

**Finding of No Significant Impact
Environmental Assessment for Development of Additional HLZs and DZs
Moody Air Force Base, Georgia**

Pursuant to provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), 42 United States Code (USC) 4321 to 4270d, implementing Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) Regulations, 40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 1500-1508, and 32 CFR Part 989, Environmental Impact Analysis Process, the U.S. Air Force (Air Force) assessed the potential environmental consequences associated with the establishment of three proposed off-base helicopter landing zones (HLZs) and two drop zones (DZs) located on private parcels in Atkinson, Echols, and Clinch counties in Georgia, and Columbia County, Florida. The action would support the 347th Rescue Group's (347 RQG) personnel recovery (PR) training. Activities would involve helicopter landings, ground troop training, and flyovers by helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft. The proposed land areas for the HLZs and DZs are privately owned and would be utilized by the Air Force under lease agreements with the respective owners.

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to provide the 347 RQG with additional HLZ/DZ options to allow for more realistic training and to alleviate scheduling conflicts with A-10 operations, which often utilize the same airspace over the current primary HLZs/DZs. The Proposed Action is needed to address lack of space in current HLZ/DZ training areas, which lends itself to lost training proficiency and currency, as well as increased man hour costs.

The Environmental Assessment (EA), incorporated by reference into this finding, analyzes the potential environmental consequences of activities associated with establishment of the new HLZs and DZs, and provides environmental protection measures to avoid or reduce adverse environmental impacts. The EA considers all potential impacts of the Proposed Action and the No Action Alternative. The EA also considers cumulative environmental impacts with other projects at Moody AFB.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

The Proposed Action is to lease five parcels of land for the development of HLZs and DZs near Moody Air Force Base. Two of the proposed parcels will be utilized as HLZs and DZs, with the remaining three smaller parcels used exclusively as HLZs. The Air Force intends to use these parcels primarily for daily HH-60 personnel recovery and aircrew training. The following table provides the details of each property. Each HLZ/DZ is privately owned and would be leased by the Air Force from the owner.

NAME	TYPE	COUNTY	SIZE (ACRES)	LOCATION (LATITUDE / LONGITUDE)	OWNER	CURRENT PRIMARY LAND USE
L2-A	HLZ	Columbia (FL)	1	82°31.363'W / 30°35.045'N	Langdale Properties	Undeveloped
L4-3	HLZ	Atkinson	1	82°58.483'W / 31°12.320'N	Langdale Properties	Undeveloped
HLZ 11	HLZ	Echols	1	82°51.917'W / 30°42.707'N	Westervelt Company	Undeveloped
L3-2 DZ	DZ	Clinch	83	82°53.077'W / 30°50.873'N	Langdale Properties	Undeveloped
75.8 DZ	DZ	Echols	76	82°52.193'W / 30°39.358'N	Westervelt Company	Undeveloped

The 347 RQG would utilize these HLZs and DZs for PR training activities, and routing to a particular HLZ or DZ is mission-dependent and variable from one mission to the next. Typical PR training missions include day-to-day training and more elaborate once-per-month training events.

Day-to-Day Training:

Day-to-day training involves typical flight training operations associated with tactical and remote training and fulfills the basic PR training requirements.

Helicopter (HH-60) Operations:

There would be two sorties per week, but there could be up to six sorties per week at specific HLZs/DZs based on existing weather and mission needs. There are two HH-60s per sortie; sometimes the craft would split up, each going to different HLZs/DZs to practice. Night operations make up about 50 percent of total sorties, with approximately 20 percent occurring after 10:00 PM. Training is not typically conducted after midnight because the Moody AFB tower closes at 1:00 AM, and the aircraft need time to return to base. There is typically no flying on weekends or holidays.

Occasional Training:

More than once a month, but less than daily, a large force exercise (LFE) training exercise would occur at a particular HLZ/DZ; the HLZs/DZs would be rotated each month for LFE operation. Typical operation involves a C-130 aircraft making contact with a simulated survivor at the HLZ/DZ, then dropping either personnel (via parachutes) or sandbags to the HLZ/DZ area; then HH-60(s) arrive, make contact with the simulated survivor, simulate firing on enemies and then extract all friendly forces. A-10 aircraft may also provide simulated close air support (CAS). The LFE training exercise would include two ground vehicles and approximately 10 personnel at each HLZ/DZ, utilization of training munitions (e.g., blanks and simulators), and towable or inflatable full-sized mockups of threats as well as portable low power radar emitters, infrared/ultraviolet (IR/UV) threat emitters, eye-safe laser spotting, and other visual threat representation equipment.

C-130 (Fixed-Wing Aircraft) Operations:

The C-130 is utilized to make drops of equipment and supplies and would occur as part of occasional LFE training exercises. Drops consist of either personnel airdrops (i.e., parachute jumps) or standard airdrop training bundles (i.e., sandbags of about 5–15 pounds).

NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

Under the No-Action Alternative, the Air Force would not enter into agreements with the property owners to lease the proposed parcels. The Air Force would continue to experience scheduling conflicts and lack of space in current HLZ/DZ areas. Training proficiency and currency would continue to be lost, increasing man hour costs over time. As a result, the No Action Alternative would not meet the purpose and need of the Proposed Action.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The Air Force has concluded that no significant adverse effects would result to the following resources as a result of the Proposed Action: air quality, greenhouse gases, biological resources, cultural resources, geology and earth resources, land use and coastal zone resources, noise, public health and safety, transportation, and water resources. 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. In addition, the EA concluded that the Proposed Action would not affect environmental justice, socioeconomics, public services and utilities, and recreation opportunities.

