

DRAFT FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)
FORGING SABRE BIENNIAL EXERCISES AT MOUNTAIN HOME AIR
FORCE BASE, IDAHO

Pursuant to provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), 42 United States Code (U.S.C.) §§ 4321 to 4370; Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) Regulations, 40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) §§ 1500 to 1508; and 32 CFR § 989, *Environmental Impact Analysis Process* (EIAP), Mountain Home Air Force (MHAFB) prepared the attached Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) to address the potential environmental consequences associated with biennial Forging Sabre exercises occurring at MHAFB, Mountain Home Range Complex (MHRC), Orchard Combat Training Center (OCTC), Boise Airport, and the Utah Test and Training Range (UTTR) beginning in 2021.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to enhance the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) training mission through integrated biennial exercises to maintain maximum readiness for SAF personnel, with support from U.S. Armed Forces. Integrated exercises allow Republic of Singapore Air Force (RSAF) F-15SGs to train with other SAF military assets and show continued U.S. commitment to support foreign allies' and partners' training requirements in a combined operational environment.

The Proposed Action is needed because the Republic of Singapore has limited airspace and range space to support a large-scale air and ground force training exercise. The Proposed Action would also continue the building of U.S. relationships, integration, and interoperability with SAF. The Proposed Action would provide training for effective combat readiness of an important partner nation, fulfilling the need to train as a team to perform in a multinational force structure.

Description of Proposed Action and Alternatives

MHAFB proposes to support Forging Sabre exercises beginning in 2021 and occurring every other year thereafter. Components of each Forging Sabre exercise would include construction of temporary facilities and modification of an existing building, temporary personnel increases, and training operations (aircraft flight training, ground operations, and munitions expenditures).

To provide additional office space and storage capabilities at MHAFB, new temporary facilities would be installed, and one existing facility would be modified prior to the exercises. Facility modifications at other exercise locations would not be required; however, temporary targets (e.g., shipping containers) could be placed at MHRC, OCTC, and UTTR to support air and ground training operations, as is regularly done for existing U.S. Air Force (USAF) and U.S. Army training operations at these locations. Such actions would be within the operational envelopes analyzed under previous NEPA for each range (see **Section 1.6** of the EA).

The Proposed Action would require an additional 1,300 deployed personnel during the exercises that would operate air and ground assets and provide necessary support services.

This would include 500 SAF personnel from existing U.S. units and 800 SAF personnel from the Republic of Singapore.

The proposed training activities (aircraft flight and combat maneuvers, ground operations, and munitions use) to be conducted for the Proposed Action are in compliance with and are within the allowances of previously completed USAF Environmental Impact Statements (EISs) and EAs which are incorporated into the EA by reference. The analyses incorporated by reference include the 2018 RSAF Beddown of Additional F-15s EA, 2013 F-35 Operational Basing EIS, Title 14 CFR § 91, General Operating and Flight Rules and conditions of the Certificate of Waiver or Authorization for the Forging Sabre 2021 exercise, FAA Order 1050.1F – Policies and Procedures for Considering Environmental Impacts, and the 2017 MHRC EA. Additionally, all facilities, aircraft operations, ground operations, and munitions use during exercises would occur on military or joint civil-military use property, or within military ranges that currently support similar operations. Therefore, training activities are not analyzed for potential impacts in the EA.

Analysis in the EA is focused on only the components of the Proposed Action that are not currently documented or analyzed in existing NEPA or other planning documents, including construction and preparation activities, the temporary increase in personnel required for the biennial exercises, and transit flights of the MRTT between MHAFB and the Boise Airport, and UAS transit flights between MHAFB and the nearby restricted areas.

No Action Alternative

USAF NEPA regulations require consideration of the No Action Alternative, which serves as a baseline against which the impacts of the Proposed Action and other potential action alternatives can be evaluated. Under the No Action Alternative, USAF would not support Forging Sabre biennial exercises at MHAFB. The No Action Alternative would not meet the purpose of and need for the Proposed Action and would not allow RSAF to enhance their training mission at MHAFB. The No Action Alternative would limit RSAF's ability to maintain maximum readiness for RSAF forces and USAF's ability to train with an important partner nation, and would not fulfill the need for USAF and the RSAF to train as a team to perform in a multinational force structure.

Summary of Findings

The analysis of environmental effects focused on the following environmental resources: noise, air quality, cultural resources, health and safety, socioeconomics, biological resources, water resources, and hazardous materials and waste management.

Noise. The Proposed Action would have short-term minor adverse effects on the noise environment. Short-term effects would be due to noise generated by heavy equipment during construction. There would be no long-term effects from changes in aircraft noise in areas surrounding MHAFB during the transit flights associated with the proposed exercises. For areas between MHAFB, MHRC, OCTC, and the Boise Airport, both the level of noise and the frequency of overflights are, and would continue to be very low, and there would be no perceptible change in the noise environment from aircraft in transit between these installations

and training areas. The Proposed Action would not lead to a violation of any federal, state, or local noise ordinance, and would not substantially increase areas of incompatible land use on and adjacent to MHAFB.

