

RECORD OF DECISION

**FOR THE BARRY M. GOLDWATER RANGE EAST RANGE ENHANCEMENTS
FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT DATED NOVEMBER 26, 2010**

INTRODUCTION

This Record of Decision (ROD) documents the decisions of the U.S. Air Force regarding 6 of 10 proposed enhancements to the eastern portion of the Barry M. Goldwater Range (BMGR), also known as BMGR East. The 10 proposals include: (1) developing a sensor training area, (2) establishing efficient and timely environmental review and approval procedures to address reconfiguration of existing air-to-ground target complexes on the tactical ranges, (3) installing a moving-vehicle target system to support air-to-ground attack training, (4) developing a new target to support training in live air-to-ground missile employment within the East tactical range (East TAC), (5) lowering the regular flight altitude floor over a portion of the Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge, (6) converting a portion of Manned Range 3 into a helicopter gunnery range, (7) allowing additional training in combat search and rescue and similar ground-based and combined air-ground operations, (8) constructing a new taxiway and air traffic control tower at Gila Bend Air Force Auxiliary Field (AFAF), (9) paving approximately 7 miles of an existing graded road within the BMGR East, and (10) excavating, stockpiling, and using sand and gravel resources on the BMGR East. The Air Force has reached a decision regarding six of these proposals.

Proposal 1. Developing a sensor training area.

Proposal 4. Developing a new target for live air-to-ground missiles within East TAC.

Proposal 6. Converting a portion of Manned Range 3 into a helicopter gunnery range.

Proposal 8. Constructing a new taxiway and air traffic control tower at Gila Bend AFAF.

Proposal 9. Paving approximately 7 miles of an existing graded road within BMGR East.

Proposal 10. Excavating, stockpiling, and using sand and gravel resources on the BMGR East.

This ROD is based on the information, analysis, and public and agency comments contained in the *Final Environmental Impact Statement for Proposed Barry M. Goldwater Range East Range*

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Enhancements (Federal Register Vol 75, No 227, Nov 26, 2010, p 72824), as well as other relevant factors. The Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) proposes 10 separate actions that would enhance military training and operations at BMGR East. This ROD has been prepared in accordance with the regulations implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), specifically Title 40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 1505.2, *Record of decision in cases requiring environmental impact statements* (40 CFR § 1505.2). This ROD:

- States the Air Force's decision (p. 14);
- Identifies alternatives considered by the Air Force in reaching the decision and specifies the alternative considered to be environmentally preferable ;
- Identifies and discusses relevant factors in reaching the decision, including technical considerations and public input;
- States the mitigations adopted and states whether all practical means to avoid, minimize, or mitigate environmental harm from the alternatives selected have been adopted.

BACKGROUND

Since its inception in 1941, the BMGR has been indispensable for producing and maintaining the combat-ready aircrews needed to defend the United States and its interests. The BMGR is currently used to train aircrews from the Air Force, Air Force Reserve, Air National Guard, Army National Guard, Marine Corps, Marine Corps Reserve, and Navy. The BMGR routinely supports the training of both student and combat-ready aircrews in the region. An aggregate total of more than 800 combat aircraft are typically stationed at military air bases in southern Arizona (AZ) and California (CA). The BMGR is also one of the most heavily used ranges in the United States for training deployments by air units from bases located in other regions of the country, U.S. bases located overseas, and allied foreign militaries. Training deployments typically result in an additional 950 to 1,200 aircraft annually using the BMGR. Approximately 55,000 training sorties, or flights by individual aircraft, are flown annually at BMGR East.

