

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

**DRAFT FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FNSI) FOR THE ENVIRONMENTAL
ASSESSMENT (EA) FOR THE OFF-BASE HELICOPTER TRAINING AREAS, 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 establish three off-base helicopter training areas (HTAs) and one mountain training area (MTA) at Joint Base Lewis-McChord (JBLM), Washington.

Proposed Action: The Army proposes to establish three new HTAs west and southwest of JBLM and establish a new MTA east of JBLM. The HTAs and the MTA would be located in Washington. The HTAs and the MTA, including the proposed landing zones within these areas, would be available for use Monday through Thursday and Saturday from 7 a.m. to 2 a.m. in the spring/summer (March 20–September 21) and 7 a.m. to midnight in the fall/winter (September 22 – March 19). The training areas would not be used on Fridays, Sundays or Federal Holidays. Use of the HTAs and MTA would occur throughout the year, as weather permits.

Purpose and Need: The purpose of the Proposed Action is for the Army to conduct the necessary type, level, and duration of aircraft movements through the National Airspace System, so aircrews can attain and maintain flying proficiency and be ready for immediate deployment world-wide in support of the National Defense Mission. The proposed high altitude mountain training area would provide JBLM aviation units with mandatory high-altitude flight operations training within short flight time from JBLM, so aircrews can attain and maintain high-altitude flying proficiency. The proposed low-level helicopter training areas would provide JBLM aviation units with low-level training areas off JBLM to eliminate training conflicts between JBLM aviation units and other units training at JBLM. JBLM on-base training areas are currently limited due to a reduction in flight density (i.e. the number of aircraft that can train safely in a training area at the same time) as a result of 2011 regulation changes (JBLM Regulation 95-1) and scheduling conflicts with other units, particularly ground-based activities by Brigade Combat Teams, who are given priority of usage. Currently, in order to complete needed low-level training, aircrews select off-base locations in low population areas to conduct flight tasks in accordance with Federal Aviation Administration and Army regulations. High Altitude Mountainous Environment Training (HAMET) is currently limited to three sites in the contiguous United States which all require extensive travel time, scheduling difficulties and cost. Currently, all Army installations have off-post training areas for tenant aviation units to utilize.

Existing Conditions: Currently, low-level training conflicts with training activities by other units, including ground-based activities by Brigade Combat Teams, who are given priority of usage. Low-level flight training is conducted throughout the state in low population areas including local airports such as the Olympia Regional Airport, Tacoma Narrows Airport, and Sanderson Field in Shelton. The geography of JBLM does not have the elements to meet high-altitude training criteria, therefore crews must leave the confines of the installation to do this mission-critical training. For HAMET, aircrews travel to Colorado for short-training periods. These trips are

expensive and can often be unavailable as Colorado provides one of the few available HAMET sites in the U.S. and is in high demand.

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 conduct needed off-base low-level and HAMET training for rotary wing aircraft. The No-Action Alternative would result in continued on-base training limitations, utilization of local airports, and out-of-state HAMET.

Environmental Effects: The environmental resource areas analyzed in the EA include land use; airspace; airspace safety; noise; air quality; cultural resources; water resources and wetlands; recreation and visual resources; vegetation; fish and wildlife; and proposed, threatened and endangered species. 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