



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION IX
75 Hawthorne Street
San Francisco, CA 94105

May 22, 2008

Ms. Sheryl Parker
HQ ACC/A7PP
129 Andrews Street
Suite 122
Langley AFB, VA. 23665-2769

Subject: Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) F-35 Force Development
Evaluation and Weapons School Beddown (CEQ# 20080122)

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has reviewed the above-referenced document pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508), and our NEPA review authority under Section 309 of the Clean Air Act. Our comments are provided in accordance with the EPA-specific extension to the comment deadline date from May 19, 2008 to May 22, 2008, granted by Michael Estrada, Public Affairs Office, Nellis Air Force Base on May 7, 2008.

We have rated the DEIS as Environmental Concerns – Insufficient Information (EC-2) (see enclosed "*Summary of Rating Definitions*") due to our concerns with the direct and cumulative increase in noise that would disproportionately affect minority and low-income populations in the vicinity of Nellis Air Force Base (Nellis AFB).

We appreciate the opportunity to review this DEIS. When the FEIS is released for public review, please send one hard copy and one CD ROM to the address above (mail code: CED-2). If you have any questions, please contact me at (415) 972-3846 or Laura Fujii, the lead reviewer for this project. Laura can be reached at (415) 972-3852 or fujii.laura@epa.gov.

Sincerely,
/s/ by Connell Dunning for

Nova Blazej, Manager
Environmental Review Office

Enclosure:
Summary of EPA Rating Definitions
Detailed Comments

cc: Honorable Michael L. Montandon, Mayor, City of North Las Vegas
Mr. Mark Morse, BLM-Las Vegas Field Office

Mitigation of Noise Effects

Provide additional specific commitments to mitigate adverse noise effects. The beddown of 36 F-35 fighter aircraft at Nellis Air Force Base (Nellis AFB) would expose an additional 13,917 persons and 11 more sensitive receptors, including 7 more schools, to noise levels of 65 Day-Night Average Sound Level (DNL) or greater (p. 2-45, p. 4.8-2). The Federal Interagency Committee on Urban Noise states that noise exposure greater than 65 DNL is considered generally unacceptable over public services or residential, cultural, recreational, and entertainment areas (p. 4.3-1). Further, this increase in noise would disproportionately affect minority and low-income populations, affecting 42% minority and 16% low-income populations of the total population in the vicinity of Nellis AFB (p. 4.8-1).

The Air Force commits to continued use of existing noise abatement procedures which include operational measures and continued coordination with Clark County on land use planning (p. 3.3-8). The DEIS acknowledges that there would be a noticeable increase in noise complaints and levels of annoyance from residents adjacent to the base (p. 4.3-3). EPA is concerned with the increased noise levels over residential areas, sensitive receptors, and disproportionate effects on environmental justice communities. Our concern is heightened given the cumulative effects of the doubling of historical noise effects caused by the 2002 to 2008 beddown of 17 F-22 Raptor aircraft at Nellis AFB (1999 DEIS F-22 Aircraft Force Development Evaluation and Weapons School Beddown).

Recommendation:

We recommend the FEIS include a list of additional specific commitments to mitigate the adverse noise effects of the F-35 beddown and the cumulative impacts of the F-35 beddown in combination with the F-22 beddown. Mitigation options include additional public involvement in noise abatement decisions, education programs on noise attenuation measures, assessments of the adequacy of existing sound proofing, and funding and technical assistance to sensitive receptors and communities to reduce the adverse noise levels.

Provide a public outreach and education program to inform recreation visitors about noise effects. In addition to the increase in subsonic noise, there would be an increase of sonic booms by 2 to 4 per month within the Desert Military Operations Area (MOA)/Elgin airspace and Desert MOA/Coyote airspace. The average number of sonic booms per month in these MOAs is 35 and 12 sonic booms, respectively, under a 350,000 sortie-operations scenario (p. 4.6-6). The Key Pittman Wildlife Management Area, White River Petroglyphs, Beaver Dam State Park, and Ella Mountain recreation areas are under these MOAs (Figure 3.6-6, p. 3.6-20). Recreation visitors would be exposed to these sonic booms which may be perceived as annoying in a wilderness setting.

Recommendation:

Given the increased number of sonic booms and the significant increase in population in Clark and Lincoln Counties (p. 5-5), we recommend the Air Force and Nevada Test and Training Range (NTTR) implement a public outreach and educational program about aircraft operations and their associated noise effects. For instance, we recommend working with the appropriate land use managers to develop interpretive signs for the affected recreation areas that explain aircraft operations and associated noise effects and sonic booms.

Pollution Prevention

Salvage, recycle, and reuse demolition waste. Use materials with recycled content. The F-35 beddown would require construction of new facilities, and alteration and demolition of existing facilities (p. 2-31).

Recommendation:

Maximize resource conservation and pollution prevention in accordance with Executive Order 13148 Greening the Government Through Leadership in Environmental Management. We recommend the project design include the salvage, recycling, and reuse of the demolition waste. We also recommend new construction maximize the use of materials with recycled content. Useful tools and resources may be found at <http://www.epa.gov/industrialmaterials/> and in EPA's March 2008 Industrial Materials Recycling: Tools and Resources Guide which can be obtained from EPA's Industrial Materials Recycling Program, U.S. EPA's Office of Solid Waste (MC 5306P), Washington, DC, 20460.