Since the BMGR was established, technology and tactics of military aviation have substantially evolved. In response to these changes, the infrastructure at BMGR East has been modified, improved, and upgraded periodically to keep aircrew training relevant to real-world air combat missions and threats. Although some modernization has occurred during the last decade, much of the current training infrastructure (including physical and electronic simulations of targets and air defense systems) was installed or last upgraded during the Cold War era, which ended in the

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early 1990s. Since that time, many of the tactics of modern air combat have been dramatically altered by rapid advancements in aircraft-delivered air-to-ground weapons (including precision-guidance systems and stand-off [i.e., long-range] capabilities), electronic sensing and surveillance of the battle space, and air defense systems. Furthermore, as recent events in Iraq and Afghanistan have demonstrated, increased warfare in urban settings has placed new demands on airpower to counter threats and support friendly forces in an exceedingly complex environment.

The Air Force has determined that the training and range support infrastructure currently in place at BMGR East is in need of key additions, modifications, improvements, and upgrades to ensure that aircrew training remains realistic and relevant and so that training produces the air combat capabilities needed by the nation today and in the future. These training features are not available at other training ranges within the BMGR operating region. Similarly, there is need to upgrade Gila Bend AFAF, located within the northeastern portion of BMGR East, to support flying operations. Certain new ground-based training activities that are components of the overall air power mission are also needed at BMGR East. Finally, improvements in some range maintenance facilities are needed to help the Air Force keep BMGR East fully functional.

The Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), located directly south of BMGR East, would be directly affected by one of the proposed actions and is therefore serving as a cooperating agency. In addition, the Cabeza Prieta NWR leads the Recovery Team for the endangered Sonoran pronghorn (which occurs within BMGR East) and has contributed to the understanding of how the proposed actions may affect Sonoran pronghorn. No decision has been made regarding Proposal 5, which would lower the regular flight altitude floor over a portion of the Cabeza Prieta NWR; that proposal is not addressed in this ROD.

An EIS was prepared to aid in the decision-making process of the Air Force to implement 10 proposed enhancements within BMGR East. All of the actions being proposed for BMGR East and Gila Bend AFAF are independent of each other and have stand-alone value for improving training operations. While the Air Force prefers to implement all the proposed actions because this would result in the greatest training benefit for aircrew and ground troop training, each of the proposals, if implemented alone, would have a positive effect on the use and/or management of BMGR East and/or Gila Bend AFAF. This ROD identifies the Air Force's decisions regarding six of the proposed enhancements; the other proposed enhancements may be addressed in one or more separate RODs at a later date.

SELECTED ALTERNATIVES

The proposed actions selected by the Air Force thus far to meet the enhanced mission requirements at BMGR East are described below.

Proposal 1: Developing a Sensor Training Area (STA) within the San Cristobal Valley underlying the air-to-air range airspace.

The STA will provide regular and deployed users of the BMGR with realistic training in air-to-ground combat in urban settings, including training for simulated precise guided munitions (also known as smart bombs). This urban target complex will employ the latest technology to: (1) meet the detection and targeting capabilities resident in today's advanced airborne weapons systems, as well as next generation weapon systems; (2) provide the most realistic target environment for these weapon systems to include infrared targets and a variety of urban lighting conditions; (3) simulate 21st century surface-to-air threats and aircrew reaction through advanced airborne sensor systems, and (4) electronically score pilot performance and record it for post-mission replay.

The STA will consist of 640 acres, of which up to 400 acres will be developed over time. Key features will include electronic unmanned threat emitters and a large-scale target sensor system. Related features beyond the 640 acres will include a ground-based forward air controller site on approximately 0.25 acre; roadway improvements for construction, operations, and maintenance access; and limited Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) clearance activities.

Proposal 4: Developing a new target for live air-to-ground missiles within East TAC.

BMGR East currently has two targets for training with live air-to-ground missiles, but the one in East TAC is positioned in a way that limits the ability of aircrews to attack the target from a variety of directions and altitudes. A second live missile target will be developed in East TAC in a centrally positioned location that will support attacks with air-to-ground missiles, including Maverick missiles, from multiple directions and optimal altitudes.

Proposal 6: Converting a portion of Manned Range 3 into a helicopter gunnery range.

