

**DRAFT FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)
BEDDOWN OF F-35A DEVELOPMENTAL TEST AIRCRAFT AT
EGLIN AIR FORCE BASE, FLORIDA**

Pursuant to the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations for implementing the procedural provisions of the *National Environmental Policy Act* (NEPA), Title 40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Sections (§§) 1500–1508 (the September 14, 2020 version of CEQ NEPA rules [at 85 Federal Register 43304-43376] as modified by the CEQ NEPA Implementing Regulations Revisions Final Rule that became effective 20 May 2022), and the United States Department of the Air Force (DAF) environmental impact analysis process (EIAP) regulations at 32 CFR § 989, the DAF has prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) to evaluate the potential environmental effects of the DAF's proposal to beddown four F-35A aircraft and associated personnel at Eglin Air Force Base (AFB) in Okaloosa County, Florida as part of a weapons Developmental Test (DT) program to facilitate the integration of existing and new air-to-air and air-to-ground weapons on the F-35A aircraft. Pursuant to 40 CFR § 1508.13, the EA is attached to this FONSI and hereby incorporated by reference.

Purpose and Need (EA §1.4, page 1-8): The purpose of the Proposed Action is to facilitate integration of existing and new air-to-air and air-to-ground weapons on the F-35A aircraft. This integration is done through a weapons DT program, which is a routine procedure for fielding any combat aircraft weapon system.

The Proposed Action is needed to conduct developmental testing of new weapon systems to be integrated onto the F-35A aircraft to evaluate whether the new systems fulfil design specifications, verify the design and manufacturer process per the design specifications, and to validate how the systems integrate into the aircraft, fulfill design requirements, and meet performance standards for safety, function, and effectiveness. Weapons DT will involve the loading, carriage, employment (targeting and firing), and other test functions using both inert and live weapons. This testing must be conducted at an installation that has the operational and airspace capacity to support the required flight and munitions expenditure activities, weapons DT expertise, and properly sized, configured, and instrumented ranges that can track and control weapon system tests.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

Proposed Action (EA §2.1, pages 2-1 to 2-18): The DAF is proposing to beddown four F-35A aircraft and associated personnel at Eglin AFB and conduct test flight operations as part of a weapons DT program to facilitate the integration of existing and new air-to-air and air-to-ground weapons on the F-35A aircraft. To support the F-35A DT Program, the Proposed Action also includes construction of a 2-bay aircraft maintenance hangar and aircraft parking area, construction of a 2-bay aircraft test hangar, demolition of Building 965 and relocation of the Maritime Operations Group and associated a boat storage functions at that location to an area away from the airfield, an addition to Building 64, and renovations to four existing support facilities. In addition to Eglin AFB, the DAF will conduct F-35A DT operations at Tyndall AFB.

The four F-35A DT aircraft will arrive between January 2026 and August 2027. At least 259 full time military personnel will be required to support the F-35A DT mission at Eglin AFB, with a maximum of 270 additional billets. The four F-35A DT aircraft will conduct approximately 2,346 airfield operations per year, comprised of 2,322 operations at Eglin AFB and 24 operations at Tyndall AFB. Weapons DT flight operations will be conducted across existing special use airspace (SUA) over land and over water within the Eglin Test and Training Complex, and within the existing Gulf Regional Airspace Strategic Initiative Air Traffic Control Assigned Airspace. Expenditures of defensive countermeasures will include 210 chaff bundles and 210 flares per year and will occur over water within Warning Areas (W-) 151 and 470. Expenditures of munitions will include approximately 95 inert munitions and 5 live munitions and will occur over land and over water in areas authorized for their use. Combined, approximately 150 supersonic flight and weapons DT operations per year will be conducted in restricted area (R-) 2915A over Test Area (TA) B-70. Up to 60 annual supersonic flights are authorized at TA B-70.

