

DRAFT FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)

PROPOSED INTEGRATED NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT PLAN (INRMP) PROJECTS AT NELLIS AIR FORCE BASE AND THE NEVADA TEST AND TRAINING RANGE, NEVADA

Pursuant to provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Title 42 *United States Code* (USC) § 4321 et seq.; Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) Regulations at 40 *Code of Federal Regulations* (CFR) Parts 1500–1508; and 32 CFR Part 989, *Environmental Impact Analysis Process (EIAP)*, the United States (US) Air Force (Air Force) prepared the attached Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) to address the potential environmental consequences associated with construction, demolition, and renovation projects at Nellis Air Force Base (AFB) and the Nevada Test and Training Range (NTTR) in Nevada.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to guide and document the manner in which Nellis AFB and the NTTR manage natural resources while supporting the military mission. The INRMP has established long-term goals, objectives, and projects for management and protection of natural resource assets integral to carrying out the military mission and provides guidance on avoiding impacts to natural resources during the planning, designing, and management phases of new construction/expansion projects when practicable. The Proposed Action is needed to ensure that Nellis AFB and the NTTR remain in compliance with the Sikes Act (Public Law 86-797) as amended; Air Force Manual (AFMAN) 32-7003, Environmental Conservation; Air Force Policy Directive 32-70, Environmental Considerations in Air Force Programs and Activities; and Department of Defense Instruction (DoDI) 4715.03, Natural Resources Conservation Program. The Sikes Act requires the development and implementation of an INRMP, the implementation of which requires the DoD to cooperate with federal and state agencies concerning conservation, protection, and management of fish and wildlife resources on military installations. The INRMP provides an important tool that is referenced during the planning, design, and construction phases of construction/expansion projects occurring on the installations and ensures that natural resources are considered during planning, site selection, and decision-making processes.

Description of Proposed Action

The Proposed Action includes natural resource management projects on Nellis AFB and the NTTR that align with established INRMP goals and objectives. These projects would include, but not be limited to, conducting survey work for identified taxa; installing and maintaining equipment such as cameras and acoustic monitors; treating invasive species with approved herbicides; monitoring water parameters; trapping and releasing species according to state and federal permit requirements; conducting habitat restoration projects for the benefit of special-status species; installing and monitoring exclusionary fences around sensitive areas; maintaining permits for flight safety; conducting hazardous fuel reduction projects to reduce the threats of wildland fire; updating the Natural Resources Management Database to inform management decisions; and conducting educational outreach.

The Nellis Natural Resources Program has established long-term goals, objectives, and projects for the management and protection of natural resource assets integral to carrying out the military mission. The proposed INRMP projects are categorized under these goals (listed below), each with a set of objectives and list of projects that support their achievement.

- Goal 1: Ensure long-term wildlife and ecosystem viability on Nellis AFB and the NTTR in support of the military mission by conducting targeted surveys and monitoring for threatened, endangered, and sensitive species.
- Goal 2: Sustain and protect sensitive plant and animal species and natural habitats to support the military mission and preserve biodiversity in a changing climate.
- Goal 3: Maintain compliance with federal, state, local, and military regulations.
- Goal 4: Protect life, property, and resources from wildfire at costs commensurate with values at risk.

- Goal 5: Update the Natural Resources Management Database and GIS to comply with spatial data standards for facilities, infrastructure, and the environment and provide the foundation for management.

Summary of Findings

Potentially affected environmental resources were identified through communications with state and federal agencies and review of past environmental documentation. Specific environmental resources with the potential for environmental consequences include land use; earth resources; air quality and climate change; water resources; biological resources; cultural resources; infrastructure, including transportation and utilities; and safety and occupational health.

Land Use

No significant adverse effects to land use would be expected to result from implementation of the Proposed Action. The development of the environmental appreciation park for recreation and conservation is compatible with the open space designation and would not be in conflict with the overall planning goals and land utilization of the Base. No land use change would occur under the Proposed Action.