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The targets in each of the four manned ranges within BMGR East were developed for fixed-wing aircraft and are less relevant for training aircrews of rotary-wing aircraft (helicopters). Consequently, the Air Force will convert the southern portion of Manned Range 3, including the left conventional target south of the tower, into a helicopter gunnery range with fixed, moving, and pop-up targets to provide more appropriate training for the Army National Guard and other rotary-wing units that train at BMGR East. The targets, which will be strafed with small caliber (up to 50 cal) munitions, will be used for daytime and nighttime training missions.

Proposal 8: Constructing a new taxiway and air traffic control tower at Gila Bend AFAF.

The runway at Gila Bend AFAF is not serviced by a separate parallel taxiway, which forces aircraft to taxi on the runway and limits the tempo at which the airfield can support take-off and landing operations. The air traffic control tower at Gila Bend AFAF, designed and built in 1964, is inadequately sized and no longer meets the minimally acceptable visual surveillance or depth perception standards to fully manage current flight operations. Two key improvements will be made to support airfield operations at the Gila Bend AFAF. One improvement will be to construct a taxiway parallel to and west of the airfield runway to increase the safety and capacity of the airfield by eliminating the need for aircraft to taxi on the runway; total ground disturbance will be about 42 acres. The second improvement will be to replace the existing air traffic control tower with a new one located approximately 1,100 feet west of the existing tower with the height needed to provide adequate observation of aircraft movements on the runway and taxiways and sufficient interior space to house the needed equipment.

Proposal 9: Paving approximately 7 miles of an existing graded road within BMGR East.

Approximately 7 miles of the road will be paved from the main tower within Manned Range 1 to the water well and adjacent Range Munitions Consolidation Point (RMCP) 1 located near the boundary of the North and South TAC ranges to the west of Manned Range 1. Paving this road will (1) decrease dust levels and improve air quality and driver visibility and safety; (2) decrease road maintenance requirements by providing a cost-effective, durable, and long-lasting maintenance solution; and (3) reduce vehicle maintenance costs resulting from the disproportionate wear and tear on Air Force vehicles that frequently travel on this road. The current roadbed and drainage way is approximately 30 feet wide; however, only the center 16 feet will be paved. The total

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area to be paved will cover approximately 13.5 acres. The current speed limit of 35 mph established by the Air Force for this road will not be changed, and speed limit signs will be posted along the road.

Proposal 10: Excavating, stockpiling, and using sand and gravel resources at BMGR East.

Sand and gravel supplies are needed within BMGR East to (1) simulate certain target features, such as aircraft revetments; (2) repair and maintain some facilities, such as berms used to protect scoring instruments at the strafe pits on the manned ranges; (3) fill road ruts resulting from frequent grading and soil erosion; and (4) repair at-grade crossings of washes. Instead of continuing to purchase and haul sand and gravel from off-range sources, the Air Force will excavate sand and gravel from ten sites within BMGR East to be used for on-range road maintenance, target reconstruction, and target maintenance. The excavated material will be transported to four new stockpile sites on BMGR East and to one existing site on the Gila Bend AFAF, where the materials can be accessed as needed. The material source sites are all located adjacent to existing roads and in areas open enough to provide reasonable access for a loader and where trees along the banks of the washes can be avoided. The source sites are highly ephemeral washes that are normally dry and flow only in response to local rainfall runoff. The proposed sites have material of sufficient quantity and quality for the intended uses. The materials excavated from the source sites will be removed using existing equipment such as a front-end loader mounted on a rubber-tired tractor. The quantities excavated at each site will be small enough that natural replenishment is expected following major rainfall events. Stockpile sites will be outside of washes so that runoff from storms will result in minimal movement of the stockpiled sand and gravel.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

For each of the 10 actions proposed, the EIS analyzed (1) the proposed action and (2) no action, in which no changes to existing operations would be made. Action alternatives were considered in detail for four of the proposals (STA, moving vehicle target system, lowered flight floor over a portion of the Cabeza Prieta NWR, and the air traffic control tower at Gila Bend AFAF). Of the proposals with action alternatives, only Proposal 1 regarding the STA and Proposal 8 regarding the air traffic control tower at Gila Bend AFAF are addressed in this ROD. These action alternatives addressed other locations or modified areas in which the proposed action could

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occur. No other reasonable alternatives meeting the purpose and need were identified for the other proposed actions.

