

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Cannon Air Force Base Environmental Assessment for Low Altitude Tactical Navigation Area

PROPOSED ACTION QUESTIONS

1. **What is being proposed?** Under this proposal, the 27th Special Operations Wing (27 SOW) based at Cannon AFB, would use a newly proposed low altitude tactical navigation (LATN) area to accomplish unique Special Operations Forces (SOF) mobility training requirements. Aircrews would hone unique skills by flying:
 - At night
 - In high altitude mountains

The SOF mobility training would consist of approximately three sorties (or training flights) per day, or approximately 688 annually, in the northern portion of New Mexico and the southern portion of Colorado. For each sortie, approximately three hours would be spent on training in the LATN area and the remainder of the five-hour flight would be spent training at Melrose Range or a local airfield. Aircraft would fly as low as 200 feet above-ground-level (AGL) at speeds below 250 nautical miles per hour. The majority of training flights would take place after dusk and approximately 95% would take place Monday through Friday.

Aircrews flying in the LATN area would comply with all FAA flight rules, and would use aircraft lighting and communications systems. In compliance with Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and Air Force regulations, aircraft training in the LATN would avoid airfields, towns, noise sensitive areas, and wilderness areas by prescribed vertical and/or horizontal distances. Low-level training is the sole objective to accomplish in the LATN area and no air drops are proposed in the LATN area.

2. **What is the Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC)?** AFSOC, headquartered at Hurlburt Field, Florida, was established in 1990 to provide Air Force Special Operations Forces (SOF) for worldwide deployment and assignment to regional unified commands. AFSOC is composed of highly trained, rapidly deployable airmen who are equipped with highly specialized aircraft. These forces provide global ability to conduct special operations missions ranging from precision application of firepower, to infiltration, exfiltration, resupply, and refueling of SOF operational elements.

AFSOC is a Major Command (MAJCOM) and the Air Force component of U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), a unified command located at MacDill AFB, Florida. AFSOC is responsible to USSOCOM for the readiness of Air Force SOF for worldwide

deployment. On August 20, 2007 a Record of Decision (ROD) approved the beddown of AFSOC personnel and equipment at Cannon AFB, New Mexico and created a new AFSOC Wing, the 27th Special Operations Wing (27 SOW). AFSOC's core tasks and the 27 SOW training requirements are grouped into four mission areas:

- Forward presence and engagement;
- Information operations;
- Precision employment and strike; and
- SOF mobility.

3. **Why is AFSOC looking to terrain in New Mexico and Colorado to meet Training Requirements?** This area was primarily selected due to the topography, proximity to Cannon AFB, and lack of a large civilian populations. The proposed LATN area is necessary because the existing Military Training Routes (MTRs) controlled by 27 SOW at Cannon AFB are generally narrow corridors over flat terrain designed for use by F-16 aircraft previously flown from Cannon AFB. These MTRs do not provide the access to aircrew training opportunities over high mountainous terrain need to represent current real world taskings. During night missions in high mountainous terrain, aircrews are challenged in that they must keep the aircraft on the proper time schedule and course while avoiding simulated threats. This SOF mobility capability is a unique, national asset and proficiency at these skills are required for successful operations in ongoing global conflicts. The northern New Mexico and southern Colorado area proposed for the SOF training meets these terrain requirements.
4. **If the proposed LATN is not established, what will be the consequences?** Aircrew training would occur in existing Military Training Routes (MTRs) and Kirtland LATNs. The majority of these airspace units are managed and scheduled by the 27th SOW or the 58 SOW based at Kirtland AFB near Albuquerque, New Mexico. The 27 SOW MTRs are limited in length and are over relatively flat terrain. The 58 SOW MTRs meet Cannon-based aircrew training requirements, but the number of routes are limited. The Kirtland AFB LATNs do not provide sufficient high altitude mountainous terrain to meet 27 SOW training requirements as well as the training requirements of the 58 SOW. If the 27 SOW training remains restricted to existing airspace units, aircrews would not develop the unique skills obtained by training in varied mountainous terrain.
5. **What aircraft would be using the LATN?** C-130 and CV-22 Osprey aircraft based at Cannon AFB would be the primary users of the proposed LATN.

