FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
Malmstrom Helicopter Landing and Refueling Project; NZAS 30-0152

Pursuant to provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), 42 United States Code (U.S.C.) 4321 to 4370h; Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) Regulations, 40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 1500-1508; and 32 CFR Part 989, Environmental Impact Analysis Process, the U.S. Air Force prepared the attached environmental assessment (EA) to address the potential environmental consequences associated with the proposed Helicopter Landing and Refueling Project.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of the proposed action is to develop increased missile defense capability by refueling helicopters within a 15-minute flight time anywhere in the missile fields. Currently Malmstrom can only refuel helicopters at two locations: the Lewistown, Montana airport and Malmstrom Air Force Base. Time from several of the missile sites to these locations exceeds the 15 minute standard.

This proposed action is needed to bolster military readiness, increase defense posture and comply with Department of Defense 5210.41-M. Consequently, the Air Force proposes to develop the capability and infrastructure to rapidly refuel helicopters within a 15-minute flight area anywhere in the missile field.

Description of Proposed Action and Alternatives

Proposed Action. The Air Force is proposing to change refueling operations to accommodate helicopter refueling within 15 minutes anywhere within the Minuteman Missile Complex. Currently refueling is only performed at the Lewistown Airport and Malmstrom Air Force Base in Great Falls. This proposed action would affect seven Missile Alert Facilities (MAFs): B-01, C-01, E-01, G-01, H-01, L-01, and N-01. The Proposed Action consists of developing refueling capability at the seven sites, including previous work that upgraded the helicopter landing pads and access roads, new work that would place concrete turnout pads for housing refuelers, purchasing and developing protocols for operating 1,000-gallon self-contained refuelers. An increase in fuel truck deliveries as well as increased helicopter activity at each of the seven facilities would occur as described in the accompanying EA.

The concrete turnout pads would be located adjacent to the helipad access roads. Permanent power to all pads would eventually replace the temporary generators operating the pumping and lighting. Current land leases on six of the seven sites will have to be updated to include fuel-handling operations. One helipad, N-01, is on AF-owned land and has a mobile refueler pad. The Proposed Action would increase helicopter flights and tanker truck deliveries to each of the MAFs.

Alternative A. The AF could change the helicopter used in their operations. The current helicopters are UH-1N “Huey” and UH-60 Sikorsky Black Hawk which are utility and transport type helicopters. Upgrading or changing to newer and more fuel efficient aircraft would require fewer refueling helipad sites and would reduce the need for additional refueling MAFs. This alternative would require a change in aircraft fleet enabling helicopters to fly further in the 15-minute time allotment needing fewer refueling locations. This alternative would require a substantial capital investment in a new fleet of helicopters.

Alternative B. Prepare refueling MAF locations with infrastructure necessary for refueling operations including placing mobile refuelers, infrastructure, provisions for refueling operations included in leases (for all MAFs except N-01), trained personnel, and provisions in place to transport fuel from Malmstrom to all the MAFs. The difference in this alternative and the proposed action is to delay stockpiling the mobile refuelers with fuel until alert conditions exist. This alternative would not meet the 15-minute flight time requirement, but could provide the capability to do so within 24-hours and would significantly decrease environmental impacts from increased helicopter usage and fueling operations. This option would also not provide actual physical training to operate the mobile refuelers prior to their use under alert conditions.

No Action Alternative. Presently helicopters are refueled at the Lewistown Airport and MAFB. Distances from H-01, F-01, and G-01 exceed the 15-minute flight time to MAFB; O-01, L-01, K-01, and B-01 distances to Lewistown Airport exceed the 15-minute flight time. Consequently, current MAF flight times do not meet
the 15 minute refuel requirement in the missile complex. The "no action" alternative is always included in any environmental analysis as it establishes the baseline for which all other alternatives can be compared.

Summary of Environmental Impacts

1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse: The beneficial effect of the Landing and Refueling Project is threat protection against violence and destruction of the built environment.

Adverse effects include minor impacts to air quality/climate change, transportation, nearby grazing animals, and waterfowl that would occur from refueling activities. Long term effects would be increased traffic from fuel transportation and increased noise from landings and takeoffs near each refueling missile alert facility.

2. Effect on public health and safety: The Proposed Action achieves the balance of resource protection and beneficial uses of the human environment envisioned by the national environmental policy.