Three alternative locations were evaluated in detail for the STA. The preferred and selected location underlies the air-to-air range airspace where it offers the fewest operational conflicts with other simultaneous military operations. Another location analyzed was Target 220 on South TAC, which offers an area of previous and ongoing military disturbance, but would disrupt other training operations within South TAC. The third location was within North TAC outside of the current range of the endangered Sonoran pronghorn and in an area that has not been previously used for air-to-ground training; flight maneuvers associated with a STA in this location would interfere with the simultaneous use of both Manned Range 4 and Manned Range 2 and reduce the training capacity of those ranges.

Two alternative locations were considered for the proposed replacement air traffic control tower at Gila Bend AFAF. The preferred and selected location is approximately 3,100 feet north of the Runway 35 threshold (the beginning of the portion of the runway that is usable for landing) and 1,600 feet west of the Runway 17/35 centerline. This location is approximately 1,100 feet west of the existing tower. The second location considered is approximately 3,050 feet north of the Runway 35 threshold and 1,750 feet west of the Runway 17/35 centerline. However, this location would result in a field of view that is impacted by power lines and other base structures.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES AND MITIGATION/MANAGEMENT ACTIONS

The effects of each alternative are discussed in the Final EIS with regard to earth resources, water resources, air quality, biological resources, land use, outdoor recreation, health and safety, cultural resources, hazardous materials, socioeconomics, and noise. The analysis in the Final EIS indicates that, with mitigation and management actions, none of the selected actions will result in a significant environmental impact.

Earth Resources

Environmental Consequences: Effects on earth resources will predominantly consist of short-term localized ground disturbance associated with construction and EOD operations associated with range enhancements. Long-term localized ground disturbance will occur with ongoing use of the STA, new air-to-ground target, and sand and gravel extraction and stockpile sites. The paving of the frequently used road in Manned Range 1 will stabilize soils and reduce erosion potential in this area in the long term.

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Mitigation/Management Actions: Construction-related effects will be minimized through adherence to the Arizona Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Construction General Permit requirements. Ongoing impacts will be minimized through best management practices to limit erosion and adherence to the Arizona Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Multi-Sector General Permit for the proposed sand and gravel operations.

Water Resources

Environmental Consequences: Effects on water resources are mostly associated with the potential for increased sedimentation in washes associated with runoff from areas with increased ground disturbance. The short- and long-term potential for impacts correlate to those noted for Earth Resources. The Air Force has consulted with the Department of the Army, Corps of Engineers who has determined that none of the proposals will involve discharge of dredged or fill material into jurisdictional waters of the United States and therefore, would not be regulated under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act.

Mitigation/Management Actions: Adherence to construction permits and natural revegetation will minimize the effects in the short and long terms, respectively.

Air Quality

Environmental Consequences: The construction emissions associated with the proposed actions will generate low to moderate emissions, with the bulk of emissions associated with land disturbance activities and the resultant production of dust (PM₁₀). Generator emissions associated with the STA and equipment used for sand and gravel extraction will result in minor ongoing and/or recurring air emissions. Individually and collectively, none of the proposed actions is expected to result in an exceedance of the National Ambient Air Quality Standards.

Mitigation/Management Actions: None required.

Biological Resources

Environmental Consequences: Biological effects are associated with loss of vegetation from ground disturbing activities; and potential disturbance to wildlife and special status species associated with human presence in new areas for construction, operations, and maintenance of the Range enhancements. Activities are, in general, not expected to impact the distribution or abundance of any species.