Geological Resources

No significant effects to geological resources would be expected to result from implementation of the Proposed Action. The construction, environmental appreciation park and exclusion fencing projects would result in soil disturbances during excavation of foundation materials. Soil erosion potential would be short term and limited to construction activities. With proper project site analyses and implementation of best management practices (BMPs), the potential for increased soil erosion and sedimentation would be expected to be low and could be managed with structural controls such as stormwater diversion, detention ponds, wattles, silt fences, berms, and erosion control mats. No impacts to prime farmland would occur because no prime farmland occurs within Nellis AFB.

Air Quality

No significant effects to air quality would be expected to result from implementation of the Proposed Action. The estimated total annual emissions of the Proposed Action would not exceed the *de minimis* or Prevention of Significant Deterioration permitting thresholds for any criteria pollutant or precursor. Therefore, impacts from the Proposed Action on regional air quality would be expected to be minor and short term based on the findings of the Air Conformity Applicability Model.

Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, expressed in terms of carbon dioxide-equivalent (CO₂e), do not have a regulatory threshold; however, estimated emissions for CO₂e demonstrated that CO₂e emissions from the Proposed Action would be low when compared to GHG emissions of 25,000 metric tons or more associated with large GHG sources.

Water Resources

No significant effects to water resources would be expected to result from implementation of the Proposed Action.

Surface Water and Stormwater – Within Nellis AFB, natural perennial streams, rivers, springs, or lakes do not occur due to low precipitation, high evaporation rates, and low humidity. Several unnamed ephemeral streams and washes occur on Nellis AFB, including known washes that traverse Nellis AFB. If construction of the environmental appreciation park exceeds 5,000 ft², contractors would be required to maintain or restore, to the maximum extent feasible, the predevelopment hydrology of the property with respect to the water temperature, rate, volume, and duration of flow. Mitigation measures to control surface runoff from construction sites would minimize sedimentation in washes and opportunities for surface water and stormwater contamination. Projects to protect surface water resources include installing exclusionary fences around the Kawich Peak Spring, the Sumner Spring, and the Log Spring within the NTTR; and conducting wetland delineations, water testing, installation of soil moisture sensors, and ongoing

monitoring. These projects would result in long-term beneficial impacts to surface waters by providing Nellis AFB staff with information needed to develop management plans for these resources.

Groundwater – The construction projects under the Proposed Action would have the potential to impact groundwater if stormwater runoff from construction, demolition and renovation sites contained contaminants and entered the underground aquifer. Stormwater is managed in accordance with the BMPs in the Base's Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan. These controls would minimize the potential for groundwater contamination. Project to protect groundwater resources include conducting a survey of groundwater resources on the NTTR. Long-term, beneficial impacts would result from surveys as the NTTR Range would be better able to identify and describe groundwater quantity and locations.

Floodplains – None of the Proposed Action are located within a regulatory floodplain. No impacts to floodplains would be expected to result from implementation of the Proposed Action.

Biological Resources

No significant effects to biological resources would be expected to result from implementation of the Proposed Action.

Vegetation – The area of the environmental appreciation park is rich in known locations for the Las Vegas bearpoppy. The purpose of construction of the boardwalk is to protect this and other sensitive species from foot traffic. Design of the boardwalk location is intended to avoid impacts to the Las Vegas bearpoppy. Additional projects included in the Proposed Action include various vegetation surveying, restoration, and management. The projects would result in long-term beneficial impacts to sensitive plant species by providing additional information that could be used to protect existing vegetation.

Terrestrial Wildlife – The majority of projects under the Proposed Action would broadly benefit wildlife by providing updated information regarding wildlife, gathering data to inform wildlife management decisions, and improving conditions for wildlife across Nellis AFB and the NTTR. These projects include studies on small mammals, bats, bighorn sheep, herpetofauna, pronghorn, mesocarnivores, invertebrates, and mollusks. The projects would document population trends and biodiversity to inform management decisions on Nellis AFB and the NTTR. Any noise or impacts to wildlife that occur during these studies is considered short term and negligible.