AFSOC C-130s fly clandestine or low visibility, single-or multi-ship low-level missions intruding politically sensitive or hostile territory to provide air refueling for special operations aircraft. These aircraft primarily fly missions during darkness to reduce probability of visual acquisition and intercept by airborne threats. Secondary mission capabilities may include airdrop of leaflets, small special operations teams, bundles and combat rubber raiding craft, as well as night vision goggle (NVG) use, and in-flight refueling as a receiver. Simulated training would occur in the proposed area with no items leaving the aircraft. The C-130 features improved navigation, communication, threat detection, and countermeasures systems. They have a fully-integrated inertial navigation and Global

Positioning System (GPS), and NVG compatible interior and exterior lighting. The C-130 is also equipped with forward looking infrared, radar and missile warning receivers, chaff and flare dispensers, NVG compatible heads-up display, satellite and data-burst communications. The C-130 can fly during the day in a low threat environment. At night, the crews fly at low-levels, performing air refueling and formation operation using NVGs. To enhance mission success and survivability by avoiding detection, employment tactics include blacked-out flights with no external lighting or communications. Lights and communication would be utilized during the Cannon AFB-scheduled airspace training.

The CV-22 Osprey is a tilt rotor, twin-engine aircraft that combines the vertical takeoff, hover, and vertical landing qualities of a helicopter with the long-range, fuel efficiency, and speed characteristics of a turboprop aircraft. The CV-22 Osprey adds new capability and fills a long-standing United States Special Operations Command requirement to conduct long-range infiltration, exfiltration, and resupply and air refueling missions during day/night operations. The CV-22 Osprey can take off vertically and, once airborne, the nacelles (engine and prop-rotor group) on each wing can rotate into a forward position. This versatile, self-deployable aircraft offers increased speed and range over other rotary-wing aircraft, and can perform missions that normally would require both fixed-wing and rotary-wing aircraft. The CV-22 Osprey has an advanced electronic warfare suite and multimode radar, a retractable aerial refueling probe, and four crew positions in the cockpit. The CV-22 is equipped with integrated threat countermeasures, terrain-following radar, forward-looking infrared sensor, and other advanced avionics systems that allow it to operate at low altitude in adverse conditions and medium- to high-threat environments, and can cruise at 220 knots indicated airspeed.

6. **Are there weapons on the aircraft? Will the aircraft drop anything on training systems or fire at training transmitters?** No weapons would be employed during training in the LATN. Pilots fly their aircraft to exercise pilot and aircraft systems to simulate defense against threats.
7. **Will construction occur on Cannon AFB or Melrose Range?** No construction activity is proposed on Cannon AFB or Melrose Range as part of this action.
8. **Are personnel, including family members, expected to relocate to the area as a result of the proposal?** No additional personnel are anticipated to move to the area as a result of this proposal. The EA will address potential environmental effects of establishing the LATN area.
9. **Who is going to pay for all of this training and equipment?** This proposal is mandated by the Chief of Staff of the USAF and is budgeted into the DoD's budget. There is no proposed new aircraft/equipment/construction associated with this action.

NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT QUESTIONS

10. What is an Environmental Assessment (EA)? An EA is a document that a Federal agency must prepare pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act to determine whether a federal action would significantly affect the environment and thus require a more detailed environmental impact statement. Once the environmental assessment is complete, the federal agency will either determine that an Environmental Impact Statement is required because the federal action has the potential to significantly impact the environment or will issue a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI).

11. What environmental resources will be analyzed in the EA? The Low Altitude Tactical Navigation (LATN) EA will analyze the following resource areas to determine the potential environmental consequences of the Air Force's proposal to establish a LATN area for C-130 and CV-22 Osprey aircrews:

- Airspace Operations: Airspace Management, Noise, Air Quality, and Flight Safety;
- Biological Resources: Terrestrial, Wetland, and Freshwater Aquatic Communities, Threatened and Endangered, and Special Status Species;
- Cultural Resources: Archaeological, Native American, and Traditional Resources; and,
- Human Resources: Land Use, Recreation, Visual Resources, and Environmental Justice

12. When will the Draft EA be available to the public? We anticipate the Draft EA will be available in Fall 2010.

13. Where can I view a copy of the Draft EA when it becomes available? The Draft EA can be viewed online at www.cannon.af.mil and will be available at the Clovis-Carver, Portales, Roswell, Vaughn, Moise Memorial, and Fort Sumner public libraries. You may also request a copy from Cannon AFB (575-784-4131).