Air Quality. There would be short-term, minor, adverse effects on air quality from fugitive dust and the use of heavy equipment during construction and renovation. There would be no long-term effects from changes in aircraft operations in areas surrounding MHAFB. Emissions would not exceed the PSD major source thresholds, and the Proposed Action would not contribute to a violation of any federal, state, or local air regulation.

Cultural Resources. No National Register of Historic Places-eligible properties or traditional cultural resources have been identified in the Area of Potential Effect of the Proposed Action; therefore, no impacts on cultural resources under the Proposed Action Alternative are expected.

Health and Safety. Construction and preparation activities under the Proposed Action would result in short-term, negligible, adverse impacts on the health and safety of construction personnel directly involved in installing temporary facilities and renovating Building 1361 at MHAFB. Short-term, negligible, adverse impacts on personnel safety would occur under the Proposed Action because of the temporary increase in personnel during Forging Sabre exercises. The addition of up to 1,300 SAF personnel at MHAFB and in the surrounding areas during biennial exercises could potentially negligibly increase demand on the local police, fire, and emergency services. To minimize health and safety risks, all construction activities and siting of proposed facilities would remain outside of existing ESQD arcs unless permitted for use in accordance with Department of Defense regulatory requirements and ammunition and explosives safety standards.

Socioeconomics. Under the Proposed Action, short-term, negligible effects on demographics would occur as a result of the increase of 1,300 personnel. The use of regional labor would have short-term, minor, beneficial impacts on employment within the construction industry, increasing local employment for construction activities associated with site preparation and facility modification. The purchase of goods and services to support the site preparation and construction of the temporary facilities associated with the Proposed Action would have a short-term, minor, beneficial effect on the MHAFB region economy.

Biological Resources. Under the Proposed Action, short-term, negligible, adverse effects on vegetation in the project area, which would include grass, shrubs, and other landscaping, would be expected as a result of the installation of temporary facilities and a temporary increase in personnel at MHAFB. Additionally, construction noise from installation of temporary facilities and modifications to Building 1361, and a temporary increase in personnel operating on the installation would result in short-term, negligible to minor, adverse effects on wildlife. Construction noise could cause wildlife to engage in escape or avoidance behaviors; however, the area of disturbance would be within a developed area at MHAFB where disturbances such as noise and motion (e.g., moving, landscaping, foot and vehicle traffic, and flight line activities) already occur. The Proposed Action would have no effect on federally listed species because none are known to occur in the project area. Because the proposed facility sites are within

semi-developed or developed ground where vegetation and landscaping are maintained regularly, impacts on vegetation and wildlife would be minimized. All the proposed flight operations would be consistent with the existing day and night flight activities occurring at MHAFB and would be conducted in accordance with the installation's *Bird and Wildlife Strike Hazard Safety Plan*.

Water Resources. Negligible impacts on groundwater could occur from an accidental spill during site preparation and construction or removal of 68 temporary facilities, on up to four acres of land used for similar purposes, or during renovation of Building 1361. Negligible impacts on surface water and stormwater could result from site preparation, construction, or removal activities of 68 temporary facilities. All temporary facilities would be installed in areas that were previously used for similar purposes or were previously developed; this might require minor ground disturbance which could displace soils and sediment into nearby waterbodies. There are no surface water features in the temporary facility locations. There are no wetland features in the vicinity of temporary facility locations; therefore, no impacts on wetlands are anticipated under the Proposed Action.

Hazardous Materials and Wastes. Short-term, minor, adverse impacts on hazardous materials and petroleum products would occur from renovation of Building 1361. Hazardous materials are not likely to be used during temporary facility installation; however, renovation of Building 1361 could employ paints, solvents, liquid descalers, hydrochloric acid, glycol, and sealants. Hydraulic fluids and petroleum products, such as diesel and gasoline, would be used in vehicles and equipment for renovation activities and would produce waste products. All hazardous materials, petroleum products, and hazardous waste would be handled, contained, stored, disposed of, and managed appropriately in accordance with existing USAF, federal, state, and local regulations. Short-term, minor, adverse impacts from toxic substances might occur from the proposed renovation of Building 1361 because the building may contain hazardous materials (asbestos containing materials, lead based paint, and polychlorinated biphenyls) that could be disturbed during renovation activities. Surveys for special hazards would be completed, as necessary, by a certified contractor prior to work activities to ensure appropriate measures are taken to reduce potential exposure to, and release of, these toxic substances.

Reasonably Foreseeable Actions

The EA considered impacts of the Proposed Action when combined with other reasonably foreseeable actions in the project area. No potentially significant impacts were identified.

Mitigations

The analysis concluded that the Proposed Action would not result in significant environmental impacts; therefore, no mitigation measures would be required. Best management practices, standard operating procedures, and environmental commitments would be implemented as appropriate to avoid or reduce the anticipated impacts.

Conclusion

Finding of No Significant Impact. After review of the EA prepared in accordance with the requirements of NEPA; the CEQ Regulations; and 32 CFR § 989 (*Environmental Impact Analysis Process*), which is hereby incorporated by reference, I have determined that the Proposed Action would 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 considering all submitted information, including a review of public and agency comments submitted during the 30-day public comment period, and considering a full range of practical alternatives that meet project requirements and are within the full legal authority of USAF.

Richard A. Goodman, Colonel USAF

Date