Mitigation/Management Actions: Plant salvage and revegetation efforts will be conducted in accordance with the Arizona Native Plant Law. Where required, surveys will be conducted for

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western burrowing owls and desert tortoise prior to ground disturbing or construction activities. The Air Force has consulted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to comply with Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act and will adhere to the terms and conditions issued as part of the Biological Opinion.

Land Use

Environmental Consequences: The selected actions are generally compatible with existing land uses because the purpose of BMGR East is to support Department of Defense training. With regard to the STA in particular, the preferred and selected action of developing the STA underlying the air-to-air range airspace is more compatible with existing military operations than the alternative locations in North and South TAC ranges, which would be more likely to interfere with training in other subranges within BMGR East.

Mitigation/Management Actions: None required.

Outdoor Recreation

Environmental Consequences: The actions addressed in this ROD are proposed in areas that are closed to public use for safety reasons and will not affect outdoor recreation. Establishing the STA within the San Cristobal Valley could result in certain limitations on bighorn sheep hunting within the Mohawk Mountains to the west of the site due to potential laser hazards.

Mitigation/Management Actions: The number of potential bighorn sheep hunters that could be affected by limited hunting opportunities within the Mohawk Mountains is very small. If there is a period of time during the hunting season when the STA will not be activated for laser use, bighorn sheep hunting may be allowed with a special use permit.

Health and Safety

Environmental Consequences: Because the actions addressed in this ROD are in areas where public access is not allowed, there will be minimal effects on public health and safety. Personnel involved in construction activities associated with the proposed actions may be exposed to increased health and safety risks associated with heavy equipment operations or EOD clearance operations, but such risks would be comparable to those associated with periodic range maintenance.

Mitigation/Management Actions: Adherence to standard construction and ongoing health and safety protocols will be requirements for BMGR East operations and maintenance personnel, contractors, military users, and visitors.

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Cultural Resources

Environmental Consequences: Surface disturbance associated with five of the six independent proposals included in this ROD (4, 6, 8, 9, and 10) will be limited to areas that have been surveyed for cultural resources, where no resources eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places (National Register) were identified. As documented in the Final EIS, the Arizona State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) has concurred with the Air Force's determinations that implementation of Proposals 4, 6, 8, 9, and 10 will not affect historic properties.

Proposal 1, developing the STA in the San Cristobal Valley underlying the air-to-air range airspace, will adversely affect properties eligible for inclusion on the National Register. The Air Force and SHPO, in consultation with tribes that attach cultural importance to places in the affected area, have executed a programmatic agreement which takes into account the effects of the proposal on historic properties and demonstrates compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

Mitigation/Management Actions: No mitigation actions are required in connection with Proposals 4, 6, 8, 9, and 10. The programmatic agreement governing implementation of Proposal 1 stipulates that the Air Force, in consultation with SHPO and tribes, will develop and implement a treatment plan which includes measures to avoid, minimize, or mitigate adverse effects on historic properties.

Hazardous Materials and Waste Management

Environmental Consequences: Construction-related activities could result in temporary increases in petroleum, oil, and lubricant use and the need to dispose of solid and/or hazardous wastes. Actions that will result in a change in aircraft operations, such as increased use of the air-to-air range airspace associated with locating the STA within the San Cristobal Valley, could result in an increased risk of aircraft mishaps or mishaps in a different area of BMGR East. No increased potential for unacceptable risk to human and/or ecological receptors or transport of munitions constituents off-range is expected with the new air-to-ground missile target given the source-interaction-receptor analysis conducted to date.

Mitigation/Management Actions: Spills will be addressed and cleaned up in accordance with applicable regulations and Air Force policies and procedures. The potential for munitions constituents to migrate off BMGR East and cause an unacceptable risk to human and/or ecological receptors will be reassessed at a minimum of every 5 years as specified in the

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Operational Range Assessment Program, or whenever significant changes occur at BMGR East that may affect determinations made during the previous assessment.

