

FINAL FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)

FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT FOR THE PROPOSED NORTHERN HUB DEVELOPMENT TOLICHA PEAK WATER FACILITY AT THE NEVADA TEST AND TRAINING RANGE, NELLIS AIR FORCE BASE, NEVADA

Pursuant to provisions of the *National Environmental Policy Act* (NEPA), as amended by the *Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023* (Public Law 118-5); the United States (US) Department of Defense (DoD) NEPA implementing procedures issued 30 June 2025; and Executive Order 14154, *Unleashing American Energy*, the US Department of the Air Force (DAF) prepared the attached Environmental Assessment (EA) to address the potential environmental consequences from a proposed new well and water facility at the Tolicha Peak Electronic Combat Range (TPECR) Operations and Maintenance (O&M) compound within the Northern Hub of the Nevada Test and Training Range (NTTR) in southern Nevada.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to provide adequate access to a consistent and safe supply of water at the TPECR O&M compound in compliance with state water draw limitations. The Proposed Action would provide redundancy and security for water access at both the TPECR O&M compound and salvage yard and would ensure that the new treatment facility is modernized for remote operations into the future.

The Proposed Action is needed because the water system at the TPECR O&M compound lacks sufficient capacity to support future mission requirements. Currently, there is no water source located nearby to support the salvage yard and the current system has a single point of failure because there is only one on-site well.

The current well at the TPECR O&M compound was permitted by the State Water Engineer in the Sarcobatus Flat 146 aquifer. The acre-foot-per-year allowed for the Sarcobatus Flat 146 aquifer is 13.93 acre feet, or 4,539,110.45 gallons per year. Demand has reached 70 to 75 percent of total aquifer capacity during the two most recent years and is expected to continue to rise. The existing well was installed approximately 40 years ago and is susceptible to failure. The groundwater is known to have a high baseline level of arsenic that requires treatment prior to use, and a functional well with arsenic filtration is the only long-term solution. The new water system facility would support the additional development projects within the TPECR O&M compound and the salvage yard.

Description of Proposed Action

The Proposed Action would construct a new well and water treatment facility at the TPECR O&M compound within the Gold Flat 147 aquifer. The proposed facilities would be located within an approximately 200-acre parcel north of the TPECR O&M compound and south of the salvage yard. The Proposed Action comprises three primary components: drilling and construction of the well, construction of the treatment facility and infrastructure, and the connection of supporting utilities. The Proposed Action would include installation of the following per the Nellis and Creech Air Force Bases (AFBs) Installation Facilities Standards:

- one well;
- underground water and electrical lines;
- revenue-grade water and electric meters in National Electrical Manufacturers Association type 4 enclosures;
- fiber and communication lines;
- septic tank and sewer lines;
- remote monitoring system;
- water storage tanks;
- unpaved access road; and
- multiple structures including the well house, arsenic filtration facility, pump house, fuel tank, and generator.

The proposed well would be located in the southern half of the project area within the Gold Flat 147 aquifer. An exploratory well permit and test drilling would be required to determine the exact location within the project area for the new well within this aquifer. The final location of the new well would determine the location of the water treatment facility and utility connections. These additional construction actions would be implemented to support the new well and would have the potential to occur throughout the entire project area. Supporting water treatment infrastructure would be constructed within the project area after the successful installation of the new well. The Proposed Action would be constructed in the following four successive stages.

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 air quality and climate change, cultural resources, biological resources, water resources, hazardous materials and waste, infrastructure, including utilities and transportation, earth resources, and safety and occupational health.

Air Quality (including Greenhouse Gases)

For all criteria pollutants, the increase in emissions would be negligible in comparison to the applicable threshold. The net increase in annual steady-state emissions would occur because of a minor increase in the building square footage that requires heating. Impacts from increased air emissions would be short term and negligible.