To support the requirements of the F-35A DT program, the Proposed Action includes construction of a 41,400 square foot (ft²) 2-bay aircraft maintenance hangar and aircraft parking area; construction of a 2-bay aircraft test hangar; a 24,232 ft² addition to Building 64; and renovations to Buildings 32, 100, 101, and 138; demolition of Building 965 and relocation of the maritime operations group and associated boat storage area to a site approximately 1.3 miles southwest of the existing site. The areas that could be physically disturbed from these actions are collectively referred to as the “project areas”. New facilities will include all required utilities, fire suppression systems, pavements, parking areas, access control points, pedestrian facilities, and site improvements. No construction activities will occur at Tyndall AFB.

Selection Standards for the Alternatives (EA §2.2, pages 2-14 to 2-15): The DAF used the following selection standards to determine the range of reasonable alternatives for beddown of the four F-35A DT aircraft:

- Must be an AFB with an existing weapons DT mission and test organizational structure to support the F-35A DT program.
- Must have infrastructure and facility capacities that can be used immediately or updated through renovations or addition to cost-effectively enable support to the F-35A DT aircraft and mission personnel with minimal requirement for new construction.
- Must be collocated with sufficient test airspace and range capacity to facilitate weapons testing.
- Test airspace and ranges must be instrumented with required telemetry and tracking systems to ensure safety of weapons test operations.

The DAF considered three alternatives: Beddown four F-35A DT aircraft at Eglin AFB, Florida; beddown four F-35A DT aircraft at Edwards AFB, California; and beddown four F-35A DT aircraft at Nellis AFB, Nevada. The alternative to beddown four F-35A DT aircraft at Eglin AFB was the only alternative that met all selection standards and was carried forward for detailed analysis (Table 2-6 on page 2-17 of the EA provides details of alternative screening).

No Action Alternative (EA §2.4, page 2-16): Under the No Action Alternative, the DAF will not beddown four F-35A DT aircraft at Eglin AFB, and F-35A DT flight and weapons testing operations, and construction and renovation activities to support the F-35A DT program will not occur.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

EA § 3.1 includes discussion on the resources not carried forward for analysis in the EA, identifies reasonably foreseeable actions that were considered along with the Proposed Action for the cumulative impacts analysis. Based on the findings within the EA, it was determined implementation of the Proposed Action will have no effect to aesthetic and visual resources, airspace, and environmental justice (**EA § 3.0, pages 3-1 to 3-2**). New facilities will be sited in appropriate planning districts and incorporate installation design guidelines to ensure consistent and coherent architecture with existing facilities. The action does not include proposals for new airspace, changes to existing airspace, or changes to the type and conduct of flight operations conducted at Eglin AFB or Tyndall AFB. Construction and modification actions will occur within the boundary of Eglin Main Base sufficient distances away from off-installation populated areas and will not introduce disproportionately high and adverse human health and environmental impacts on minority, low-income, or child populations. As a result, these resources were dismissed from further review. Environmental resources carried forwarded included air quality, biological resources, cultural resources, geological resources, hazardous materials and wastes, infrastructure and transportation, land use, noise, safety, socioeconomics, and water resources.

This EA was prepared in accordance with the 2020 CEQ NEPA regulations (40 CFR 1500), as amended in 2022, and therefore analyzes environmental impacts from the Proposed Action combined with potential impacts from reasonably foreseeable actions. Reasonably foreseeable actions that may be implemented concurrently with the Proposed Action are identified in **EA §3.0, Table 3-1**. The cumulative effects on the environment that would result from the incremental impacts of the Proposed Action, when combined with the potential impacts of the present and reasonably foreseeable actions are included within the environmental consequences discussions for each resource carried forward in the EA for analysis (§§ 3.2 through 3.12). These sections present a qualitative analysis of the cumulative effects. The Proposed Action will not contribute to cumulatively significant impacts when considered with other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions occurring at or in the vicinity of the project areas. Short- and long-term, negligible to minor cumulative impacts on air quality, biological resources, geological resources, hazardous materials and wastes, infrastructure and transportation, land use, noise, safety, and water resources will be expected. Short- and long-term, minor, beneficial cumulative impacts on biological resources, geological resources, infrastructure and transportation, and socioeconomics will be expected. Based on this analysis, no significant cumulative impacts would occur.

