is currently a 3-bay hangar used for KC-135 aircraft. This building would require renovation to accommodate four Global Hawk aircraft and the associated LREs for the ACC mission. Although minor renovations would be required to this building, no new construction or additions are proposed.

All other ground-based improvements and personnel changes would be the same as those described under the Draft EIS proposed action Alternative A.

Mitigated Preferred Alternative: Alternative C – Southern Restricted Area Creation, Ground-Based Improvements and Personnel Changes – Airspace Scenario 2

Alternative C is the USAF's mitigated preferred alternative. The mitigated preferred Alternative C contains the proposed airfield RA (R-54XA), the southwest transit RA (R-54XC), the proposed southern training RA (R-54XG), and the proposed RA around and above the existing R-5401 (R-5402). Table 2.3-2 of the final EIS summarizes the aeronautical proposal, dated November 2, 2009, submitted by the USAF to the FAA. This table identifies the proposed RA and the proposed scheduling of the airspace. Figure 2.3-1 in the Final EIS presents geographic locations under the RAs listed in Table 2.3-2 of the Final EIS. The ground-based improvements and personnel changes proposed as part of the mitigated preferred Alternative C are listed in Table 2.3-3 of the Final EIS and would be the same as those described under the Draft EIS proposed action Alternative A. Implementation of the mitigated preferred Alternative C would allow Global Hawk aircraft to spiral up through the proposed airfield RA (R-54XA) to transit up to Class A airspace. In addition, the Predator would also spiral up through R-54XA to access the proposed southwest transit RA (R-54XC)

The mitigated preferred Alternative C would also allow the Predator aircraft to utilize the proposed airfield RA (R-54XA) to transit through the proposed southwest transit RA (R-54XC) and enter the proposed southern training RA (R-54XG) in the current Devils Lake MOA. While

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in the proposed southern training RA, the Predator would utilize the onboard combat laser to conduct laser training at the expanded RA above R-5401/Camp Grafton South (R-5402).

Of the two operational scenarios described in the Section 4.1.2 of the Final EIS, scenario 2 would be the operational scenario implemented for the USAF's mitigated preferred alternative. Under the mitigated preferred Alternative C scenario 2, the USAF would schedule each airspace segment, such as the proposed southern training RA (R-54XG) from 10,000 feet MSL to 14,000 feet MSL in advance and this block would be activated only when a training Predator is present. Appendix E of the Final EIS provides a detailed legal description of the proposed RA for this mitigated preferred alternative.

Alternative D – Northern Restricted Area Creation, Ground-Based Improvements and Personnel Changes – Airspace Scenarios 1 and 2

This alternative includes the same airspace changes as proposed under the Draft EIS proposed action Alternative A with the exception of the proposed southern training area (R-54XG) and the proposed southwest transit corridor (R-54XC). Ground-based improvements and personnel changes would be the same as those proposed under the Draft EIS proposed action Alternative A. Implementation of Alternative D would allow Global Hawk aircraft to spiral up through the proposed airfield RA to transit up to Class A airspace. Under Alternative D, Predator aircraft would utilize the proposed airfield RA (R-54XA) to transit through the proposed northwest transit RA (R-54XB) and enter the proposed northern RPA training areas (R-54XD and R-54XE) in the current Tiger MOA. The proposed north-south transit RA (R-54XF) and expansion of the RA around R-5401/Camp Grafton South (R-5402) would be as described under the Draft EIS proposed action Alternative A. Alternative D would allow the Predator aircraft to transit from the proposed northern training areas, R-54XD and R-54XE to the proposed R-5402 to conduct the proposed laser training.

No Action Alternative

The No Action Alternative is the environmentally preferred alternative. The No Action Alternative would not beddown RPA at Grand Forks, not construct facilities, and not modify airspace in the vicinity of GFAFB. The analysis of the No Action Alternative provides a basis for comparing the environmental impacts of the Proposed Action in comparison to the existing (baseline) conditions over time. Aside from the previously described BRAC directed actions, there are no known changes to existing airspace or facilities that would reflect a change to the baseline conditions over time. The No Action Alternative would not adhere to the BRAC directive as approved by Congress and the President.