Cultural Resources

The Area of Potential Effects (APE) for cultural resources includes the 200-acre Proposed Action area and a 0.5-mile buffer to account for potential visual, auditory, atmospheric, and cumulative impacts. Within the APE, there are four archaeological sites eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) and five archaeological sites yet to be evaluated for NRHP eligibility. No historic architectural resources or Traditional Cultural Properties have been identified within the APE. The four NRHP-eligible archaeological sites have been determined eligible under Criterion D. The significance and integrity of resources eligible under Criterion D are dependent on the recovery of data that is important, or potentially important, to the past. Therefore, only physical disturbance would threaten these sites. Considering that all eligible sites qualify for nomination to the NRHP under Criterion D, any visual, auditory, atmospheric, and cumulative impacts resulting from facilities and infrastructure construction would not adversely affect any aspects of integrity that communicate the historical or archaeological significance of eligible sites. Nor would such impacts preclude any unevaluated sites from potentially being determined NRHP-eligible at a later date, as most sites also would qualify under Criterion D, if at all. There are three sites within the project footprint that would be avoided entirely during ground-disturbing activities and monitored during such activities by a qualified archaeologist: two NRHP-eligible sites and one unevaluated site. Consequently, the DAF determined that implementation of the Proposed Action would result in no adverse effects to cultural resources. In accordance with the requirements of Section 106 of the *National Historic Preservation Act*, the Nevada State Historic Preservation Office concurred with these findings on 10 March 2025. Therefore, consultation with the Nevada State Historic Preservation Office on this matter is complete.

The DAF invited federally recognized Tribes that are historically affiliated with lands in the vicinity of the Proposed Action to consult on the undertaking via letter dated 24 January 2023. These Tribes also were invited to comment on DAF's effects determinations in the Draft EA via letter dated 23 May 2025. The DAF received no comments from these Tribes; therefore, government-to-government consultation with Native American Tribes on this matter is complete.

Biological/Natural Resources

Under the Proposed Action, construction activities would have minor, long-term impacts on vegetation and wildlife. Populations of small mammals and reptiles in the Proposed Action area would be lost during vegetation removal as a result of mortality during land clearing. The project area does not contain habitat

for either the federally threatened yellow-billed cuckoo or the candidate monarch butterfly. Additionally, the federally threatened desert tortoise is not likely to be found within or near the Proposed Action area due to lack of suitable habitat because topographic elevations in this area range from 5,500 to 5,700 feet above mean sea level (AMSL) where temperatures are cooler. Desert tortoises are typically recorded at lower elevations, below 4,200 AMSL, where temperatures are warmer. The Proposed Action would have no effect on any federally listed threatened or endangered species.

There are no structures present in the project area that migratory birds could use for roosting or nesting. No impacts to bald or golden eagles would be expected because suitable habitat for bald eagles does not exist in this location, and while the type of habitat that golden eagles are known to use for foraging is present, it is widespread elsewhere across the NTTR.

Soil disturbance associated with excavation and new construction could create ideal conditions for the establishment of invasive plant species, including cheatgrass, reed brome, and Russian thistle. Any invasive species found during development would be eliminated. The Proposed Action would result in minor, long-term effects on the establishment of invasive and noxious weed species.

The DAF notified the USFWS via letter dated 23 May 2025 of its determination that the Proposed Action would have no effect on threatened or endangered species or other protected species. The DAF did not receive a response or further comments from USFWS. Therefore, consultation with the USFWS on this matter is complete.

Water Resources

There are no jurisdictional surface waters present. The Proposed Action would have no potential to impact surface waters.

Minor, short-term impacts to stormwater would occur during construction due to soil disturbance during all four phases of the Proposed Action. Construction of the well, pump house, utilities, storage tanks, unpaved access road, and multiple support structures would disturb more than 1-acre of land. In accordance with National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System regulations, NTTR would obtain coverage under a state-issued Construction Stormwater General Permit from the Nevada Department of Environmental Protection prior to implementing the Proposed Action. Best management practices, such as the placement of hay bales and silt fences, would be used to minimize soil erosion and deposition in the runoff. There would be minor, short-term impacts to stormwater during construction of the Proposed Action.

Due to the potential for contamination of the well, construction within the Gold Flat 147 aquifer would result in minor, short-term impacts to groundwater resources during test hole drilling and final well installation, although these risks would be managed through proper drilling and sterilization procedures. Access to the Gold Flat 147 aquifer would be sufficient for the needs of the TPECR O&M compound, would not exceed the existing allowable capacity, and would allow for additional usage in the future. The operation of the new well within Gold Flat 147 would result in minor, long-term impacts to groundwater resources.

