

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
INTEGRATED NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN
EDWARDS AIR FORCE BASE, CALIFORNIA**

The 412th Civil Engineer Group prepared a Programmatic Environmental Assessment (PEA) to analyze the effects associated with implementing the Edwards Air Force Base (AFB) Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan (INRMP) and the Annual Work Plan update, covering fiscal years 2020–2032. The PEA has been prepared in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) as amended by Public Law 118-5, the Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023 (42 United States Code (USC) § 4321 et seq.), and in accordance with the Department of Defense (DoD) NEPA Implementing Procedures effective July 1, 2025. The PEA, incorporated by reference in this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), presents the potential environmental consequences associated with this action.

Purpose of and Need for the Proposed Action (PEA Section (§) 1.3, page 4): The purpose of the Proposed Action is to sustain and enhance the natural environment and/or ecosystems at Edwards AFB using an adaptive management process as outlined within the INRMP. The INRMP is needed to comply with the Sikes Act (16 USC § 670 et seq.), DoD Instruction 4715.03, *Natural Resources Management*, dated September 9, 2025, and Department of the Air Force (DAF) Manual 32-7003, *Environmental Conservation*, and is consistent with the Edwards Installation Development Plan. The INRMP supports the military mission while conserving and protecting the Base’s natural resources. It allows multipurpose use of natural resources, provides public access to these resources, and continues building upon relationships with federal, state, and local agencies, federally recognized tribes, nonprofit organizations, and the public.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

Alternative A, No Action Alternative (PEA § 2.4.1, page 12): Under the No Action Alternative, Edwards would only undertake activities and management practices to comply with legal requirements regarding natural resources across the base as well as within Branch Memorial Park and the Piute Ponds Complex. Actions would include:

- Maintain current habitat conditions and diversity of native plant and animal populations
- Sustainable use of natural resources for hunting, fishing, trapping, and non-consumptive recreational uses
- Maintain federally listed threatened or endangered species population and habitat (e.g., desert tortoise)
- Provide legally required training for newcomers and contractors
- Control invasive species impacting DAF testing and training operations
- Restrict introduction of exotic species at Edwards AFB
- Maintain current hydrologic processes across the landscape

Alternative B, Low-Level Management Alternative (PEA § 2.4.2, pages 12-13): Under the Low-Level Management Alternative, Edwards would not only implement legally required activities as part of the No Action but would improve natural resources across the base as well as at Memorial Park and the Piute Ponds Complex:

- Improve current habitat and ecosystems to create diversity of native plant and animal populations

- Physically improve habitat (e.g., through vegetation management) to increase hunting, fishing, trapping, and non-consumptive recreational uses
- Extend protection to plants and animals proposed, candidate, or under review for federal listing (e.g., Joshua tree, western pond turtle)
- Enhance awareness training given to newcomers and contractors
- Expand invasive species control across the Edwards landscape where these measures have the greatest opportunity to restore self-sustaining native ecosystem
- Restrict introduction of exotic species into both improved and semi-improved grounds
- Improve hydrological processes across the landscape

Alternative C, High-Level Management Alternative (PEA § 2.4.3, page 13): Under the High-Level Management Alternative, Edwards would implement activities that restore, improve, and enhance natural resources not only within existing ecosystems but also within man-made areas and improved/semi-improved lands. This alternative encompasses all the actions listed under the No Action and Alternative B but would also implement the following improvements base wide as well as to Memorial Park and the Piute Ponds Complex:

- Restore current or previously disturbed habitat to native conditions for plant and animal population diversity
- Add structures (e.g., fishing pier, portable restrooms, parking spots) and interpretive signage to enhance hunting, fishing, trapping, and non-consumptive recreational uses
- Protect and conserve state listed protected species when practical and consistent with military mission (e.g., tricolored blackbird, Mohave ground squirrel)
- Enhance conservation training programs/events to heighten public awareness of natural resources conservation
- Expand detection and control of invasive species populations across the entire Edwards landscape
- Remove exotic species from natural ecosystems and improved / semi-improved grounds
- Improve hydrological processes within man-made wetlands
- Begin reintroduction of native federally listed species

Because execution of various projects with the INRMP are dependent on funding, site specific information for many of the activities is unknown, especially for the actions listed under Alternatives B and C. Once these activities have been approved for funding and site-specific details understood, Edwards will determine whether they are within the scope of the PEA or would require additional site-specific NEPA analysis or other environmental compliance review. In addition, the DAF would determine if project-specific consultations are required under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act and Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act review before commencing these activities.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

