

**Finding of No Significant Impact
Modification of Airspace Units R-3008A/B/C from
Visual Flight Rules (VFR) to VFR-Instrument Flight Rules (IFR)**

Moody Air Force Base, Georgia

Pursuant to provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), 42 U.S.C. 4321 to 4270d, implementing Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) Regulations, 40 C.F.R. 1500-1508, and 32 C.F.R. Part 989, Environmental Impact Analysis Process, the U.S. Air Force (Air Force) assessed the potential environmental consequences associated with the change in the weather operations category of airspace units R-3008 A/B/C at Grand Bay Range, Moody Air Force Base (AFB), Georgia, from visual flight rules (VFR) to VFR-instrument flight rules (VFR-IFR). This action would minimize the number of training hours lost by allowing full utilization of Grand Bay Range during periods of IFR operations. The Environmental Assessment (EA) for the VFR-IFR change is hereby incorporated by reference in this decision document.

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to reduce the number of aircraft training hours lost for all Moody AFB aircraft types on Grand Bay Range due to IFR weather condition requirements. The Proposed Action is needed because training hours are limited due to weather less than VFR conditions. In 2014, the R-3008 airspace was scheduled for 3,591 flying hours, and the airspace was closed due to weather for approximately 260 hours. The Proposed Action would result in the ability to more fully utilize the existing airspace to conduct operations that were previously authorized in the 2012 *Moody AFB Expansion of Sortie-Operations Environmental Assessment* by simply allowing operations during inclement weather that would otherwise be cancelled. While the Proposed Action would allow approximately 250 more hours of flight availability than under current conditions (which equates to approximately 12.5 percent more flight hours and 505 annual sorties), this additional availability would still remain under previously assessed and approved levels of flight activity (U.S. Air Force, 2012). The Proposed Action is needed to minimize lost training opportunities for existing Moody-based weapons systems, minimize range scheduling issues, and allow full utilization of the range within the operational hours published.

Range operations are currently restricted to VFR operations as a result of the final 1986 Moody AFB Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that established the range and restricted airspace. Since 1986 there have been significant improvements in aircraft navigational and weapons delivery systems. Safety in employing current systems has also greatly increased since the mid-1980s. Also, Moody AFB's current air traffic control radar system is among the newest in the Air Force's inventory, with Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)-fed backup capability that enhances aircraft safety on range. Consequently, Grand Bay Range can now safely support operations regardless of VFR or IFR conditions. Local procedures also ensure safety of aircraft operating on the range.

The hours for range operations would not change under this Proposed Action. Additionally, under the Proposed Action there would be no change in current flight patterns, aircraft utilized, types of training, or distribution of day/night operations.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION (EA Section 2.2)

The Proposed Action is to identify a method for reducing the number of Moody AFB aircraft training hours lost on Grand Bay Range due to VFR weather condition requirements (1,500-foot ceiling and 3-mile visibility in accordance with 14 C.F.R. 91.155 [Basic VFR Weather Minimums]). As stated previously, the Proposed Action does not involve changes in current range operating hours, flight patterns, aircraft utilized, types of training, or distribution of day/night operations.

NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE (EA Section 2.6)

The No Action Alternative would continue to restrict flight operations on the range and in R-3008 A/B/C under VFR conditions and, therefore, would result in the continued loss of training opportunities.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS (EA Chapter 4)

The following resource areas are addressed in detail in the EA, Sections 4.1 through 4.6, respectively: airspace, noise, safety, air quality, cultural resources, and biological resources. No significant impacts to any of these resources have been identified. Additionally, no significant adverse cumulative impacts would result from activities associated with the Proposed Action when considered with past, present, or reasonably foreseeable future projects at Moody AFB.

On June 11, 2015, Moody AFB completed National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 consultation with the Georgia State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) for potential impacts to cultural resources. The SHPO concurred on a finding of no adverse effect to cultural resources. Moody AFB also provided notification of and request for input on the Proposed Action to 13 Native American tribes; none of the tribes identified any concerns associated with the Proposed Action. On June 30, 2015, Moody AFB completed Endangered Species Act Section 7 consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regarding listed species, which concurred on a "No Effect" determination for listed species.

PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

The Preferred Alternative is to implement the Proposed Action.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Based on my review of the facts and analyses contained in the attached EA, which is hereby incorporated by reference, conducted under the provisions of NEPA, CEQ Regulations, and 32 C.F.R. Part 989, I conclude that implementation of the Preferred Alternative (Proposed Action) cumulatively with other projects at Moody AFB will not result in significant environmental impacts. Accordingly, an EIS is not required. The signing of this Finding of No Significant Impact completes the environmental impact analysis process.

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Date 30 Sep 15 _____

JENNIFER L. KILBOURN, Colonel, USAF
Chief, Civil Engineer Division (ACC/A4C)