14. How can I become involved in the environmental process (environmental impact analysis process [EIAP]) or comment on the Draft EA? You can provide your input regarding what you would like to see analyzed in the EA to the Air Force either via mail, email or fax. Scoping comments are requested by July X, 2010 to ensure your input is considered during preparation of the Draft EA. Request a copy of the Draft EA for review from the Cannon AFB Public Affairs Office at 110 E Sextant, Suite 1150 Cannon AFB NM

88103 Phone: (575) 784-4131, Fax: (575) 784-7412 Email: 27SOWpublicaffairs@cannon.af.mil or view the document www.cannon.af.mil, when it becomes available. After reviewing the Draft EA, provide written comments to the contact information above.

15. **What is the EA schedule?** In June the USAF notified the public that an EA is being prepared. It is anticipated that the Draft EA will be issued in the of Fall 2010 and that a Final EA will follow, after the incorporation of comments.

AIRSPACE QUESTIONS

16. **What is a Military Training Route or MTR?** Military Training Routes (MTRs) are flight corridors developed and used by the Department of Defense (DoD) to practice high speed, low-altitude flight, generally below 10,000 feet above mean sea level (MSL). They are described by a centerline, with defined horizontal limits on either side of the centerline, and vertical limits expressed as minimum and maximum altitudes along the flight track. MTRs are identified as Visual Routes (VRs), which are flown under Visual Flight Rule (VFR), or Instrument Routes (IRs), which are flown under Instrument Flight Rule (IFR). MTR locations including defined entry and exit points are published in the FAA's Flight Information Publications so that non-participating pilots can be aware of their presence and plan flights accordingly. No changes to MTRs are included in this proposal; however, they are defined because they are an important component of airspace used for military training.

17. **What is a Low Altitude Tactical Navigation Area or LATN?** LATNs are defined geographic areas within which low-altitude navigation can be practiced. Aircrews training in LATNs fly in accordance with Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) flight rules and training in LATNs is not considered to be hazardous to non-participating aircraft. FAA and Air Force regulations require aircraft utilizing the LATN to avoid airfields, towns, noise sensitive areas, and wilderness areas by prescribed vertical and/or horizontal distances. Aircraft must fly at airspeeds of 250 knots (288 statute miles per hour) or less and are precluded from flying over the same point more than once per day.

18. **What role does the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) play in the proposal?** The FAA manages the National Airspace System and may review and comment on the Draft EA.

19. **How are altitudes measured or specified?** Altitudes may be specified in feet above ground level (AGL), feet above mean sea level (MSL), or as a Flight Level (FL). FL is specified in hundreds of feet, and is approximately equal to MSL. For example, FL240 is approximately 24,000 feet MSL.

NOISE RELATED QUESTIONS

- 20. Will noise levels increase due to the proposed action?** Individual overflights would result in a temporary increase in noise levels. However, given the large size of the proposed LATN and the small number of proposed training flights (three per day), any given location beneath the MOA would be expected to be overflown relatively infrequently. Furthermore, as mentioned previously, Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and Air Force regulations require aircraft utilizing the LATN area to avoid airfields, towns, noise sensitive areas and wilderness areas by prescribed vertical and/or horizontal distances to the extent practicable.
- 21. If citizens have complaints, how will they know who to call?** Because this project is so widely dispersed, citizens will like call their local representative. We have sent letters about this proposed project, along with maps of potentially impacted areas to mayors, county commissioners, state and federal congresspersons throughout the potentially impacted area so that they are aware of the potential training flights in the LATN area.
- 22. How does the Air Force know that endangered birds won't be impacted from the noise of the low-level flights?** The Air Force is preparing an EA to make this determination and will coordinate it's analysis with federal and sate agencies within the affected area.