Threatened or Endangered Species and Other Protected Species – The majority of projects under the Proposed Action would broadly benefit protected or sensitive species by providing updated information regarding populations, gathering data to inform management decisions, and improving conditions for protected species across Nellis AFB and the NTTR. The only federally protected species under the *Endangered Species Act* known to occur within the study area is the Mojave desert tortoise. Projects would conduct surveying and monitoring for desert tortoise. This includes conducting up to 40 field days of surveys for Mojave desert tortoise on Nellis AFB and the NTTR, including up to 6 days of helicopter use for accessing remote areas that cannot be reached by road. Tortoise monitoring would be expanded to include tortoise health assessment measurements, DNA sample collection and analysis, use of very high-frequency radio transmitters and shell-attached global positioning system loggers, and application of unique identification tag, as approved by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Impacts to the tortoise are considered short term and negligible. Long-term beneficial impacts to tortoises would be anticipated to occur as a result of the information gained from the transmitters, which would be used to inform management decisions.

Invasive Species – Projects would monitor and control invasive species across Nellis AFB and the NTTR. Surveys would include up to 400 acres and eight survey days for invasive species on the NTTR annually, and up to 200 acres and four survey days for invasive species on Nellis AFB annually. It would also survey approximately 250 acres of roadsides and borrow pits for the malta star thistle on Nellis AFB. Control of invasives would include application of pre-emergent herbicide to Bromus species infestations on the NTTR, application of herbicides to the road network between Tolicha Peak and Black Mountain, and annual treatment of invasive Sahara mustard, tamarisk, or other non-native invasive species on Nellis AFB Area II, on Wells Annex, and other sites on Nellis AFB. Controlling invasives is especially important for reducing

wildfire risk. This includes reducing hazardous fuel accumulation through various treatments. Coordinating wildland fire and invasive species initiatives is important for reducing large scale infestations of Bromus species to decrease wildfire risks.

Cultural Resources

No significant effects to cultural resources would be expected to result from implementation of the Proposed Action.

Archaeological Sites – Under the Proposed Action, the environmental appreciation park could have the potential to impact two archaeological sites that are located within the direct Area of Potential Effects of the proposed project as a result of construction and equipment staging activities associated with the installation of a boardwalk and shaded picnic areas. However, while the exact locations of the boardwalk and picnic areas have yet to be determined, the locations of the archaeological resources are known, and the project would be designed to avoid them. If designed accordingly, the project would not be anticipated to impact archaeological sites.

Historic Architectural Properties – No impacts to historic architectural properties would be anticipated to occur at Nellis AFB or the NTTR under the Proposed Action. Any projects that have the potential to occur within the proximity of historic architectural properties would result in no adverse effect to those resources.

Traditional Cultural Properties – No impacts to Traditional Cultural Properties would be anticipated to occur at Nellis AFB or the NTTR under the Proposed Action.

Infrastructure, Transportation, and Utilities

No significant adverse effects to infrastructure, transportation, or utilities would be expected to result from implementation of the Proposed Action.

Solid Waste – Projects would conduct cleanup of trash refuse within the fenced-in Area III Conservation Area. The removal of trash would assist in cleanup and remediation of areas that are critical to protected-species habitat and wildlife corridors. Republic Services has sufficient capacity to remove the additional waste that would be generated by this project.

Electricity and Natural Gas – The Proposed Action would involve conduct of winter surveys for the presence of raptors along powerlines on Nellis AFB and the NTTR. This action would not involve any physical disturbance of the lines and would not impact existing or future capacity to meet the Base's needs. The Proposed Action also would evaluate the potential to retrofit powerline features on the NTTR that are currently presenting dangers to raptors on the Range and would erect alternate nest perches as a replacement. This action would result in a long-term, beneficial impact to the reliability of electrical service in these areas by proactively evaluating and eliminating hazards to the power lines.