Under the Proposed Action there would be no ground disturbance or construction activities; only aircraft operations and noninvasive ground training. As part of Proposed Action implementation, the Air Force would implement the special considerations identified in Section 2.1 of the EA, which would serve to minimize potential impacts. Such considerations include the avoidance of water bodies and wetlands, landowner/resident coordination and notification, use of HLZs/DZs outside growing season, and restrictions on conducting of air drops and use of munitions at certain HLZs/DZs to minimize safety and noise impacts. The main impact driver for most resource areas is noise resulting from aircraft operations and munitions use. Special considerations identified in Section 2.1 as part of the Proposed Action would minimize noise impacts to an insignificant level and therefore minimize impacts to land use, socioeconomics, and biological resources. Based on the scope of the Proposed Action and accounting for the special considerations identified in Section 2.1, issues with minimal or no impacts were identified through a preliminary screening process. The following issues were not carried forward for detailed analyses in the EA: Surface Waters and Water Quality, Hazardous Materials/Waste, Cultural Resources (the Air Force conducted a consultation with the Georgia State Historic Preservation Officer), Earth Resources, Utilities, and Airspace. The rationale for dismissal of these resource areas is provided in Section 1.5.1 of the EA.

Noise – Noise is the largest impact driver associated with the Proposed Action. Overall, HLZ/DZ training noise associated with proposed HLZ/DZ training would be expected to be annoying to certain nearby residents. However, no impacts other than annoyance would be expected to occur, and nearby residences would be notified prior to scheduling LFE training activities. No large quantities of land would experience noise greater than 65 dB DNL, nor would any residences be exposed to greater than 75 dB DNL or be at risk of damage to hearing and no significant noise impacts have been identified.

Air Quality – Air pollutant emissions including CO, NO_x, PM₁₀, PM_{2.5}, SO₂, VOC, and CO₂ would be associated with HH-60, C-130, and A-10 aircraft operations. Emissions from C-130 and A-10 aircraft would be limited to the L3-2 DZ and 75.8 Acre DZ. Occasional training for LFEs would include two ground vehicles and the use of munitions by ground forces. The ground vehicles would travel between Moody AFB and the HLZs/DZs. None of estimated annual net emissions associated with this action are above the insignificance indicators, indicating no significant impact to air quality. Therefore, the action will not cause or contribute to an exceedance on one or more National Ambient Air Quality Standards.

Water Resources – Potential impacts to water resources are based on water availability, water quality, and use. No surface waters are present at the properties, however waterways and wetlands can be found nearby the HLZs/DZs. Personnel and vehicles would avoid any adjacent wetlands or waterways during proposed training activities. As a result, the Air Force has not identified any potential for direct or indirect impacts to water resources resulting from the Proposed Action. Potential impacts related to flood hazards can be significant if such actions are proposed in areas with high probabilities of flooding; however, impacts can be mitigated through the use of design features to minimize the effects of flooding. Approximately half of the HLZ 11

and 75.8 Acre DZ sites are located within a designated 100-year floodplain. However, the proposed action does not require any ground modifications or surface construction, therefore no impacts to floodplains or hydrology are expected. An impact to wetlands would be significant if it reduced wetland function and/or required Section 404 Clean Water Act permitting. Wetlands are located within the DZ properties, however the wetlands are located in wooded areas and will be obvious to personnel who will be avoid them during training activities. Wetlands within the site do not appear to have a direct connection to other streams or wetlands, so they would likely be considered “isolated” and would not be subject to Section 404 permitting.

Safety and Occupational Health – There are inherent safety risks associated with air drop operations, the use of pyrotechnics, and risk of mid-air collisions. These procedures include prohibition on the use of pyrotechnics during high-risk fire days (i.e., extremely dry conditions or in days with high winds) and establishing and maintaining positive two-way communication between pilots and personnel on the ground prior to any air drops.

Biological/Natural Resources – Wildlife could be startled by aircraft operations and overflights, and by training munitions. Startle effects would in most cases be expected to be temporary, and individuals would resume normal behaviors after completion of training events. Wildlife would likely habituate to noise to at least some degree. Wood stork and bald eagle nesting locations would be avoided. Impacts to vegetation on the HLZs/DZs would be minimal since there would be no ground disturbance or construction activities. The Air Force conducted an Endangered Species Act consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which concurred on a finding of “not likely to adversely affect” sensitive species.

Socioeconomic Resources/Environmental Justice – Noise and loss of productivity on the proposed lands are the main drivers associated with socioeconomic and environmental justice impacts. No significant noise or land use impacts have been identified. As a result, there would be no significant adverse impacts to socioeconomic resources or disproportionate impacts to environmental justice areas of concern under the Proposed Action.

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, conducted under the provisions of NEPA, CEQ Regulations, and 32 CFR Part 989, I conclude that the Preferred Alternative (the Proposed Action) cumulatively with other projects at Moody AFB would not result in significant environmental impacts. Accordingly, an Environmental Impact Statement is not required. The signing of this Finding of No Significant Impact completes the environmental impact analysis process.

Date _____

RUSSELL P. COOK, Colonel,
USAF Commander, 23d Wing