Based on the findings within the PEA, it was determined all three alternatives will have minimal to no effect on airspace, groundwater, hazardous material/waste, land use, topography/seismicity, socioeconomics, and infrastructure (PEA § 1.4.1, pages 7-8). Activities under the INRMP occur outside the flightline and any smoke generated from prescribed burns would be too far to affect airfield operations. In addition, notices would be posted in advance when prescribed burns occur. None of the actions would require groundwater withdrawal, use of hazardous material/waste, require a land use change, and/or

change existing topography/seismicity activity. There would be no impact on economics, demographics, or social assets within the surrounding communities. While some of the activities would maintain and/or add on to existing infrastructure, these projects are small in scale and would not alter the overall size of disturbed ground. Therefore, analyses focused on air quality, water resources, soils/geological resources, cultural resources, biological resources, noise, public health/safety, and recreation.

Air Quality (PEA § 3.2, pages 27-33): Edwards is located within the Mojave Desert Air Basin and falls under jurisdiction of the Eastern Kern Air Pollution Control District, the Mojave Desert Air Quality Management District and the Antelope Valley Air Quality Management District. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has classified this region as unclassified/attainment for lead, nitrogen oxide, carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, and particulate matter less than or equal to 2.5 microns in diameter; moderate nonattainment for particulate matter less than or equal to 10 microns in diameter; serious nonattainment for the 2008 ozone; and severe nonattainment the 2015 ozone standard. Emissions released as part of these activities would be short-term and localized to the project area. In addition, standard fugitive dust control measures would be implemented (PEA Appendix C, pages 108-109) to control particulate release. Using the DAF Air Conformity Applicability Model, emissions released during prescribed burns were determined not to exceed any Clean Air Act General Conformity de minimis threshold (EA Tables 3-3 and 3-4, pages 32-33); therefore, a General Conformity Determination is not applicable. Based on this analysis, implementation of the INRMP will have no significant impact on air quality.

Water Resources (PEA § 3.3, pages 34-39): Edwards AFB is located within a desert environment and receives surface water flow from surrounding mountains and valley floor washes. In an Approved Jurisdictional Determination dated June 7, 2013, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers concluded Edwards contains no jurisdictional waters of the U.S. A 6-acre pond fed by a deep water well and several small claypan playas to the north and east is found in Branch Memorial Park. Piute Ponds is a complex of connecting washes/creeks and includes the largest body of perennial surface water on Edwards. It is also the largest freshwater marsh in Los Angeles County. Portions of Branch Memorial Park and Piute Ponds Complex are designated as floodplain where wetlands are found. Implementation of the INRMP would cause short-term impacts to water resources/wetlands and the floodplain, mainly from ground disturbance and use of prescribed burns and/or application of herbicides to control invasive plant species and manage vegetation. Other activities would cause temporary ground disturbance while improving both the recreational and ecological functionality of these areas. Temporary impacts to floodplain or wetland areas cannot be avoided; however, none of the activities will permanently alter these resource areas. All disturbed areas will be revegetated with native plant species and returned to their natural state. Upon completion, there would be a long-term benefit to water resources with the removal of invasive/exotic species and improvement to hydrological flow allowing native species to repopulate. Based on this analysis, there will be no significant impacts to water resources with implementation of the INRMP.

Soils and Geological Resources (PEA § 3.4, pages 39-42): Edwards AFB is subject to high winds, and sandy soils often become airborne. All three alternatives would cause temporary, short-term impacts on the surface or at a shallow depth but would not significantly alter soil or geological resources. To minimize soil erosion, reseeded will occur. In addition, application of soil stabilizers would further control fugitive dust releases if needed. Overall, there will be no significant impacts to soils/geological resources with implementation of the INRMP.

Cultural Resources (PEA § 3.5, pages 42-44): Branch Memorial Park consist primarily of historical sites remaining from late 1800s and early 1900s homesteaders. There are 106 identified archaeological sites within the Piute Ponds Complex and over 5,200 archaeological sites identified across the installation. Temporary impacts from ground disturbance would occur. Edwards AFB performed consultations with the California State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) and local tribes. On 11 September 2025 Edwards AFB sent a notification letter to the California SHPO for concurrence. Edwards conducted formal consultation with five federally recognized tribes recorded as having cultural affiliation and interest in the Base. The Yuhaaviatam of San Manuel Nation (formerly the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians) was the only agency or tribe to respond. They stated Edwards should clarify the term ‘standard minimization’ measures. As written, these are not mitigations. Activities as identified within the INRMP are not anticipated to require any mitigation. Mitigation measures can only be determined through meaningful tribal consultations with federally recognized consulting tribes under Section 106. Once site-specific information is known for the activities Edwards would engage in, the Base will initiate follow-on Section 106 Consultations with the California State Historic Preservation Officer and the five federally recognized tribes.