RELEVANT NATURAL, ENVIRONMENTAL, ECONOMIC, AND TECHNICAL FACTORS

NEPA requires focused analyses on environmental resource areas potentially affected by an alternative. This section summarizes the natural, environmental, economic, and technical factors considered in making a final decision. Based on the operational requirements of the

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Grand Forks BRAC proposal, environmental considerations, and public and agency inputs on the Draft EIS, specific potential consequences to environmental resources are considered in the Final EIS. Chapter 4 of the Final EIS presents potential direct and indirect environmental consequences for each environmental resource. The Draft EIS public and agency review identified concerns with airspace impacts from the creation of restricted areas. The Final EIS identifies actions taken to remove or reduce the potential for these environmental consequences. The Final EIS addresses the environmental consequences for the following resource areas: airspace management, earth resources, water resources, biological resources, air quality, noise, land use and visual resources, socioeconomics and environmental justice, cultural resources, safety, solid waste and hazardous material and waste, and infrastructure. The expected geographic scope of potential consequences, known as the Region of Influence (ROI), was determined for each resource. The EIS also addressed the air traffic in the area of Grand Forks AFB and central North Dakota where the new RAs are proposed. The technical analysis produced the following results for Camp Grafton South, GFAFB, and associated airspace.

Airspace

Civil aircraft operations in regional airspace would be impacted by the proposed operations in new or expanded RA airspace. Impacts could include civil aircraft ground holds, rescheduling, and or rerouting. The extent of the impacts would depend upon the manner in which the mitigated preferred Alternative C is implemented. Implementation of the mitigated preferred Alternative C without the proposed mitigation measures described below would be anticipated to have significant impacts to civil aircraft operations within the ROI.

Implementation of the mitigated preferred Alternative C, Scenario 1, would daily impact 70 civil aircraft operations by the airfield expansion RA (R-54XA) and an additional 39 civil operations in the airspace for a total of 109 civil operations daily. Activation of the training RAs by NOTAM after normally scheduled hours could result in an additional 31 civilian aircraft operations being affected if activated from 2200 to 0200L or 6 civil aircraft operations if activated from 0200 to 0600L. ITA would not add to the total number of RA activations.

Implementing Scenario 2 of the mitigated preferred Alternative C could substantially reduce the total number of daily civilian operations impacted if the controlling agency for the proposed R-54XA were able to direct civilian aircraft through the RA when the airspace was not occupied by an RPA and the controlling agency for R-54XC was able to permit transit when the corridor was not occupied by a training RPA. An estimated 1/3 to 1/2 of those affected civil operations could avoid impacts if they could be directed through R-54XA and/or R-54XC by the controlling agencies when the airspace was not occupied by an RPA. For example, if 1) R-54XG and R-5402 were activated from 10,000 to 18,000 feet AGL from 0700 to 2200L, 2) R-54XA was activated for from 0700 to 1000L, from 1400 to 1800L, and from 2000 to 2200L for the same altitude, and 3) R-54XC was activated from 10,000 to 18,000 feet AGL for the same time periods as R-54XA, then the total daily civilian operations potentially affected would be approximately 63 instead of 109.

Responsibilities, procedures for aircraft operations, ATC operations, and air traffic control assigned airspace (ATCAA) utilization are documented in Letters of Agreement (LOAs)

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between the scheduling military agency and the applicable ARTCC. If approved by the FAA, the RA would be well publicized and documented on aeronautical charts. All pilots should be aware of the changed configuration of the local airspace. Coordination and communications between the USAF and the FAA about scheduling and use would occur on a regular basis.