The Proposed Action would also clear 150 acres of hazardous fuel accumulation from the Cedar Peak Powerline along the northern boundary of the NTTR. The clearing would reduce the risk of wildland fire to high value powerlines. The Proposed Action would also clear trees underneath powerlines every few years based on a Bureau of Land Management schedule to reduce the risk of wildland fire and improve the reliability of the existing electrical infrastructure at NTTR.

Safety and Occupational Health

No significant effects to safety and occupational health would be expected to result from implementation of the Proposed Action.

Ground Safety – The Proposed Action would develop, produce, and install road signage for tortoise caution and speed limits, would have long-term beneficial impacts on ground safety by encouraging safe motor vehicle operation and discouraging speeding. The Proposed Action would have long-term, beneficial impacts on ground safety as habitat restoration efforts would likely involve removing invasive plants that

are not native to the local ecosystem, thereby reducing the amount of potential wildfire fuel. Projects which would apply herbicides to existing populations of invasive species, would have long-term beneficial impacts on ground safety by controlling and reducing infestations of invasive plants, thereby reducing the amount of potential fuel available for wildfires. Projects would also create a fire break and include treatment of hazardous fuel accumulation which would have long-term beneficial impacts on ground safety by slowing and/or stopping potential wildfires.

Flight Safety – The Proposed Action would obtain and maintain relevant permits to reduce Bird/wildlife Aircraft Strike Hazard (BASH) and collaborate with the 57th Wing Flight Safety to share BASH information, would have long-term beneficial impacts on flight safety by ensuring that the necessary permits and plans are in place to properly manage BASH, and would make available accurate information about the numbers of birds and BASH bird fatalities.

Cumulative Impacts

The EA considered cumulative impacts that could result from the incremental impact of Proposed Action when added to other past, present, or reasonably foreseeable environmental trends and planned actions on Nellis AFB. Projects that could potentially occur concurrently and result in cumulative impacts:

- Air Combat Command at Nellis Air Force Base (AFB) West Side Development Projects
- Northern Hub Development, Tolicha Peak Water Facility at the NTTR
- Master Plan and Installation Development at Nellis AFB

Projects proposed as part of the updated INRMP are considered essential to ensure long-term wildlife and ecosystem viability on Nellis AFB and the NTTR. The targeted surveys and monitoring for threatened, endangered, and sensitive species would inform all future management plans and development projects to their effect on the species and habitat within Nellis AFB and the NTTR.

The Proposed Action would include 35 days of pre-project surveys to detect Mojave desert tortoise and nesting birds, and construction monitoring for Mojave desert tortoise on Nellis AFB; these surveys and construction monitoring efforts would help to provide vital information regarding Mojave desert tortoise occurrences and potential efforts required to minimize impacts to the species. Additionally, installing exclusionary fencing for tortoise would also help to minimize impacts associated with proposed development. The pre-project surveys, exclusion fencing, and construction monitoring would help to protect tortoise and other sensitive species during the Master Plan and Installation development of the east side of Nellis AFB. Projects proposed for Installation development on the west side of Nellis AFB would occur in developed areas and would not be anticipated to result in significant cumulative effects.

The Installation development of the east side of Nellis AFB proposes a significant amount of grading, construction, paving, increased building heating, and trenching. NEPA analysis is ongoing; however, it is expected that the proposed development would improve up to 2,000 acres of land and increase impervious surfaces by 1,480 acres on Nellis AFB. This large area of impact would potentially result in air emissions exceeding the Prevention of Significant Deterioration thresholds for ozone precursors (volatile organic compounds and nitrogen oxides), carbon monoxide, PM₁₀, and possibly other pollutants. The concurrent Proposed Action would be anticipated to account for approximately 5 acres of grading and would be anticipated to contribute less than 1 percent of the cumulative air emissions impacts associated with proposed development.

Mitigation

The EA analysis concluded that the Proposed Action would not result in significant environmental impacts; therefore, no mitigation measures are required. BMPs are described and recommended in the EA where applicable.

Conclusion

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, and which is hereby incorporated by reference, I have determined that the proposed activities 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 was made after considering all submitted information, including a review of 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 legal authority of the US Air Force.

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