

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FNSI)
WASHINGTON ARMY NATIONAL GUARD (WA ARNG)
CONSTRUCTION AND OPERATION OF A TACTICAL UNMANNED AIRCRAFT SYSTEM (TUAS)
FACILITY AND TRAINING OF A WA ARNG TUAS PLATOON AT THE US ARMY'S YAKIMA TRAINING
CENTER, WASHINGTON**

Introduction

The Washington Army National Guard (WA ARNG) prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) to identify and evaluate potential adverse environmental effects associated with the Proposed Action—construction and operation of a WA ARNG Tactical Unmanned Aircraft System (TUAS) facility at the United States Army's Yakima Training Center (YTC), Washington.

This proposed action is needed to provide the TUAS platoon of A Company, 81st Heavy Brigade Combat Team/ Brigade Special Troops Battalion (HBCT/BSTB) with facilities to store and maintain its unmanned aircraft systems at a location where the unit can train. This TUAS training is intended to give the 81st HBCT/BSTB situational awareness at the Brigade level and lower, by gathering Reconnaissance, Surveillance, and Target Acquisition (RSTA) data using unmanned aircraft. The TUAS platoon requires an airstrip for launch and recovery of the aircraft; sufficient restricted use airspace (RUA) or military airspace for flight and maneuvering of the aircraft; a hangar for administration, storage, and maintenance activities; and related site infrastructure such as parking and utilities. Providing the platoon with facilities and training areas at YTC will lead to more seamless operations in preparing for future deployments to a theater of operation and more realistic RSTA support.

WA ARNG prepared the EA in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 (42 United States Code 4321 to 4360d), as implemented by the regulations promulgated by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) (40 Code of Federal Regulations Section 1500-1508) and 32 CFR Part 651, Environmental Analysis of Army Actions.

1. Description of the Proposed Action and Alternatives

Proposed Action: The WA ARNG proposes to construct and operate a TUAS facility and train a TUAS platoon at YTC. The WA ARNG will enter into a 25-year real property agreement [license] with The Department of the Army via the United States Army Corps of Engineers-Seattle District, for use of land at YTC. This facility would be intended for the WA ARNG's 81st HBCT/BSTB/TUAS Platoon, and act as the platoon's primary duty station to support all collective and individual training requirements along with all administrative requirements.

Alternatives Considered: Section 2.0 of the Draft EA presents a discussion of the alternatives evaluated. WA ARNG identified two alternatives for the TUAS construction – either to construct at the north end of Selah Airstrip (Preferred Action Alternative) or to construct at the southwest corner of Selah Airstrip (Alternative Location). The alternatives considered are summarized as follows:

Alternative 1: No Action Alternative - Continue with WA ARNG TUAS operations as currently conducted at YTC and do not implement the Proposed Action at YTC.

Alternative 2: Preferred Action Alternative - Implement the Proposed Action which is to construct and operate the proposed TUAS facility at the north end of Selah Airstrip. (N. Selah) on YTC.

Alternative 3: Alternative Location – Construction and operation of the proposed TUAS facilities at the southwest corner of Selah Airstrip. (S. Selah) on YTC.

Alternatives Evaluated:

Alternative 1: No Action Alternative

The No Action alternative serves as a baseline from which to compare all other reasonable alternatives and is not analyzed as an action alternative to accomplish the proposed action. The real property agreement [license] and construction of facilities would not occur; however, the operations and training of the WA ARNG platoon would still take place at YTC. Currently, TUAS training occurs at Selah but WA ARNG soldiers use temporary structures (tents). Due to the lack of facilities specifically designed for TUAS training, the efficiency and effectiveness of the TUAS platoon training at YTC is degraded.

Alternative 2: Preferred Action Alternative

The North Selah Airstrip alternative consists of construction of the proposed facilities at the north end of the YTC Selah Airstrip and conducting all TUAS training, operations and maintenance at that site. The North Selah site fulfills the needs of the platoon while at the same time has minimal interference with existing YTC training. Selah Airstrip is located in the southwestern part of YTC. To achieve flexibility in the siting of the N. Selah alternative, an area of 189 acres has been delineated in which an approximately 8 acre WA ARNG facility would be constructed. The effects from construction and training at any 8 acre parcel within those 189 acres would be essentially identical. This would provide the WA ARNG with the flexibility to site the proposed TUAS facility at the optimal location within the 189 acre zone. The airstrip is positioned such that obstructions to flight are minimal, the RUA boundary is far enough away to allow unconfined flight maneuvers on take-off/landing and there are no topographical obstructions. This site supports the mission of the platoon by providing enough space to conduct TUAS training effectively and also allows for possible future development. The distance to existing infrastructure [roads, buildings, utilities] is approximately 4.8 miles.