Without the Landing and Refueling Project, the Air Force could have a delayed response to a national emergency. This project is primarily a military readiness action with minimal impact on the environment.

3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas: There are no prime farmlands, cultural resources, endangered or threatened species or plants, or wild and scenic rivers in the project area. The nearest State Park is three miles from one of the missile alert facilities. The closest National Park is over a hundred miles from the closest facility.

4. Public input regarding the effects on the quality of the human environment: The EA was released for a 30-day public review and comment period, which ended February 25, 2016. The government received one comment from a local rancher. The commenter suggested the increase in helicopter activity may have the effect of scattering livestock and wildlife. In response to the comment technical staff studied and evaluated available research regarding the effects of aircraft operations on livestock and wildlife. The government added additional technical analysis to the Final EA. Current helicopter activities include one to three landings per year at each MAF and the proposed refueling activity would likely increase landings to 12-20 times per year at each MAF. Pilots take helicopter noise into consideration during flight operations. At 1/2 mile from flight operations the noise level should not exceed 65 dBA, similar to typical rural back ground noise. The ranch’s nearest property is 3/4 mile to the closest MAF.

No landowner should experience noise levels above 65dBA for longer than short periods of time. As stated in the Final EA, the Proposed Action would fly helicopters primarily during daylight hours and avoiding flight paths near residences, horses and grazing livestock, as practicable to support the mission. Based upon the Final EA technical analysis, noise resulting from helicopter operations of the Proposed Action would not have a significant environmental effect on livestock or wildlife.

The Montana Transportation Department raised concerns during the scoping process about effects from rotor wash effects on nearby highways and secondary containment for refueling. Both comments were evaluated in the draft EA with no significant environmental effect noted.

Advertisements in two local papers were run in prominent locations, a webpage with the draft environmental assessment and capability for submitting comments online was developed, and copies of the draft EA were sent to four libraries near the affected facilities. Additionally, postcards were mailed to neighbors living within one mile of each of the facilities alerting them of the availability of the draft EA and inviting comments.

Based on the number and content of the comments received from the public, the effects on the quality of the human environment are not considered highly controversial.

5. Potential uncertain, unique or unknown effects on the quality of the human environment: No highly uncertain or unknown risks to the human environment were identified during analysis of the preferred alternative.
6. Potential to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration: The preferred alternative neither establishes a precedent for future Air Force actions with significant effects nor represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

7. Potential to adversely affect district, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed on the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources: No historic properties were identified within the area of potential effects. A review by the Montana Historical Society, State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) concurred with a “No Effect” determination for cultural impacts.

8. Potential to adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its critical habitat: No endangered or threatened species are impacted by the preferred action at any of the facilities. Greater Sage Grouse is found in the missile complex but not in any of the affected facilities. The EA describes mitigating actions by the Air Force for the preferred action including flying at higher levels around certain facilities and altering flight paths around wetlands.

9. Potential to violate of federal, state, or local environmental protection law: The preferred alternative violates no federal, state, or local environmental protection laws.

Cumulative Impacts

Cumulative effects are “the impact on the environment which results from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonable foreseeable future actions regardless of what agency (Federal or non-Federal) or person undertakes such other actions.

The EA considered cumulative impacts that could result from the incremental impact of the proposed Helicopter refueling activities, when added to existing activities and other past, present, or reasonably foreseeable future actions. No other reasonably foreseeable actions have been identified in the vicinity of the affected MAFs that could contribute to potential cumulative environmental impacts, along with impacts associated with implementation of the Proposed Action. No significant cumulative impacts are expected.

Finding of No Significant Impact. After review of the EA prepared in accordance with the requirements of NEPA; CEQ regulations; and 32 CFR Part 989, Environmental Impact Analysis Process, and which is hereby incorporated by reference, I have determined that the proposed Malmstrom Helicopter Landing and Refueling Project will not have a significant impact on the quality of the human or natural environment. Accordingly, an Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared. This decision has been made after taking into account all submitted information, and considering a full range of practical alternatives that meet project requirements and are within the legal authority of the U.S. Air Force. The signing of this FONSI completes the environmental impact analysis process.

Signed:

RONALD G. ALLEN, JR., Colonel, USAF
Commander, 341st Missile Wing

Date: 16 May 16