Air Quality (EA § 3.2, pages 3-9 to 3-15): The Proposed Action will occur in Okaloosa, Santa Rosa, Walton, and Bay counties, which are in attainment for all criteria pollutants. Minor, short-term construction-related emissions from particulate matter and engine exhaust will occur under the Proposed Action. Additional, volatile organic compound emissions will result from vehicle operation and maintenance activities during operations. Construction-related emissions will be short term and negligible with respect to overall conditions for the region. Minor, long-term operations-related emissions from new and renovated facility operations, F-35A DT aircraft operations, and munitions expenditures will occur under the Proposed Action. An Air Conformity Applicability Model Report assisted with evaluating impacts

to air quality and determined emissions were below significance thresholds (EA Table 3-2, page 3-5 and Appendix F). Conformity determination is not required. Best management practices (BMPs) and management actions, such as water spray and revegetation of disturbed areas for dust suppression, and use of diesel particulate filters will be implemented to minimize construction and operation emissions. No short- or long-term, significant impacts on air quality will result with implementation of the Proposed Action.

Biological Resources (EA §3.3, pages 3-16 to 3-22): Construction and modification actions will occur within previously disturbed areas. Temporary disturbance of vegetation and soil compaction during construction and from permanent vegetation removal for new facilities will result in short- and long-term impacts on vegetation. There also will be opportunities for nonnative and invasive plant species to establish themselves in disturbed areas. Short- and long-term, minor, adverse impacts on wildlife will occur from noise associated with heavy construction equipment and the permanent loss of habitat.

Potential exists for 19 federally listed and candidate species protected under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) or Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), and the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act (BGEPA) to occur at Eglin AFB, and for 7 federally protected species to be present under non-Eglin AFB-owned airspace. In addition, there are 74 plant and wildlife state-protected species with the potential to occur on Eglin AFB (Appendix G of EA). The state-threatened Florida burrowing owl has been documented on TA B-70, however, even with ongoing flight and munitions expenditures operations conducted at the site, the species has been shown to continue to nest successfully. Prior to the delisting on October 12, 2022, the gopher tortoise eastern distinct population was a candidate for federal listing and protection. The species is still state listed as threatened and Eglin AFB continues to comply with the *Gopher Tortoise Programmatic Conference Opinion (FWS Log #: 04EF3000-2018-F-0139)*. There is a Programmatic Biological Opinion (BO) for the eastern indigo snake, a species that is closely associated with the gopher tortoise, in place at Eglin AFB. The red-cockaded woodpecker is actively managed in compliance with the Red-Cockaded Woodpecker Programmatic BO. Additionally, the natural resources office actively manages the Okaloosa darter, reticulated flatwoods salamander, Gulf sturgeon, and bald eagle. There is Okaloosa darter stream habitat and three active red-cockaded woodpecker nests near the project area. Only the bald eagle, protected under BGEPA and Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA), has been documented around the project areas with two historical bald eagle nests at the southern edge of Eglin Main Base. The project areas do not provide quality habitat for migratory bird species; however, there is the potential for 13 birds protected under MBTA to be in the vicinity of the project areas. The Eglin AFB Bird-Aircraft Strike Hazard (BASH) plan implements habitat modification with BASH dispersal techniques to minimize the presence of wildlife species, including migratory birds on Eglin AFB. There is no USFWS-designated critical habitat within or near the project areas. In the Eglin Gulf Test and Training Range (EGTTR), there have been 25 documented species protected under MMPA, with 5 that are also listed as endangered. Wildlife and protected species at Eglin AFB and in the vicinity of the Eglin Test and Training Complex TAs will experience long-term, minor, adverse impacts from noise disturbances from airfield operations (i.e., takeoffs and landings), flight operations, munitions expenditures, and other range activities. It is expected most of these species are habituated to regular aircraft overflights and noises from the regular airfield and range operations. Exposure to noise from air operations and munitions expenditures in the EGTTR will have intermittent, short-term, minor to moderate impacts on marine species. Long-term impacts on marine species from exposure to ordnance and munitions would be less

than significant, as F-35A DT operations would adhere to the mitigation measures specified in the 2017 and 2019 National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) BOs and the 2023 NMFS Letter of Authorization.