Current FAA policy requires a Certificate of Authorization (COA) for RPA operations outside of RA. Additionally, current FAA policy states that a COA will not be granted outside non-joint use Class D airspace or Class A airspace without additional provisions to avoid other traffic. Although both aircraft carry transponders and the Global Hawk has such provisions to avoid other aircraft, the Predator does not have additional traffic avoidance provisions.

With the selection of the mitigated preferred Alternative C, fewer small airports would be impacted, and the USAF would schedule specific RA altitude blocks necessary for each RPA mission in advance. The USAF plans to communicate on a regular basis with agencies regarding surveillance flights and, under the mitigated preferred Alternative C, the training RA could be scheduled around such activities.

Mitigated preferred Alternative C, using operational Scenario 2, would substantially reduce impacts to civil aviation. The smaller footprint of the proposed RA combined with the RA scheduling flexibility was determined to meet the operational requirements as identified in Chapter 2 of the Final EIS while reducing impacts to civil aviation.

Earth and Water Resources

Construction, demolition, and renovation activities would occur at GFafb in areas already developed and/or previously disturbed by excavation. Fewer than five acres of soil would be disturbed and approximately 0.1 acre of impervious surface would be added. A National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit would be required due to the acreage disturbed for construction. Changes in runoff or soil loss from construction would be minimal and much of it would be temporary in nature. By using standard construction practices, such as stockpiling soil and watering graded areas, in accordance with applicable state and federal guidelines, soil erosion and dust blowing would be minimized. Minor ground disturbance at R-5401/Camp Grafton South would not adversely impact water or earth resources at this location.

Biological Resources

Construction at GFafb is not anticipated to impact state species of concern or their associated habitats. Potential bird-aircraft strike risks would be lower with the RPA mission than with the KC-135 mission. Threatened and endangered species at R-5401/Camp Grafton South are not expected to be significantly impacted. The piping plover, the only known protected species at R-5401/Camp Grafton South, has been documented along the shores of Lake Coe. Laser targets would not be located near water bodies due to reflectivity issues. Lasing operations are anticipated to have insignificant impacts on wildlife resources.

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North Dakota counties beneath the proposed RAs are in attainment for all criteria pollutants. Construction emissions would be minimal, short-term, and would end when construction is complete. No adverse or long-term impacts to air quality are expected in Grand Forks County or Air Quality Control Region (AQCR) 172. Emissions from RPA flying above 6,000 feet MSL would be above the mixing zone for criteria pollutants. The contribution of criteria pollutant emissions from RPA would be insignificant. Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions would be extremely minimal when compared to the annual GHG emissions in the United States.

Noise

Overall noise levels in the installation vicinity are expected to be substantially below those experienced with the KC-135. The Global Hawk and Predator are relatively quiet aircraft with low single event noise levels and a relatively low number of flying operations. Construction noise would be noticeable in the immediate vicinity of the project sites, and construction workers would be required to wear hearing protection. During mission training, Global Hawk and Predator aircraft operate at altitudes where most aircraft noise would not be noticed. When noise could be noticeable, it would not be expected to interrupt daily activities, such as conversation, watching television, or sleeping. Overall noise impacts associated with the beddown would be insignificant.

Land Use and Visual Resources

All of the proposed modifications would be sited on previously disturbed land on the industrially developed portion of the base. Facilities would comply with existing area development plans, because the proposed locations have been sited to facilitate functionality and increase operational capacities to support the beddown of RPA. Renovations to existing facilities would meet the new architectural standards for facilities supporting airfield operations. The combat laser and associated targets would not be visible to the public outside of the training area at R-5401/Camp Grafton South and therefore would not affect the visual resources of the region. Range warning and status signage would be similar to current signage and would comply with DoD regulations. Neither the signage nor the moveable targets would affect the visual resources of R-5401/Camp Grafton South. The creation, expansion, and modification of airspace would not affect the current or future land use of the counties beneath the airspace areas. Therefore, no major changes in general land use patterns, land ownership, or area development plans are expected.

