

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT  
DISPOSAL AND REUSE OF THE AIR FORCE RESEARCH LABORATORY,  
MESA RESEARCH SITE, ARIZONA

The attached final environmental assessment (EA) analyzes the potential for impacts to the environment as a result of the disposal and reuse of the Air Force Research Laboratory, Mesa Research Site (AFRL Mesa), Arizona. The EA was prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended (42 U.S.C. § 4321 et seq.), the Council on Environmental Quality regulations implementing the procedural provisions of NEPA, 40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Parts 1500-1580, and Air Force policy and agency procedures (32 CFR Part 989).

This Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) summarizes the Proposed Action and alternatives and the results of the evaluation of the disposal and reuse of AFRL Mesa.

**Site Location**

AFRL Mesa is situated on former Williams Air Force Base (AFB) (now Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport and Arizona State University East Campus) in Mesa, Arizona, approximately 25 miles southeast of downtown Phoenix. The installation is approximately 7 acres in size and is situated on relatively flat terrain consisting of ten buildings, paved asphalt/concrete and gravel areas, and improved grounds.

**Description of Proposed Action and Alternatives**

In order to address the full range of potential environmental impacts caused by disposal and reuse, the following redevelopment alternatives were developed.

The **Proposed Action** is the **Educational Alternative** and involves the redevelopment of the AFRL Mesa property to support research and development (R&D) and flight simulator instruction. Interior renovation of facilities would be required to support R&D and flight instruction activities. No new facility construction has been identified; however, new building space (approximately 40,000 square feet) could be constructed in the southern portion of the property if undesirable structures were to be demolished or removed. All property redevelopment would occur after 2011 and be complete within a two-year period. (The "Specialized Research" alternative was identified in the 2010 AFRL Mesa Reuse Plan, but was not specifically evaluated by name in the 2007 final EA. However, the Specialized Research alternative is substantially the same as the Education Alternative that was evaluated in the final EA. The primary difference in the alternatives is that the Proposed Action/Education Alternative utilized a Public Development Conveyance (PBC) sponsored by the Department of Education while the Specialized Research alternative utilizes an Economic Development Conveyance (EDC) as the property transfer method. The change in method of transfer is not a change that is relevant to environmental concerns evaluated in the final EA.)

The **Medical Center Alternative** involves the redevelopment of AFRL Mesa as a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical center to accommodate regional clinic requirements. Interior renovation of the facilities would be required to support VA outpatient and administrative functions. No new facility construction is anticipated; however, a vehicle parking area (approximately 150 parking spaces) would be constructed in the southern portion of the property. Property redevelopment would occur after 2011 and be complete within a two-year period. This redevelopment alternative was to be implemented using a federal-to-federal transfer method. (This alternative was originally identified as the “proposed action” in the final EA based on the VA’s request for the AFRL Mesa property that was later withdrawn in December 2009.)

The **Airport Parking Alternative** involves the demolition of all installation facilities to allow construction of a vehicle parking lot to serve the Williams Gateway Airport. Up to 500 vehicle parking spaces (including 25 disabled parking spaces) would be developed on the property. Property redevelopment would occur after 2011 and be complete within a two-year period.

The **No-Action Alternative** involves the Air Force retaining the Mesa Research Site property and maintaining it in caretaker status.

### **Summary of Environmental Consequences**

Initial analyses indicated that the Proposed Action or alternatives evaluated would not result in either short or long-term impacts to the following resources: Environmental Restoration Program (ERP) Sites, pesticide usage, polychlorinated biphenyls, radon, ordnance, radioactive materials, and noise.

The resources analyzed in more detail are: socioeconomics, utilities, land use and aesthetics, hazardous materials management, hazardous waste management, storage tanks, medical/biohazardous waste, asbestos-containing material (ACM), lead-based paint, geology and soils, water resources, air quality, biological resources, cultural resources, and environmental justice.

Closure of the installation would result in the 200 current full-time employees relocating to Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio. Increases in employment and population due to reuse of the installation under the Proposed Action and alternatives would not result in significant impacts to socioeconomics.