Potential exists for 18 federally listed and candidate species protected under the ESA or MMPA, and the BGEPA to occur at Tyndall AFB, and for 31 federally protected and 45 state-protected species to be present under the airspace. Where the airspace extends over the Gulf of Mexico, there are 28 species protected under the MMPA. In addition, there are 37 plant and wildlife state-protected species and 43 MBTA-protected bird species that have the potential to occur on Tyndall AFB (Appendix G of EA). The Tyndall AFB BASH Plan implements protections near the airfield for birds and wildlife. Long-term, negligible, adverse impacts on wildlife and protected species, including MBTA-protected birds, will occur from noise disturbances produced from airfield operations. It is expected most of these species are habituated to regular to aircraft overflights and noises from the regular operations at the airfield. In addition, long-term, negligible, adverse impacts on wildlife and protected species under Tyndall AFB-managed airspace will occur from aircraft overflights; however, flight operations at Tyndall AFB will be consistent with the type and conduct of ongoing operations and the negligible increase in flight operations will not appreciably affect species beyond existing conditions.

The Proposed Action will adhere to the applicable conservation, mitigation, and BASH reduction measures from the BOs and BASH Plan and federal, state, and DAF regulations. In addition, biological resources have been addressed in previous NEPA analyses and associated ESA Section 7 and Section 10 consultations including, but not limited to, the 2014 and 2020 *Eglin AFB Cantonment Areas EAs*, 2014 *F-35 Supplemental EIS*, 2022 *Final Range EA for Eglin Overland Operations*, 2023 *EGTTR Final Range EA*, 2020 *Final EIS for F-35A Wing Beddown at Tyndall AFB and MQ-9 Wing Beddown at Tyndall AFB or Vandenberg AFB*, and *Final EA Combat Air Forces Contracted Adversary Air Temporary Operations from Tyndall AFB*. Live munitions expended for the F-35A DT program will use a portion of the total allotment for Eglin AFB, which was addressed in the 2023 EGTTR Final Range EA and during prior consultations with NMFS in the 2017 and 2019 NMFS BOs and 2023 Letter of Authorization. No further USFWS or NMFS consultations are required for this Proposed Action. Based on this analysis, there are no significant impacts associated with biological resources.

Cultural Resources (EA §3.4, pages 3-22 to 3-25): The project areas comprising the Area of Potential Effects (APE) have either been surveyed for archaeological resources or are in areas that have been disturbed by more than 70 years of construction and development, diminishing the likelihood of intact archeological deposits in those areas. The boundary of one previously recorded archaeological site overlaps the APE at the boat shed relocation site; however, the site has been determined ineligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). Buildings 32, 100, 101, and 138 have been determined ineligible for listing in the NRHP. Building 64, built in 2002, has not been evaluated for eligibility. Six project areas are in or adjacent to two of the seven NRHP-listed or -eligible historic districts at Eglin AFB. The sites of the 2-bay aircraft maintenance hangar and 2-bay aircraft text hangar are not within the viewshed of the NRHP-listed or -eligible historic districts. Building 32 and the parking area for the 2-bay aircraft maintenance hangar are within the NRHP-listed Eglin Field Historic District. Buildings 64, 100, and 101 are adjacent to the Eglin Field Historic District. The boat shed relocation site is adjacent to the NRHP-eligible Marine Operations Historic District. Renovation of Building 32 and construction of the parking area for the 2-bay aircraft maintenance hangar will not alter any contributing elements nor add new elements out of character with the historic and current function of the Eglin Field Historic District.

Renovations to Buildings 100 and 101, and additions to Building 64, will not be significant enough to impact the character-defining features of the Eglin Field Historic District. The relocation of the boat shed will not change the character of the Marine Operations Historic District or impact the ability of the district to convey historic significance. Therefore, the Proposed Action will not have an effect on historic properties and no significant impacts on cultural resources will occur.