Socioeconomics and Environmental Justice

Construction activities would generate a number of jobs during the construction period and contribute to local earnings and induced spending. These effects would be temporary for the duration of the construction period. The scope and duration of the construction activity is not expected to place any substantial burden or adverse conditions on the construction industry in the Grand Forks region. The RPA personnel would not noticeably be different from the personnel numbers prior to the BRAC actions.

Several private and public airports are under or adjacent to the proposed RAs. Agricultural applications below 6,000 feet MSL would not be impacted. Global Hawk operations in the proposed RAs other than the proposed airfield RA (R-54XA) are not expected to impact civil

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aviation or airport operations. The Predators would typically fly at approximately the same altitudes as civil aviation. Under the mitigated preferred Alternative C, Scenario 1, the proposed RAs would impact an estimated 109 civil aircraft operations daily. Scenario 2, with advance scheduling of RPA operations in defined airspace segments, and controlling agency direction through airspace not occupied by an RPA, would be expected to reduce the impacted civil operations by 1/3 to 1/2. Civil aviation in transit to and from the Grand Forks International Airport would be re-routed around the proposed airfield RA (R-54XA), which could add between 10 and 20 miles to their flight routes. Depending on the civilian aircraft, the re-routing could require an estimated additional two to eight gallons of fuel per aircraft and would incur additional costs to the owners and/or operators of the civil aircraft. Before and during flight operations, pilots would need to check the NOTAM or contact ATC to learn when an RA was active and how they could avoid the RA. This additional communication and re-routing would be expected to result in annoyance. Although increased communication and coordination could reduce impacts, a daily delay, diversion, and/or re-routing of up to 109 civil aircraft operations could be seen by civil aviation as a significant socioeconomic impact. Public and private airports would continue to operate below 6,000 feet MSL, although access to the airports would be impacted by a scheduled active RA. Potential impacts to civil aviation could include ground delays, re-routing per ATC directions, or being required to conduct VFR flights below 6,000 feet MSL. Smaller public and private airports under or adjacent to the scheduled RAs could experience impacts from reduced usage. The RAs scheduled daily from 0700 to 2200L daily, by NOTAM four hours in advance; other times by NOTAM, could affect transit aircraft operators who decide to use airfields not under the scheduled RAs.

During USAF consultations with the Spirit Lake Indian Reservation, Reservation leaders indicated they have no concerns with the proposed RPA overflight but did not want operations to be viewing tribal activities. With implementation of mitigated preferred Alternative C, no overflights would occur over tribal lands. The use of contract civil aircraft to fly rural children to the School for the Deaf could be affected by the scheduled RAs. Children with special schooling needs who would be delayed or re-routed by a scheduled RA below 14,000 feet MSL could be adversely impacted. Disadvantaged populations would not occur in disproportionate numbers below the proposed RA associated with mitigated preferred Alternative C. In addition, the RA below 10,000 feet MSL would not be used regularly for RPA training.

Cultural Resources

None of the 13 existing GFAFB structures directly affected by implementation of mitigated preferred Alternative C are eligible for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). However, 11 of the buildings constructed during the Cold War have reached 50 years of age since the previous studies were conducted, and nine have been identified by GFAFB as requiring additional survey and NRHP-eligibility evaluation. Construction activities would not be expected to impact any of the six archaeological sites located on GFAFB. Prior to any target placement at R-5401/Camp Grafton South, GFAFB and NDANG personnel will comply with all National Historic Preservation Act regulations. NDANG will consult with the SHPO, as required, to avoid, minimize, or mitigate impacts to cultural resources. Laser targets can be placed away from cultural resources, and no impacts are expected.

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Safety

Best practice construction safety procedures would be followed to protect construction and non-construction personnel during facility improvements at GFAFB.