Socioeconomics and Environmental Justice

Environmental Consequences: Socioeconomic effects are expected to be minor. Construction-related activities will result in short term regional economic gains from the purchase of equipment, goods, and services. The use of sand and gravel from within BMGR East will have little effect on the local community as the current off-site sand and gravel source is located roughly 70 miles from the range. No adverse off-range effects have been identified that would affect a minority or low-income population so there are no environmental justice concerns.

Mitigation/Management Actions: None required.

Noise

Environmental Consequences: New sources of noise will include generators used to power STA equipment; equipment used to construct the new air-to-ground target; pave the existing dirt road within Manned Range 1; and construct a parallel taxiway and air traffic control tower at Gila Bend AFAF; and equipment and activities associated with excavating, loading, and unloading sand and gravel. These noise sources will generally be short in duration and infrequent. Establishing both the STA under the air-to-air range airspace and a new air-to-ground missile target are expected to result in the redistribution of aircraft noise and ordnance noise within BMGR East, but are not expected to change the number of sorties flown or the number of air-to-ground missiles used in training. Persons and wildlife in proximity to these new features will, however, notice a change in noise and may be disturbed by it.

Mitigation/Management Actions: None required.

In consideration of the mitigation and management actions identified for each resource, all practical means to avoid, minimize, or mitigate environmental harm from the alternatives selected have been adopted.

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PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The public involvement process began with the publication of the Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS in the *Federal Register* on December 28, 2007. The Notice of Intent included dates and locations for scoping meetings. Three scoping meetings were held January 15 through January 17, 2008 in the Arizona communities of Glendale, Tucson, and Gila Bend to actively solicit input from the public, local governments, federal and state agencies, American Indians, and environmental groups. A total of 25 people attended the scoping meetings. During the official scoping period, the Air Force received a total of nine written comment forms or letters.

Publication of the Notice of Availability of the Draft EIS was published on July 10, 2009 in the *Federal Register* and in local newspapers in the affected area in mid-July, 2009. A total of 135 copies of the Draft EIS were sent to federal, state, and local agencies, Native American tribes and organizations, special interest groups, and those members of the public who requested a copy; an additional 15 copies of the Draft EIS were sent to local libraries to provide a location where the public could review the document. On July 27 through July 29, 2009, public hearings were held in Glendale, Tucson, and Gila Bend to provide an opportunity for the public to evaluate the proposed actions and alternatives as well as the analysis contained within the Draft EIS. Six people attended the hearings with two people providing oral comments. The 45-day public review and comment period for the Draft EIS closed on August 24, 2009. The Air Force received a total of nine written comments during the 45-day public comment period.

All comments received during the public review and comment period were reviewed by the Air Force and considered in the preparation of the Final EIS, which was issued on November 26, 2010. No substantive modifications were made to the Draft EIS based upon the input received during the public review and comment period. No comments changed the substantial elements or conclusions presented in the Draft EIS. The Final EIS contains the public and agency comments and responses to comments.

ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERABLE ALTERNATIVE

In accordance with 40 CFR § 1505.2(b), the ROD must specify the alternative, or alternatives, considered to be environmentally preferable. Ordinarily, the environmentally preferable alternative is considered to be the alternative that causes the least damage to the biological and physical environment and that also best protects, preserves, and enhances historic, cultural, and natural resources (see 46 *Federal Register* 18026-18038, 23 March 1981).

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Most of the proposed actions as well as the action alternatives involve some ground disturbance, and ground disturbance can contribute to environmental damage such as loss of vegetative cover and wildlife habitat, soil erosion, greater potential for sedimentation of running water, and greater potential for disturbance of cultural resources. While most of these effects can be avoided or minimized with implementation of management actions or mitigation, avoiding ground disturbance is typically environmentally preferred.