Per the Eglin AFB Comprehensive Section 106 Programmatic Agreement signed by Eglin AFB, the Florida State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation in 2021, Eglin AFB is not required to consult with the SHPO and Tribes on undertakings with a finding of “no historic properties affected” (where survey has already been conducted and SHPO has commented on eligibility) or “no adverse effect”. Eglin AFB is required to consult with Tribes if an undertaking will have an adverse effect on a precontact or historic Native American archaeological site. A memorandum dated March 3, 2022, notes the tribes stated they do not wish to be contacted for work in areas that have already been surveyed and have no Traditional Cultural Properties or sites significant to them (Appendix B of EA). The Proposed Action does not fall into one of these Traditional Cultural Properties and will not have an effect on archeological or historic properties. Based on the analysis results for the APE, tribal and SHPO consultations for this project were not required.

Geological Resources (EA §3.5, pages 3-25 to 3-29): Eglin AFB geology is characterized by developed flat landscapes with mild rises (less than 5 percent slope). Soil types at Eglin Main Base are predominately urban (developed) land with low slopes (0 to 5 percent) either cut to a depth of 12 inches or more or covered with 12 inches or more of fill. Soil types at test areas within the Eglin Reservation are predominately heavily disturbed, well drained Lakeland sand. No geological hazards are of concern at Eglin Main Base or proposed on-land operations areas. All proposed construction, modification, and renovations actions will occur on previously disturbed and developed land. Although soil removal will occur, the construction, modification, and renovation actions will not require extensive earth moving activities and will not alter the geology of Eglin Main Base or the region. A National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Construction General Permit will be obtained for projects that disturb one or more acres of land and site-specific Erosion and Sediment Control Plans will be followed. Munition expenditures under the F-35A DT program will disturb sediments, contributing to erosion and potentially increasing sedimentation and turbidity in nearby water; however, F-35A DT munition expenditures will be consistent with existing range operations and will follow all applicable range protocols. BMPs, such as installing silt fencing during construction to minimize soil erosion and collecting munitions debris to minimize the potential for deposition of metals in soil, will be implemented. Based on this analysis, no significant impacts on geological resources will occur with implementation of the Proposed Action.

Hazardous Materials and Wastes (EA §3.6, pages 3-29 to 3-37): Hazardous materials are used and stored throughout the installation for various functions including aircraft refueling and maintenance. Within the project areas, petroleum, oils, and lubricants are stored within Building 101 (Aerospace Ground Equipment [AGE] storage facility) and hydrazine is stored in Building 138 (Fuels Hangar). Storage tanks are within the vicinity of Buildings 32, 64, 100, 101, and 138, as well as within the 2-bay aircraft maintenance hangar site. Building 100 (Pod Shop) contains a diesel storage tank; Building 101 (AGE facility) contains a waste oil tank; and Building 138 (Fuels Hangar) contains a waste fuel bowser and a Jet A fuel bowser. Previous surveys have determined that Buildings 100 and 101 have asbestos-containing material (ACM) present in some floor tile and mastic throughout the facilities, and wrapped

pipe within the buildings may contain ACM. Based on construction years, lead-based paint (LBP) and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) may be present in Buildings 100 and 101. Building 32 may contain ACM-wrapped pipe. Buildings 64, 138, and 965 are not anticipated to contain ACM, LBP, or PCBs. Building 138 is within Installation Restoration Program (IRP) Spill Site (SS-) 292P south of Point of Interest (POI-) 725 and the boat shed relocation site is within IRP Site SS-086. There are no Military Munition Responses sites within the project areas.