Biological Resources (PEA § 3.6, pages 45-52): Over 300 species of birds have been observed on Edwards AFB. Branch Memorial Park and the Piute Ponds Complex are important for nesting, foraging, roosting, and migration stopover by waterfowl, shorebirds, and marshland species. The National Audubon Society has classified Piute Ponds as a ‘key site’ for regional shorebirds, annually supporting at least 20,000 birds. The federally threatened desert tortoise and proposed threatened western pond turtle are year-round residents on Edwards AFB. State listed species and/or species of special concern found at Branch Memorial Park and Piute Ponds include the Mohave ground squirrels, tricolored blackbirds, loggerhead shrikes, northern harriers, yellow warblers, and yellow-headed blackbirds. Plant species of concern include the Joshua tree and the alkali mariposa lily. The western pond turtles are found within the Piute Ponds Complex. Temporary impacts to biological resources would be from ground disturbing activities and pesticide/herbicide applications; however, long-term impacts would be positive by ultimately improving habitat for wildlife and monitoring their status. The INRMP was reviewed and coordinated with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Once site specific information is known, Edwards will consult with USFWS as needed if project activities would potentially affect federally listed species. Overall, long-term benefits would occur to biological resources with implementation of the INRMP.

Noise (PEA § 3.7, pages 53-55): The major sources of noise at the Base are from vehicle traffic and aircraft operations. Noise impacts associated with the INRMP are primarily a result of heavy equipment, outdoor maintenance vehicles (e.g., lawn mowers), and off-road vehicles as part of habitat restoration. Noise generated from these activities would be temporary in nature ending upon project completion; therefore, no significant impacts from noise would occur with implementation of the INRMP.

Public Health and Safety (PEA § 3.8, pages 55-58): There would be short-term impacts to DAF personnel and construction crews from heavy-equipment operation, herbicide application, wildlife encounters, exposure to heat, and prescribed burns as part of implementing vegetation management. To minimize these risks, employees and contractors will adhere to all applicable federal, state and local occupational safety and health regulations as well as applicable DAF instructions and manuals. By following these procedures, there will be no significant impacts on public health and safety.

Recreation (PEA § 3.9, pages 58-63): There are 14 areas used at Edwards for outdoor recreation (e.g., upland game hunting, off-road vehicles, mountain biking, equestrian, hiking, camping, bird watching, wildlife viewing, etc.). Branch Memorial Park provides year-around angler fishing while waterfowl hunting is permitted at Piute Ponds Complex. Certain habitat maintenance activities may result in temporary closures to these recreational areas; however, closures would only occur during certain times of year, and patrons would be given early notices. Long-term impacts would be positive since these areas will be enhanced for public enjoyment. Overall, there will be no significant impacts to recreation with implementation of the INRMP.

AGENCY AND PUBLIC COMMENT

To meet the requirements of Executive Order (EO) 11988, *Floodplain Management*, and EO 11990, *Protection of Wetlands*, Edwards published a notice stating this action could occur within these resources areas to encourage early and meaningful public involvement. A notice was published in *The Mojave Desert News* on March 13, 2024 and posted on March 15, 2024 at the Edwards AFB Environmental website (<https://www.edwards.af.mil/About/Environment/>). No public comments were received during this period. Three agencies were also given an opportunity to provide comments during March 2024 as part of early scoping.

The draft PEA and draft FONSI were made available for a 30-day public comment period on May 1, 2025, in *The Mojave Desert News*, the *Antelope Valley Press*, and at the Edwards Environmental website. In addition, hard copies of the documents were placed at the AFRL Technical Library, AFTC Technical Library, and Edwards Base Library, Edwards AFB, CA; Boron Branch Library, Boron, CA; and the Mojave Branch Library, Mojave, CA. No comments were received.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Based on review of the facts and analyses summarized above and contained within the PEA, I find implementation of the Edward INRMP and component plans would not have a significant impact on the natural and human environment. An Environmental Impact Statement is not required. Considering the above information, I also find there is no practicable alternative for Edwards to temporarily affect floodplain and wetland areas as part of implementing activities to manage hydrological flow, vegetation/invasive species control, habitat rehabilitation, recreation improvements, and ecological restoration. Because these actions are needed to either maintain DAF testing and training and improve ecological and recreational functionality, Edwards does not have the ability to relocate outside these resources areas and has taken all practicable measures to minimize harm. This fulfills the requirements of NEPA, the DoD NEPA Implementing Procedures, EO 11988, and EO 11990.

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