

**DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
JOINT BASE LEWIS-MCCHORD**

DRAFT FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FNSI) FOR THE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSEMENT (EA) FOR THE UNMANNED AIRCRAFT SYSTEMS TRAINING AIRSTRIP, AT JOINT BASE LEWIS-MCCHORD, WASHINGTON

Pursuant to the Council on Environmental Quality regulations (40 Code of Federal Regulations Parts 1500-1508) implementing the National Environmental Policy Act and Army regulations (32 CFR Part 651), the Department of the Army (Army) gives notice that an EA was prepared and an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required to construct, operate, and maintain a new Shadow unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) training airstrip within the Rainier Training Area (RTA) in Training Area (TA) 20 at Joint Base Lewis-McChord (JBLM), Washington.

Proposed Action: The Army proposes to construct, operate, and maintain a new Shadow UAS training airstrip within the RTA in TA 20 at JBLM. The proposed action consists of construction of a new training airstrip which meets all of the screening criteria as detailed in the EA. The proposed location would allow for training to occur within special use airspace (SUA) R6703C. The site would function as an expeditionary airstrip with no supplemental power or facilities. This site was identified because the area is extremely underused and provides a persistent scheduling opportunity for training. The only potential training which could conflict would be helicopter operations into a nearby landing zone which would be deconflicted through Air Traffic Control.

Purpose and Need: Recent successes of UAS support for ground troops survivability, the gathering of intelligence, and the elimination of opposing units before they can engage U.S. and allied Soldiers, point to the need for a robust and trained UAS force. The purpose of the proposed action is for the Army to maximize UAS training by developing a second downrange UAS launch/recovery airstrip completely within the existing JBLM SUA. Currently, Shadow UAS training occurs at the training airstrip on TA 4 and at Gray Army Airfield (GAAF). Training at GAAF must be scheduled in conjunction with ongoing helicopter training. In order to conduct training, units must obtain permission from GAAF to use all or a portion of JBLM's restricted use airspace. The current training airstrip on TA 4 is situated within the surface danger zone for Company/Platoon Live Fire Exercises (LFX). Shadow UAS cannot be employed when TA 4/5 is closed for LFX. The number of Shadow Platoons has increased based on Army Regulation 5-10 – Stationing, changes to the modified table of organization and equipment, and new unit fieldings. Establishing another training airstrip would allow for JBLM to conduct required Shadow UAS training within existing military restricted airspace.

Existing Conditions: JBLM has become a training platform for multiple units deploying to theaters of operation and is a focal point for the Army as a major installation for training Soldiers for combat readiness. The Army utilizes SUA R6703C above JBLM for aviation

training, including helicopters, airplanes, and UAS. Shortly after the transformation of the first Stryker Brigade Combat Team (SBCT) Shadow UAS PLTs in 2008, a UAS launch/recovery strip was constructed on JBLM in TA 4. This launch/recovery strip alleviates aircraft congestion on GAAF. JBLM is home to seven Shadow PLTs (RQ-7B) which include the 16th Combat Aviation Brigade (3 PLTs), 1-2 SBCT (1 PLT), 2-2 SBCT (1 PLT), 81st SBCT (1 PLT), 1st Special Forces Group (1 PLT). All Shadow UAS PLTs are presently directed to use the TA 4 training airstrip.

Alternatives Analyzed: The Army is considering one action alternative that meets the purpose and need for the Proposed Action. The Proposed Action would allow the Army to maximize UAS training by developing a second downrange UAS launch/recovery airstrip completely within the existing JBLM SUA. The No-Action Alternative would result in continued limitation of operations by LFX on TA's 4 and 5, and by ongoing helicopter operations at GAAF.

Environmental Effects: The environmental resource areas analyzed in the EA include air quality; land use; topography, geology, and soils; water resources; vegetation; fish and wildlife; threatened and endangered species; cultural resources; and recreation. Implementation of the Proposed Action would result in no significant environmental impacts on the natural or human environment.

Finding: In review of the resource areas potentially impacted by the Proposed Action, I find that implementing the Proposed Action will have no significant environmental impacts on the natural or human environment. Based on the analysis presented in the EA, which has incorporated or referenced the best information available, I have taken a hard look at known impacts and determined that the implementation of the Proposed Action will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment and therefore, an EIS is not warranted.

Date

SKYE D. DUNCAN
Colonel, SC
Commanding