Short- and long-term, negligible to minor impacts on hazardous materials and waste management will occur from construction and modification actions, and operation (e.g., maintenance and repair) of new facilities under the Proposed Action. All hazardous materials and associated waste will be contained, stored, and managed in accordance federal, state, and local regulations to minimize the potential for a release. In addition, construction and operation will adhere to the Eglin AFB *Hazardous Waste Management Plan* and Eglin AFB *Spill Prevention, Control, and Countermeasure Plan*. Tanks and bowzers within or adjacent to Buildings 32, 64, 100, 101, and 138, will be relocated or clearly marked and avoided to ensure no damage will occur during construction and modification actions. To ensure safety and reduce the potential for an accidental release, during construction and modification actions, no containers of hydrazine will be present within Building 138 or near any modification actions associated with the building. Surveys for toxic substances (i.e., ACM, LBP, and PCBs) will be conducted by a certified contractor for Buildings 32, 100, 101, 138, and 965 prior to any building construction or modification. Contractors performing renovations to Building 138, which is within IRP Sites SS-292P and POI-725, will adhere to all guidelines established by Eglin AFB. Should potentially hazardous wastes be discovered or unearthed during renovation, the contractor will immediately cease work, contact appropriate installation personnel, and await sampling and analysis results before taking any further action. Any waste determined to be hazardous will be managed or disposed in accordance with applicable laws and regulations. Placement of a pre-engineered building and a gravel hardstand within the boat shed relocation site will not result in impacts on IRP Site SS-086. Monitoring wells associated with IRP Sites within the project areas will be clearly marked and avoided to ensure no damage to the wells occurs during construction and modification actions. Long-term, negligible, beneficial impacts will occur from demolition and modification of facilities containing toxic substances and the reduced potential for future human exposure to ACMs, LBP, and PCBs. Based on this analysis, there are no significant impacts associated with hazardous materials and wastes with implementation of the Proposed Action.

Infrastructure and Transportation (EA §3.7, pages 3-37 to 3-45): Most utilities will be avoided or protected during construction and modification actions. Short-term, negligible to minor, adverse impacts on infrastructure (i.e., electricity, natural gas, liquid fuels, sewer and wastewater, stormwater, solid waste, and communications systems) will occur during construction from temporary utility service disruptions, increases in fuel consumption, and generation of solid wastes. The construction contractor will be responsible for disposal of solid wastes and will recycle appropriate materials to the greatest extent possible. Long-term, negligible, adverse impacts on infrastructure will result from a slight increase in infrastructure and utility demand from operation of new facilities, F-35A DT maintenance and testing activities, an increase of impervious surfaces, and to support additional personnel. Increased demand and consumption of utilities will not exceed the capacities of the existing systems at Eglin Main Base. Short-term, negligible to minor, adverse impacts on roadways, airfield pavements, and installation gates will occur from the addition of construction-related traffic on installation roadways and accessing installation gates daily, rerouting of a road near the 2-bay aircraft test hangar site, and the modification

and addition of pavements. Long-term, negligible to minor impacts on transportation, airfield pavements, installation gates, and parking will occur from the additional permanent personnel transiting through Eglin AFB daily and four additional aircraft operating on the Eglin AFB airfield. Long-term, minor, beneficial impacts will occur from construction of additional parking areas, which will support the parking needs of the incoming personnel and replacement of degraded airfield pavements. Overall, there are no significant impacts associated with infrastructure and transportation with implementation of the Proposed Action.

Land Use (EA §3.8, pages 3-45 to 3-47): Buildings 64, 100, 101, 138, and 965 are within the Flightline District of Eglin Main Base, while Building 32 is within the Downtown District, and the boat shed relocation site is within the Bayou Park District. Land uses within the project areas are consistent with the permitted land uses within their respective districts, which include airfield operations and maintenance, industrial, and administrative. The 2-bay aircraft maintenance hangar will replace Building 965 and will be re-classified from light industrial to aircraft operations and maintenance. The proposed boat shed relocation site will be re-classified from open space to light industrial. All construction and modification actions under the Proposed Action will be compatible with existing and future land use planning classifications. Changes to the functions of existing buildings will not occur from renovations or modifications.

The project areas lie within the coastal zone of Florida. The Proposed Action will not alter or jeopardize the coastline or coastal resources at Eglin AFB. Eglin AFB prepared and submitted a coastal consistency determination stating the Proposed Action is consistent with the Florida Coastal Management Program. Based on this analysis, implementation of the Proposed Action will have no significant impacts to coastal zone management and land use. The DAF's coastal consistency determination is provided in EA Appendix C.