Improved Global Hawk and Predator aircraft capabilities and aircrew training have resulted in substantially fewer Class A mishaps. Global Hawk and Predator aircraft have pre-programmed maneuvers to follow if the command and control (C2) link is interrupted. If communication cannot be restored immediately, the RPA enters a flight path known as the lost link profile, which is performed autonomously until the ground control operator can restore a datalink. If a datalink cannot be reestablished, the aircraft will proceed to a preprogrammed, controlled landing point in R-5401/Camp Grafton South.

Both the Global Hawk and Predator carry transponders and the FAA and USAF are working together to identify ways to permit RPAs to support sense-and-avoid capabilities for flights outside of RAs. However, firm procedures are not established at this time.

During RPA operations, activated RA airspace would be closed to civil aviation traffic and non-participating military traffic. Implementation of established RPA airspace management procedures within the RAs would be expected to reduce safety risks to a minimum. Laser operations would occur entirely within RA airspace and would impact defined areas within R-5401/Camp Grafton South. All range personnel in the laser surface danger zone would wear laser eye protection of appropriate optical density. The North Dakota Army National Guard (NDARNG) would revise the Range Operations Standard Operating Procedures such that R-5401/Camp Grafton South would be closed to civilians when lasers are in use.

During emergency, fire, and other special conditions as described in the airspace analysis, the USAF would immediately respond to ATC direction and relocate the RPA from the emergency-needed airspace.

The USAF has determined that a mitigated Alternative C would further reduce potential safety impacts through the overflight of less land area and the advance scheduling of altitude blocks necessary for RPA missions.

Solid Waste and Hazardous Material and Waste

With implementation of mitigated preferred Alternative C, approximately 23,000 tons of construction and demolition waste would be generated. All construction debris would be recycled, if possible, or otherwise disposed of in a municipal landfill. Municipal waste and asbestos waste would be disposed of in the Grand Forks Landfill. There would be no substantial change in the volumes or types of solid waste or hazardous materials produced. Maintenance and operations for the RPA would be similar to other aircraft operations at GFAFB. Existing procedures are in place to handle all such materials. Buildings 520 and 521 are proposed for demolition and are located in Environmental Restoration Program (ERP) site ST-006. This site is considered clean and closed. It is thus unlikely that contamination would be encountered; however, should contamination be encountered, the handling, storage, transportation, and disposal activities would be conducted in accordance with applicable federal, state, and local regulations, USAF Instructions (AFIs), and GFAFB policy.

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Infrastructure

The GFAFB infrastructure system has adequate capacity to accommodate new hangar facilities and associated operations. The roadways adjacent to the base have adequate capacity for existing traffic. No impact to infrastructure at R-5401/Camp Grafton South is anticipated.

MITIGATION AND MANAGEMENT MEASURES

CEQ regulations (at 40 CFR § 1508.20) define mitigation as follows:

1. **Avoiding** the impact altogether by not taking a certain action or parts of an action.
2. **Minimizing** impacts by limiting the degree or magnitude of the action, and its implementation.
3. **Rectifying** the impact by repairing, rehabilitating, or restoring the affected environment.
4. **Reducing or eliminating** the impact over time by preservation and maintenance operations during the life of the action.
5. **Compensating** for the impact by replacing or providing substitute resources or environments.

Avoiding, minimizing, mitigating or reducing potential environmental impacts was a priority guiding the design, development, and scoping of the alternatives during the initial development of this project.

The USAF shall develop plans to address and monitor specific mitigations selected for implementation. These plans, for example, will include a temporary erosion sediment control plan, a stormwater pollution prevention plan (SWPPP), and a spill prevention, control, and countermeasure (SPCC) plan, if required. These plans will be in addition to, and complement, any permits that may be issued to the USAF for the project. In addition, for any new construction, the USAF will ensure certified designs or principles under the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) program are compliant.

Mitigation Actions

The following includes a description of the practicable mitigation actions adopted by the USAF to avoid, minimize, rectify or reduce potential airspace impacts:

- In cases of emergency, such as firefighting, air ambulance, law enforcement, in-flight or other emergencies in scheduled RA, the USAF will immediately respond to Air Traffic Control (ATC) direction and relocate training aircraft to another RA away from the emergency. In extreme cases, the USAF will cancel a training mission and return the RPA to base to avoid interference with ATC emergency requirements.