As indicated by the Zone D designation for undetermined risk, there are no confirmed Federal Emergency Management Agency floodplains within the project area; however, storm events would be anticipated to result in flash flooding and shallow flooding where impermeable surfaces or poorly drained soils exist. Due to the uncertainty of the Zone D designation, short-term, negligible impacts to floodplains would have the potential to occur under the Proposed Action.

Hazardous Materials and Wastes, Toxic Substances, Petroleum Products, and Contaminated Sites

Two Environmental Restoration Program sites are located within the proposed project; however, these sites would be completely avoided by the Proposed Action. There would be no adverse impacts to the management of hazardous materials and waste under the Proposed Action. There would be a small but temporary increase in hazmat usage and waste generation related to the construction of the new facilities or the operation of heavy equipment, although this increase would be minor and short term.

Infrastructure/Utilities (including Transportation)

Construction of the new access road would result in more efficient access to the proposed well, pump house, and water treatment infrastructure. Construction of a new roadway would result in no disruptions to existing road usage. The Proposed Action would have a minor beneficial effect on vehicle transportation originating from the TPECR O&M compound.

The Proposed Action would install communication lines to ensure that the new treatment facility is modernized for remote operations into the future, and it would resolve the requirement for on-site operation of the existing well pump. The Proposed Action would result in a moderate, beneficial impact on the electrical infrastructure and reliability.

The Proposed Action would result in long-term, negligible impacts to fuel storage through the continued maintenance and inspection of the 250-gallon fuel tank; however, there would be a beneficial impact through the redundancy in the potable water supply that is supported by the tank's purpose of fueling the proposed backup generator.

Long-term, beneficial effects to the potable water supply would occur as a result of providing redundancy and security for water access at both the TPECR O&M compound and salvage yard. Additionally, the new treatment facility would be modernized for remote operations into the future. The redundancy would also allow for necessary repairs to occur to the existing potable water system without jeopardizing the continuity of the military mission. The new well would immediately reduce the demand on the existing ageing well for potable water, as the new well would be intended for this purpose.

Earth Resources

No significant impacts to geology or topography would be expected under the Proposed Action. Minor, short-term impacts to soils, geology, and topography would occur during construction of the well and installation of the water treatment infrastructure since displaced soils would be much more vulnerable to wind erosion. Effective measures for preventing soil erosion and controlling sedimentation would be implemented within the construction site. These may include installing silt fences, sediment basins, hay bales, mulching, or other erosion control practices that minimize the amount of disturbed soil that can be washed away by rainwater.

Safety and Occupational Health

The Proposed Action includes new construction, which would have the potential to expose personnel to risks from heavy equipment operation and hazardous materials. Minor, short-term impacts to ground safety would be expected during construction under the Proposed Action.

Long-term, beneficial impacts to ground safety would occur from consistent access to a safe water supply at the compound. The issue of a single point of failure for the water system caused by only one on-site well would be solved by constructing an additional well on the Installation. Arsenic filtration and ultraviolet bacteriological disinfection of the water storage tanks would aid in overall water quality for its range of potential uses.

Beneficial impacts to safety would also occur under the Proposed Action with three new 50,000-gallon water storage tanks to better support fire suppression efforts at TPECR. Having additional draw capacity as well as stored water ready for firefighting purposes within the range would cut down response time and the potential for mechanical failures when a fire event occurs.

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. The following projects could potentially occur concurrently and result in cumulative impacts:

- Nellis AFB and NTTR Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan
- Nellis AFB and NTTR Area Development Plan
- TPECR O&M Compound Infrastructure Improvements
- TPECR Target Yard Infrastructure Improvements
- TPECR RHA Pad Extension
- TPECR O&M Construction and Demolition
- Tolicha Peak Rd Rehabilitation and Access Road

When considered in conjunction with the incremental effects of the Proposed Action when added to the effects of other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions at NTTR, no significant adverse cumulative impacts would be anticipated to occur under implementation of the Proposed Action. Minor, adverse, cumulative impacts to water resources would be anticipated to occur with the growing water demands of the military mission at NTTR.

Mitigation

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

Conclusion

Finding of No Significant Impact. After a review of the EA prepared in accordance with the requirements of NEPA and DoD NEPA implementing procedures, 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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5 September 2025

DATE