

**DRAFT FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)
READINESS AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION INTEGRATION PROGRAM
EDWARDS AIR FORCE BASE, CALIFORNIA**

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 Department of the Air Force (DAF) prepared the attached Environmental Assessment (EA) to address the potential environmental consequences associated with restrictive use easements (RUEs) to prevent incompatible land uses from conflicting with the flight training mission of Edwards Air Force Base (AFB), California.

Purpose and Need (EA Section 1.3, p 1-3)

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to prevent further commercial, industrial, and residential development within existing flight corridors utilized by Edwards AFB.

The Proposed Action is needed to preserve the military's present and future mission-critical use of the corridors. DAF readiness depends on ensuring that installations and ranges provide realistic and effective training and testing.

Description of Proposed Action and Alternatives (EA Sections 2.2–2.4.1, pp 2-3–2-4)

Under the Proposed Action, the DAF would enter into a RUE in perpetuity on and over the property in accordance with 10 USC § 2684a. The agreement would restrict commercial, industrial, and residential development in the area. The Trust for Public Lands (TPL) would provide appraisals for the areas to be included under the RUE prior to establishing the agreement. The TPL is not a government agency, but often works with government agencies to protect land. The *National Defense Authorization Act* allows the DAF to enter into agreements with private conservation organizations, such as the TPL, to acquire RUEs in the vicinity of military installations. No ground disturbance would occur under the Proposed Action. The Proposed Action would not affect current easements in place. As part of the RUE, conservation restrictions would prohibit the following actions from occurring:

- uses for residential or household purposes;
- uses related to commercial or industrial activities, other than agriculture and passive recreation;
- use of off-road vehicles;
- placement of billboards, signs, or other structures;
- filling, dumping, excavating, draining, dredging, mining, drilling, removing, or exploring for extraction of minerals, loam, soil, sands, gravel, rocks, or other material on or below the surface of the property, including ground disturbance for new utility work;
- removal, destruction, or cutting of trees, shrubs, or other vegetation, except as required for fire breaks, maintenance of foot trails or existing roads, health of the population, or utilities;
- lighting;
- operation of activities that produce smoke, glare, or other visual hazards without permit;
- altering the surface or general topography of the property;
- depositing soil, trash, ashes, refuse, wastes, bio-solids, or any other materials on the property site; and
- conducting activities detrimental to water quality.

No Action Alternative (EA Section 2.4.2, p 2-4)

Under the No Action Alternative, no additional RUEs would be established between the DAF, The Wildlands Conservancy, and the TPL; the RUE for Phase 1 would remain in place. Future development outside of Phase 1 could potentially occur under the Bell X-1 Supersonic Corridor and Military Training Visual Routes (VRs) and could degrade Edward AFB's testing and training operations if access was limited and/or no longer available due to incompatible land use. Developing another suitable location for this type of flight corridor would be highly speculative as well as cost prohibitive.

Summary of Findings (EA Section 2.6, pp 2-4-2-5)

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; noise/acoustic environment; cultural, biological/natural, water, and earth resources; land use; infrastructure and utilities; and safety and occupational health.

Air Quality and Climate Change (EA Section 3.4, pp 3-4-3-8)

No significant effects to air quality would be expected to result from implementation of the Proposed Action. No new air emissions would be generated because the establishment of an RUE over the selected area would not involve any ground disturbance or construction activity. The implementation of the RUE would result in a long-term, beneficial impact to the air quality environment of the San Joaquin Valley Unified Air Pollution Control District by limiting commercial development that could negatively impact the goals set in place for attainment of ozone and PM_{2.5} standards under both the National and California Ambient Air Quality Standards.

Noise/Acoustic Environment (EA Section 3.5, pp 3-8-3-10)

The Proposed Action would not involve any changes to flight operations in or near the Region of Influence. There would be no changes to the noise environment, and no impacts to the human environment or any other noise-sensitive receptors.

Cultural Resources (EA Sections 3.6, pp 3-10-3-14)

The Proposed Action would not involve any ground-disturbing or construction activities; therefore, implementation of the RUE would not have the potential to disturb or alter any archaeological or historic architectural resources on the Wind Wolves Preserve.

Biological/Natural Resources (EA Section 3.7, pp 3-14-3-21)

The Proposed Action would have no adverse impacts to vegetation, wildlife, threatened or endangered species, migratory birds, or invasive species. The restrictions put in place by the Proposed Action would prohibit commercial or residential development within the Proposed Action Area, resulting in long-term, beneficial impacts to these resources by the continued conservation efforts within the Wind Wolves Preserve.