Alternative 3: Alternative Location

The South Selah Airstrip alternative consists of constructing the proposed facilities at the southwest corner of Selah Airstrip and conducting all TUAS training, administrative activities, operations and maintenance at that site. The approximately 8.0 acre S. Selah site fulfills the needs of the platoon and has sufficient RUA for the platoon. However, use of this site would encroach on the current use of Range 15 (R15) to the south of the airstrip. This site is within the range fan of R15, which is the third highest used range at YTC, and would require closure of R15 while the TUAS facility was being used or vice versa. In addition, if R15 is in use, the access route to Selah Airstrip would have to be altered because a portion of the southern access route is closed during R15 live-fire operations. This conflict would be resolved by units scheduling the use of either training asset in advance through Range Control who manages the use of all training areas and ranges. No other obstacles to flight exist. The S. Selah site could support the TUAS training mission and represents the alternative with the shortest distance to connect to utilities, 3.0 miles. Future expansion capability does not exist adjacent to this location, but could be possible to the north at other areas around the airstrip.

2. Environmental Analysis

The potential environmental impacts associated with the proposed action are fully described in the EA. Based on the analysis contained in the EA, WA ARNG determined that the TUAS project would not have any significant adverse impacts on air resources, geological resources, water resources, cultural resources, and hazardous materials. Foreseeable future actions expected to take place on or around YTC or to have an effect on the proposed action would not have significant cumulative impacts. In addition, WA ARNG has determined that a mitigation measure will be required to reduce potentially significant adverse effects to less than significant level for biological resources. The big sagebrush/bluebunch wheatgrass vegetation community serves as a suitable nesting and brood-rearing habitat for sage-grouse, a federal candidate species, a Washington State threatened species, and is considered by the US Army to be a Species-at-Risk.

3. Mitigation

The implementation of below mitigation measures for either of the alternatives listed in the final EA would reduce adverse impacts to biological resources to less than significant levels.

- Under North Selah alternative, the mitigation includes restoration of approximately 24 acres of big sagebrush/bluebunch wheatgrass vegetation communities in areas previously disturbed.
- Under South Selah alternative, the mitigation includes restoration of approximately 20 acres of big sagebrush/bluebunch wheatgrass vegetation communities in areas previously disturbed.

This mitigation strategy for both alternative locations works two-fold in that it lowers the level of significance for the impacts on the vegetation communities which also serves as the sage grouse's habitat.

4. Regulations

The Proposed Action will not violate NEPA, the CEQ Regulations, 32 CFR 651, or other Federal, state, or local environmental regulations.

5. Commitment to Implementation

The National Guard Bureau (NGB) and WA ARNG affirm their commitment to implement the proposed action and mitigation measures in this EA in accordance with NEPA. Implementation is dependent on funding. The WA ARNG and the NGB's Environmental Programs, Training, and Installations Divisions will ensure that adequate funds are requested in future years' budgets to achieve the goals and objectives set forth in this EA.

6. Public Review and Comment

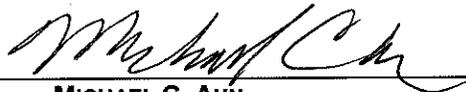
The drafts EA/FNSI were made available for public review and comment from August 01 – 15, 2012 and extended to August 30, 2012 per YTC's request. Documents were made available at the Yakima Valley Regional Library (Selah Library), Kittitas Public Library, Environment and Natural Resources Division of Yakima Training Center Bldg. 810, and the WA ARNG's Environmental Programs office at Camp Murray Bldg. 36. A Public Notice was published in two newspapers (Yakima Herald and The Daily Journal of Commerce). All documents were posted on the Washington Military Department's internet website: <http://mil.wa.gov/Environmental/Army.shtml>. The WA ARNG received and addressed comments from JBLM-Legal, YTC Environmental Division, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Yakima Regional Clean Air Agency, Yakama Nation, and Wanapum Band.

7. Finding of No Significant Impact

After careful review of the EA, I have concluded that implementation of Alternative 1, the North Selah Airstrip Alternative, would not generate significant controversy or have a significant impact on the quality of the human or natural environment. This analysis fulfills the requirements of the NEPA, the CEQ Regulations and 32 CFR 651. An Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared, and the NGB would be issuing this Finding of No Significant Impact.

30 Jan 13

Date



MICHAEL C. AHN
Colonel, US. Army
Chief, Environmental
Programs Division