Proposal 1: Developing a STA

Developing a sensor training area will result in some level of ground disturbance within an area of up to 1200 acres. In addition to increased potential for soil erosion, increase sediment in stormwater runoff, and damage or destruction of vegetation, construction and maintenance may frighten animals away from the area, although other suitable habitat occurs in the vicinity. Not developing the STA would eliminate these effects and is, therefore, the environmentally preferred alternative.

Proposal 4: Developing a new air-to-ground missile target

Developing a new air-to-ground missile target will result in ground disturbance within an estimated 75-acre area. In addition to increased potential for soil erosion, increase sediment in stormwater runoff, and damage or destruction of vegetation, the practice of firing missiles at a newly established target will frighten animals away from the area, although other suitable habitat occurs in the vicinity. Not developing the target would eliminate these effects and is therefore the environmentally preferred alternative.

Proposal 6: Converting a portion of Manned Range 3 into a helicopter gunnery range

Developing new targets for a helicopter gunnery range will result in dispersed ground disturbance within a 400-acre area. Because the no-action alternative would not require a change in ground disturbance, the no-action alternative would be environmentally preferred even though it would not support the operational purpose and need.

Proposal 8: Constructing a new taxiway and air traffic control tower at Gila Bend AFAF.

While constructing a new taxiway and air traffic control tower at Gila Bend AFAF will result in approximately 43 acres of ground disturbance, the construction will occur within areas that have been previously disturbed. The no-action alternative would not require a change from current ground disturbance so it would be the environmentally preferred alternative. However, the

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safety improvements resulting from the temporary disturbance will help to minimize the potential for an aircraft crash, which would also be harmful to the environment.

Proposal 9: Paving approximately 7 miles of an existing graded road within BMGR East.

Paving approximately 7 miles of the existing graded road within Manned Range 1 is the environmentally preferred alternative because the proposed paved surface will reduce susceptibility of soils to erosion, control dust, and reduce the potential for dust-related vehicle accidents over the long term, which will offset short-term physical disturbance construction impacts.

Proposal 10: Excavating, stockpiling, and using sand and gravel resources on the BMGR East.

Excavating, stockpiling, and using sand and gravel resources within BMGR East will also result in ongoing ground disturbance, but the same types of ground disturbance would occur off-range at commercial facilities. In addition, there are environmental costs associated with hauling materials to BMGR East including increases in vehicle emissions and a greater potential to transport seeds from non-native species onto BMGR East. Therefore, excavating and stockpiling sand and gravel resources within BMGR East is the environmentally preferred alternative.

DECISION

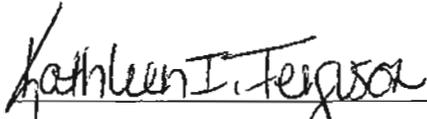
After consideration of the potential environmental consequences of the proposed action and alternatives as analyzed in the EIS, input from agencies and the public, and other factors relative to national defense, including current military operational needs, it is our decision to proceed with the proposed actions to:

- Develop a sensor training area in the San Cristobal Valley underlying the air-to-air range airspace (Proposal 1).
- Develop a new target for live air-to-ground missiles within East TAC (Proposal 4).
- Convert a portion of Manned Range 3 into a helicopter gunnery range (Proposal 6).
- Construct a new taxiway parallel to and west of the existing runway and a new air traffic control tower approximately 3,100 feet north of the Runway 35 threshold and 1,600 feet west of the Runway 17/35 centerline at Gila Bend AFAF (Proposal 8).

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- Pave approximately 7 miles of the existing graded road from the main tower within Manned Range 1 to the water well and adjacent RMCP 1 located near the boundary of the North and South TAC ranges to the west of Manned Range 1 (Proposal 9).
- Excavate, stockpile, and use sand and gravel resources within BMGR East (Proposal 10).

While no decision has been made for Proposals 2, 3, 5, and 7 at this time, the Air Force anticipates issuing one or more RODs for these independent proposals at a future date.



KATHLEEN I. FERGUSON, P.E.
Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Air Force
(Installations)



Date