Water Resources (EA Section 3.8, pp 3-21-3-29)

The Proposed Action would have long-term, beneficial impacts on surface waters by protecting them from impacts associated with future development, such as potential filling of wetlands or indirect impacts as a result of increased sedimentation and erosion.

There would be beneficial impacts to groundwater resources under the Proposed Action. Restrictions under the proposed RUE include prohibitions on conducting any activities detrimental to water quality, including excavating, draining, dredging, mining, drilling, removing, or exploring for extraction of minerals, loam, soil, sands, gravel, rocks, or other material on or below the surface of the property

Implementation of the Proposed Action would not involve any ground-disturbing activities, and there would be no potential for adverse impacts to stormwater or floodplain resources. There would be no change in impervious surface area associated with implementation of the Proposed Action and stormwater and floodplain conditions would be unaffected.

Land Use (EA Section 3.9, pp 3-29–3-33)

No significant adverse effects to land use would be expected to result from implementation of the Proposed Action. The Proposed Action would directly support the goals of five out of the six planning elements included in the Kern County General Plan. The Proposed Action would have the potential to prevent certain activities that are typically permitted in A-zoned districts, including any new excavation and vegetation clearing; however, existing agreements, including the cattle-grazing lease and electrical utility easement, would remain in place, and the existing activities covered under those agreements would be unaffected. In consultation with Kern County, Edwards AFB will request that Wind Wolves apply for an application to the county to rescind the portions of the San Emidio New Town Specific Plan that are within the footprint of the Proposed Action area for consistency. As the landowner, Wind Wolves has full authority to request the Kern County General Plan change. This action would support the full implementation of the RUE and ensure that 1) no future changes to the Wind Wolves mission or Board could request permits to implement the San Emidio New Town Specific Plan and 2) the regional planning documents, such as the Kern County Housing Element, is not placed in jeopardy through the RUE use restriction. The Proposed Action would not change land use, would be consistent with existing land use with the requested rescission action, and would not affect future adjacent land use.

Infrastructure and Utilities (EA Section 3.10, pp 3-33–3-36)

The Proposed Action would not involve any construction or ground-disturbing activities, and there would be no potential for any direct impacts to transportation facilities or electrical infrastructure. Access to these facilities across the Wind Wolves Preserve would continue to function as it does currently, and the implementation of the RUE would not impact these resources. The RUE would prohibit any activities that could have the potential to adversely impact water quality, and the Proposed Action would result in long-term beneficial impacts to the potable water supply.

Earth Resources (EA Section 3.11, pp 3-36–3-41)

The underlying geology and the topography of the affected area would not change under the Proposed Action. No ground-disturbing actions would occur, and there would be no potential for impacts to geology or topography with implementation of the Proposed Action. The RUE would protect soils from potential disturbance by preventing future ground-disturbing activities through the limitation of permitted land uses and activities in the Wind Wolves Preserve, resulting in long-term, beneficial impacts to soils.

Safety and Occupational Health (EA Section 3.12, pp 3-42–3-43)

The Proposed Action would prohibit the use of off-road vehicles for recreational purposes. The existing lease for thatch reduction via grazing would continue in its existing state and the ability for the Wind Wolves Preserve to maintain wildfire prevention efforts would be unimpeded. No development or demolition activity would occur, eliminating the need to require implementation of construction safety protocols.

The Proposed Action would prohibit residential, commercial, or industrial development that could pose a risk to or have the potential to be incompatible with the safety of military flight training operations. Lighting would also be restricted, as well as smoke, glares, or other visual hazards that pose a risk to flight safety. The Proposed Action would not alter the existing training operations performed by Edwards AFB within the Bell X-1 Supersonic Corridor, VR 1257, and VR 1262, and would result in long-term beneficial impacts to flight safety by removing the possibility of potential risks and conflicts in the future.

Cumulative Impacts (EA Table 3-1, p 3-2)

The EA considered cumulative impacts that could result from the incremental impact of the Proposed Action when added to other past, present, or reasonably foreseeable actions on or near the Wind Wolves Preserve.

When considered in conjunction with the effects of other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions on or near the Wind Wolves Preserve, no significant adverse cumulative effects would be expected to occur with implementation of the Proposed Action. Cumulative impacts identified in the impact analysis process are summarized as follows:

- Long-term, beneficial impacts to regional air quality.
- Long-term, beneficial impacts to biological and natural resources by reinforcing the restrictions on development that could harm these resources.
- Long-term, beneficial impacts to water resources.
- Long-term, beneficial impacts to ground safety.
- Long-term, beneficial impacts to flight safety.

Mitigation

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

Conclusion

Finding of No Significant Impact. After review of the attached 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 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 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 DAF.

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