Noise (EA §3.9, pages 3-47 to 3-55): The project areas are within developed and industrial areas on Eglin AFB where military and nonmilitary aircraft overflights, airfield operations, vehicular traffic, and construction activities are common. Construction and modification actions will result in short-term, minor, adverse impacts from the use of heavy equipment for clearing, excavation, grading, and paving. This noise will be intermittent/temporary and cease once the project is completed. Standard construction BMPs will be implemented such as properly maintaining heavy equipment mufflers in good working condition and conducting construction activities during normal weekday business hours. Long-term, negligible, adverse impacts will occur from incremental increases in aircraft noise from additional F-35A airfield operations at Eglin AFB, and Tyndall AFB, additional supersonic flights within TA B-70, and additional over land munitions expenditures. These activities will be consistent with the type and level of activity conducted at Eglin AFB and Tyndall AFB currently and the nature and levels of noise from these activities will be comparable to existing conditions. Therefore, there will be no significant impacts from noise with implementation of the Proposed Action.

Safety (EA §3.10, pages 3-55 to 3-59): Short- and long-term, minor impacts on safety will occur from exposure of construction workers and additional personnel to the inherent hazards associated with construction and operations, which will increase the risk of workplace mishaps. All construction workers and F-35A DT personnel will be required to adhere to all Occupational Safety and Health Administration and Air Force Occupational Safety and Health standards during construction and operations. In addition, short- and long-term, negligible, adverse impacts on explosives safety will occur from construction and siting of the aircraft taxi lane, blast pad, equipment yard and road reconfiguration associated with the 2-

bay aircraft test hangar to avoid established Explosive Safety Quantity Distance (ESQD) arcs. All appropriate DAF regulations will be followed to avoid safety impacts during construction and operations. Operation of the aircraft taxi lane, blast pad, equipment yard, and rerouted Perimeter Road will be compatible with the permitted land uses within the ESQD arcs, and therefore will not require a change or reconfiguration of the arcs or impact the movement of munitions. Long-term, negligible to minor, adverse impacts on offshore and flight safety will occur from F-35A weapons and flight DT operations conducted over land and water. Offshore munitions testing areas will be cleared prior to a munitions expenditure to ensure the safety of commercial and recreational boats. Increased air operations will increase the potential for aircraft mishaps and bird-aircraft strikes. All flight safety policies, and bird-aircraft strike hazard reduction measures will be followed to reduce the potential for mishaps. Based on this analysis, there are no significant impacts to safety with implementation of the Proposed Action.

Socioeconomics (EA §3.11, pages 3-59 to 3-62): Short-term, negligible, beneficial impacts on the local economy will occur from implementation of the Proposed Action. Construction and modification actions will provide temporary increases in income for local construction workers and indirect increases in retail trade revenues through the purchase of equipment, supplies, and materials. Long-term, minor, beneficial impacts on public services will occur from additional personnel, which will add additional demand on installation childcare, local education and health and emergency services. Incoming personnel will consider off-installation services to accommodate the increased demand. Impacts on offshore economic sectors, such as commercial fishing, maritime shipping, and ocean tourism, will not occur, as offshore F-35A DT operations will be consistent with ongoing mission training activities at Eglin AFB and within the operational envelope of which they currently occur. Based on this analysis, there are no significant impacts the Proposed Action will have on socioeconomics.

Water Resources (EA §3.12, pages 3-62 to 3-69): No surface waters are within the project areas. Stormwater runoff from the project areas ultimately discharges to Choctawhatchee Bay. Relocation of the boat shed will have short-term, minor to moderate, adverse impacts on surface water where relocation will occur within 50 feet of a surface water body (i.e., Weekley Bayou); however, the boat shed will be relocated to a previously disturbed area and impacts will be minor. Long-term, minor, adverse impacts will occur from a permanent increase in impervious surfaces (e.g., pavements, buildings) at Eglin AFB from construction of new facilities, increasing the potential for surface water runoff. BMPs specified in the installation-specific Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan and development of site-specific construction Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plans will minimize adverse effects. F-35A DT over water range operations (i.e., munitions expenditures and employment of chaff and flares) will result in long-term, negligible to minor, adverse impacts on offshore surface water in the Gulf of Mexico. The F-35A DT program will be using capacity from the previously analyzed munitions allotments in the 2023 *EGTTR Final Range EA* and related consultations with NMFS. Therefore, impacts on offshore water resources (surface waters and submerged sediments) will be the same as described in those analyses, including long-term, negligible, adverse impacts to sediment or water quality from explosives; long-term, minor, adverse impacts from spent munitions fragments and debris deposits; long-term, minor, adverse localized impacts from unconsumed explosives; and long-term, negligible, adverse impacts from defensive countermeasures. Overall, the Proposed Action is expected to result in long-term, negligible to minor, adverse impacts to offshore surface water in the Gulf of Mexico.