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- USAF will coordinate and communicate RA scheduling in advance with FAA centers and Terminal Radar Approach Control (TRACON) facilities to reduce conflicts with general civil aviation and with USFWS, air cargo services, and other organizations with time sensitive flight requirements.
- Subject to FAA approval, the USAF will serve as Controlling Agency for the proposed low airfield RA (R-54XA), up to 10,000 feet MSL. As the Controlling Agency, the USAF will have the authority to direct civil aircraft through R-54XA when the airspace is not occupied by an RPA.
- RPA will operate above 10,000 feet MSL to the maximum extent possible. Only the airspace altitude block being used will be activated for the RPA training aircraft.
- The RA schedule will be communicated in advance by NOTAM with specific training airspace altitude blocks defined four hours in advance to provide scheduling information to non-participating aircraft. This means that RPA training flights will plan and schedule specific RA training airspace and altitude blocks in advance and will operate in those pre-scheduled airspace blocks.
- Subject to FAA approval, the proposed southwest transit corridor (R-54XC) will be activated at a specific altitude block only for the transit of RPA. At all other times the RA will not be activated. In the event of an in-flight emergency, the RPA operator will inform ATC and the transit corridor will be activated for a return to base message. ATC will issue an alert and notify non-participating aircraft in the region.
- In situations of rapidly moving weather systems, the RPA will transit to a specific altitude block which will be activated to avoid the weather conditions. ATC will issue a NOTAM to notify general aviation of the activation. If systems were unavailable to notify transiting civilian aircraft in the newly activated airspace, the RPA will be given a return to base message. This means that priority to the airspace is given to a piloted aircraft.
- Should weather conditions above 10,000 feet MSL prohibit RPA training above that altitude, priority will be given to piloted aircraft operating below 10,000 feet and, depending on the civil aircraft usage, the RPA could be given a return to base message. The airfield RA at GFAFB (R-54XA) will be activated in accordance with procedures specified in a letter of agreement/procedure developed between GFAFB and Minneapolis ARTCC with the intent of balancing mission requirements with access for civil aviation. RPA emergency procedures will also be addressed within the letter of agreement. Predator Training activities in the proposed RAs will be scheduled to avoid high civil aircraft usage hours whenever practical.

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UNAVOIDABLE ADVERSE IMPACTS

Implementation of the RPA training activities are projected to result in activities that have been identified by the flying public as causing increased communication with ATC, increased awareness of airspace requirements or a negative economic impact (increased flight times, ground holds, or flying VFR below 6,000 feet) during the scoping and public involvement process. To the extent possible mitigation and management measures, such as those identified above would be applied to reduce the potential impacts. However, the impacts described below cannot be avoided because the mitigation would not be conducive to the successful implementation of the USAF mission. These impacts, while not likely to be significant to environmental resources, could be considered significant or annoying to potentially affected individuals.

Potential impacts that could occur and cannot be mitigated include the following:

- The mitigated preferred Alternative C requires less airspace than the Draft EIS proposed action Alternative A for scheduling and distributing Predator training. The benefits of Scenario 2 scheduling would be more difficult to achieve because all training activity would take place in a smaller area. There would be some degree of unavoidable impacts to civilian aircraft operations in terms of scheduling changes, ground holding, planned altitude changes, and/or re-routing. There would normally be two Predator and one Global Hawk mission scheduled daily. The potential number of unavoidable impacts to civil operations can be understood with a Predator training mission example. A typical RPA Predator training mission, with scheduling to reduce impacts to civilian operations, could be as follows: Activation of the airfield RA (R-54XA) to 18,000 feet MSL between 0600 to 1000 hrs local for launch, touch-and-goes, and transit to the training airspace. This would impact an estimated four civil operations from the Final EIS Tables 3.1-5 through 3.1-7. Activation of the proposed southwest transit corridor, R-54XC, from 10,000 to 14,000 feet MSL between 0700 and 1000 hrs local would impact an estimated one civil operation from the Final EIS Table 3.1-6. Activation of the proposed R-54XG from 10,000 to 14,000 feet MSL and R-5402 from 6,000 to 18,000 feet MSL between 0700 and 2200 hrs local for training would impact six civil operations as indicated by the Final EIS Tables 3.1-5 through 3.1-7. Activation of the proposed R-54XC from 10,000 to 14,000 feet MSL between 1500 and 1800 hrs local for RPA return to GFAFB would impact one civil operation as indicated by Table 3.1-6 of the Final EIS. Activation of the airfield RA (R-54XA) to 18,000 feet MSL between 1800 and 2000 hrs local for recovery would impact 17 civil operations as indicated by the Final EIS Tables 3.1-5 through 3.1-7. This representative RPA Predator mission could impact a total of 29 civil operations. However, potential unavoidable impacts to civil aircraft operations could be reduced if the controlling agencies permitted civilian aircraft to transit the R-54XA and R-54XC airspaces when they were not actually occupied by an RPA. In the example above, if the Predator were to actually occupy the airspace from 1800 to 1900 hrs and land by 1900, the controlling agency could direct civil aircraft to transit the still active RA and the number of potentially affected civil operations could be reduced by one-third to one-half

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in that airspace for that time period. The USAF would serve as the Controlling Agency for R-54XA low and could permit access. The FAA ATC could permit comparable access to R-54XC depending on the location of the RPA relative to GFAFB.

- Impacts to 39 civil operations daily during the 20 days per year estimated for integrated training activities (ITAs).
- Impacts to 31 civil aircraft operations daily if NOTAM activates the RA between 2200 and 0200 hrs local time and 6 civil operations if activated between 0200 and 0600 hrs local time.
- Need for increased communication by IFR aircraft. The USAF would need to schedule and inform ATC that an RA is activated and that a RPA is operating in the RA. A pilot transiting east central North Dakota, near the proposed RA, would need to check the NOTAM, as well as contact ATC in flight, to learn if any RA were activated. If needed, the pilot would then request identification of the current RA altitude block where the RPA was operating, and request an altitude below or above the activated RA for IFR or VFR transit.

CUMULATIVE AND FUTURE ACTIONS

The cumulative effects analysis (See Chapter 5 of the Final EIS) evaluates past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions. The cumulative BRAC reassignment of KC-135 aircraft is included in the discussion of applicable environmental resources. Other military airspace actions in North Dakota and adjacent states do not involve the creation of RA to support RPA training. The relatively small numbers of Global Hawk transit flights through Class A airspace are not expected to cumulatively impact civil aviation above FL180. There are no significant cumulative effects anticipated for any environmental resource other than the unavoidable adverse impacts to civil aviation below FL180.

The USAF recognizes future actions may be planned for Grand Forks AFB and the region; however, the USAF cannot speculate on the impacts of preliminary proposals that may be under development at the very early discussion stage and not presently capable of meaningful analysis.

DECISION

After consideration of relevant operational, environmental, economic and technical factors discussed in this ROD, environmental consequences explained in the Final EIS, inputs from the public, inputs from regulatory agencies, and other relevant factors, the USAF has decided to implement the mitigated preferred alternative (Alternative C – Southern Restricted Area Creation, Ground-Based Improvements and Personnel Changes - Airspace Scenario 2) and will continue working with FAA to establish the RA or other FAA designated airspace suitable for RPA training and operations.

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The decision takes into account the direct, indirect and cumulative impacts from the alternative. The preferred alternative includes all practicable means to avoid, minimize or mitigate environmental harm.



KATHLEEN I. FERGUSON, P.E.



Date

**Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Air Force
(Installations)**