Reuse of the property would be consistent with surrounding land uses and would not result in significant change to the visual sensitivity of the property.

The number of vehicle trips anticipated to occur under the Proposed Action and alternatives would represent a slight increase to current traffic levels, as a result, the level of service of the local road network would not be affected.

On-site utility usage (electrical, natural gas, water, wastewater) would not affect the ability of the local utility purveyors to provide service. Demolition debris would be recycled to the extent

possible and remaining debris would require disposal in a landfill. The maximum amount of debris generated from demolition that would require disposal would be 1,683 tons and would occur from the Airport Parking Alternative because all existing buildings would be demolished. Solid waste generation is not expected to significantly affect the service life of the local landfill.

Current storage, handling, and transportation of hazardous materials and hazardous waste associated with AFRL Mesa would cease. Future storage, handling, and transportation of hazardous materials and hazardous waste would be conducted in accordance with applicable regulations and established procedures by the future property owner/operator.

Storage tanks (propane tanks) would be emptied and cleaned or removed. Proper management of these storage tanks would minimize the potential for impacts.

ACM and lead-based paint would likely be encountered during renovation and demolition activities. These activities would be subject to applicable federal, state, and local regulations to minimize the potential risk to human health and the environment. ACM and lead-based paint waste generated as a result of demolition activities would be disposed of in accordance with applicable regulations.

Short-term erosion impacts could occur to soils and surface water resources as a result of ground disturbance associated with construction and demolition activities. Potential impacts would be minimized by implementing standard construction best management practices such as using protective cover, implementing storm water diversions, and limiting the area and period of time that barren ground is left exposed as defined in a storm water pollution prevention plan that would be prepared prior to initiation of construction activities.

Air emissions from construction and demolition activities and from operational activities would not adversely affect the regional air quality. Standard management techniques, such as wetting exposed surfaces, would reduce fugitive dust emissions during construction/demolition activities.

The installation contains no areas of natural vegetation and development of the property would affect only developed and disturbed areas. Wildlife that could be displaced would consist of common and widespread species. Habitat suitable for the lesser-nosed bat (a federal endangered species) and the California leaf-nosed bat (state species of concern), could be adversely impacted by the demolition of buildings and land clearing activities; however, these species have not been identified on the property. Plant species protected under the Arizona Native Plant Law and identified on the property include the saguaro, barrel cactus, Ocotillo, prickly pear, Sotol, palo verde, Jerusalem thorn, and Mesquite. The numbers of each species are few and all are limited to small landscape areas. Species in landscaped areas are exempt from the law because they are not growing wild.

No archaeological resources are present on the property; however, monitoring by a professional archaeologist would occur during ground-disturbing activities and in the unlikely event that archaeological resources are encountered, the Arizona State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) would be contacted. An evaluation of Building 570 at AFRL Mesa was conducted to assist the Air Force in its compliance responsibilities under the National Historic Preservation Act.

Building 570 was not recommended as eligible for listing in the National Register due to lack of historic, architectural, or engineering significance. The Arizona SHPO has concurred with this finding.

Activities associated with the disposal and reuse of AFRL Mesa would not have a significant impact on any of the resources analyzed in the attached final EA. As a result, no disproportionately high or adverse impacts to minority, low-income, or child populations would be expected.


### **Cumulative Impacts**

Other future actions in the region were evaluated to determine whether cumulative environmental impacts could result due to the implementation of Air Force property disposal actions in conjunction with other past, present, or reasonably foreseeable future actions. Other actions that would occur in the region include the future development plans and continued operations on Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport and Arizona State University. These activities are not anticipated to result in cumulative impacts when added to potential impacts of proposed Air Force disposal and reuse activities.

### **Conclusion**

As a result of the analysis of environmental impacts in the final EA, it was concluded that, with the incorporation of appropriate construction practices identified in the final EA and referenced in this FONSI, the Proposed Action though it may be implemented by an EDC will not have a significant effect on human health or the natural environment; therefore, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared.

13 MAY 2011  
Date

  
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