Groundwater underlying the project areas consists of the surficial aquifer and the Floridian Aquifer. The surficial aquifer is an unconfined aquifer and is not a primary water resource at Eglin AFB. The top of the Floridian aquifer ranges from 50 feet below the surface to 700 feet below the surface underneath Eglin AFB. The Floridian Aquifer is the primary water source at Eglin AFB. No impacts on groundwater will occur from the Proposed Action, and ground disturbance required for construction and modification actions will be at surface-level and, at most, a few feet below the surface. If required, the DAF will implement LUCs near monitoring or water wells in the project areas to prevent potential contamination from reaching the groundwater.

Eglin Main Base has 100-year and 500-year floodplains along its southern border with Choctawhatchee Bay. Recent modeling data show that the southeastern portion of the main base area will be flooded during extreme storm (hurricane) events. The boat shed will be relocated to a previously disturbed area adjacent to the 500-year floodplain and will overlap an approximately 1-acre area of the 500-year floodplain at the western boundary and northwest corner of the site. Because the installation constructs and manages facilities in this area to be consistent with the intent of the floodplain management guidelines promulgated under the with the National Flood Insurance Program, the northwest corner of the facility would be constructed to be at a higher elevation than the floodplain and no appreciable effects on the floodplain would be anticipated. No other project areas are within the 100- or 500-year floodplains or within the Coastal High Hazard Area (or Special Flood Hazard Area) that will be subjected to storm hazards due to wind and wave action. Because the area has been previously disturbed and already encompasses existing facilities and infrastructure, no appreciable impacts that would affect the flow of water in a flood event would be expected.

Any construction of impervious surface, storm water management systems (retention ponds, swales, storm water pipes/culverts), or work in wetlands will require an Environmental Resource Permit through the Northwest Florida Water Management District (NFWFMD). Construction will be conducted in a manner to have negligible impacts on surface water, groundwater, and floodplains to the maximum extent practical. The Proposed Action will not situate critical infrastructure within the floodplain and will not affect existing flood heights or floodplain limits. Based on this analysis, there are no significant impacts associated with water resources.

MANAGEMENT ACTIONS

As the proponent for this action, the DAF is responsible for ensuring all environmental plans, permits, and management actions are fully funded, in place, and being carried out as identified above and within the EA. Many of the environmental permits required to implement the Proposed Action cannot be issued by the governing federal, state, and local regulatory agencies until after review of the final project design. A list of mitigation measures, BMPs and management actions is included in Appendix E of the EA. Management actions focus on avoidance and minimization of impacts to the resources analyzed in detail in the EA. They do not address all the range and aircraft operations procedures required to be followed, which include those specified in Eglin AFB Instruction (EAFBI) 13-212, *Range Planning and Operations*, EAFBI 13-204, *Air Operations*, and other applicable regulations and guidance documents. Eglin AFB and its contractors will adhere to all applicable requirements in accordance with federal, state, and/or local regulatory requirements during installation and operation of the Proposed Action.

PUBLIC REVIEW AND STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

The EA is being made available for a 30-day public comment and review period. Copies of the Draft EA and Draft FONSI and documents incorporated by reference are accessible from the Eglin AFB Environmental Documents website at: <https://www.eglin.af.mil/About-Us/Eglin-Documents/>.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Based on review of the facts and analysis summarized above and contained within the findings of the EA, I find the Proposed Action to beddown four F-35A aircraft and associated F-35A aircraft and associated personnel at Eglin AFB to support the F-35A DT mission will not have a significant impact on the natural or human environment; therefore, an environmental impact statement is not required. This analysis fulfills the requirements of NEPA, the President's Council on Environmental Quality regulations at 40 CFR §§1500–1508, and DAF EIAP regulations at 32 CFR §989.

SIGNATORY
TITLE

Date