

*RECORD OF DECISION  
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT  
KC-46A MAIN OPERATING BASE #6 BEDDOWN AT  
MACDILL AFB, FLORIDA OR FAIRCHILD AFB, WASHINGTON*

**INTRODUCTION**

The Department of the Air Force (DAF) is issuing this Record of Decision (ROD) for the “*Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), KC-46A Main Operating Base #6 (MOB 6) Beddown*” (“KC-46A MOB 6 EIS”), analyzing the alternatives of MacDill Air Force Base (AFB), Florida or Fairchild AFB, Washington (*88 Federal Register [FR] 82350, EIS No. 20230162; November 17, 2023*). The DAF considered the information, analyses, and public comments contained in the Final EIS (FEIS), along with other relevant matters.

The DAF is issuing this ROD per the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) at Title 40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) § 1505.2 *Record of decision in cases requiring environmental impact statements*, as amended.

This ROD documents:

- The DAF’s decision;
- The alternatives considered;
- The environmentally preferable alternative;
- Relevant factors considered among the alternatives and how those factors entered into the decision;
- A Finding of No Practicable Alternative (FONPA)
- Whether the DAF adopts all practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental harm from the selected alternative, and if not, why not; and
- Adoption of a Mitigation Plan and a summary of applicable mitigations.

**DECISION SYNOPSIS**

The DAF has decided to replace the current KC-135 aircraft at MacDill AFB, FL with the KC-46A. The KC-46A MOB 6 beddown will include construction, demolition, and renovation of various facilities on MacDill AFB as shown in Figure 2-1 (*FEIS, Vol 1, Section 2.3.1.2*). KC-46A aircraft operating out of MacDill AFB will continue aerial refueling operations within existing airspace and training areas currently or previously used by tanker and cargo aircraft (*FEIS, Vol 1, Section 3.1*). Additionally, the KC-46A MOB 6 beddown at MacDill AFB will result in a net increase in population of approximately 283 persons, to include personnel and dependents (*FEIS, Vol 1, Section 2.3.1.3*).

**BACKGROUND**

The EIS was prepared to support DAF’s program to replace the older KC-135 and KC-10 tanker aircraft with the newer KC-46A tanker aircraft. The KC-46A MOB 6 beddown will establish the MOB 6 mission to include new and renovated infrastructure, increased numbers of support and

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operations personnel, and changes in number of aerial refueling operations. The Strategic Basing Process guides the identification and selection of locations to beddown DAF missions so that they are optimally aligned within the DAF's existing mission and organizational structure. Through the Strategic Basing Process, the DAF identified two alternative KC-46A MOB 6 beddown locations: MacDill AFB, Florida and Fairchild AFB, Washington. The Final KC-46A MOB 6 EIS (*Vol. I, § 2.1, Pages 2-1 through 2-3*) also describes the common elements that the KC-46A MOB 6 beddown would bring to each base, including personnel and airfield operations.

## **ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED**

As more fully described in the Final KC-46A MOB 6 EIS (*Vol. I, § 2.2, Pages 2-3 through 2-5*), the alternatives considered are as follows:

**Alternative 1 (MacDill AFB, Florida)** (*Vol. I, § 2.3.1, Pages 2-1 through 2-11*) The MOB 6 proposed beddown location would include approximately 229,376 square feet of renovation projects, 25,454 square feet of new construction projects, and 1,552,420 square feet of facility and airfield improvement projects. The MOB 6 mission at MacDill AFB would use the same flight tracks, fuel jettison areas, and aerial refueling tracks as were used by the KC-135 mission (*Vol. I, Pages 2-11 through 2-12*).

**Alternative 2 (Fairchild AFB, Washington).** (*Vol. I, § 2.3.2, Pages 2-12 through 2-15*). The MOB 6 proposed beddown location would include approximately 652,671 square feet of renovation projects, 315,047 square feet of new construction projects, and 2,112,216 square feet of facility and airfield improvement projects. The MOB 6 mission at Fairchild AFB would use the existing KC-135 flight tracks, fuel jettison areas, and aerial refueling tracks (*Vol. I, Pages 2-17*).

**No Action Alternative.** (*Vol. I, Pages 2-17 and 2-18*). The EIS analyzed the No Action Alternative for Alternatives 1 and 2 providing a baseline for comparing the potential environmental effects of the action alternatives. The No Action Alternative would not beddown the KC-46A at either MacDill AFB or Fairchild AFB and the existing aerial refueling mission would continue at both bases at their current levels. Baseline conditions, described as the affected environment in the Final KC-46A MOB 6 EIS (*Vol. I, Chapter 3*) for each resource area per installation alternative, would continue under the No Action Alternative.

## **ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERABLE ALTERNATIVES**

The DAF considers the MacDill AFB Alternative to be environmentally preferred for noise, land use, and environmental justice and other sensitive receptors. For socioeconomic resources, the EIS identifies beneficial socioeconomic impacts for both the MacDill AFB and Fairchild AFB alternatives.

For biological resources, cultural resources, soils and geology, water resources, infrastructure and transportation, hazardous materials and wastes, health and safety, and air quality, the No Action Alternative is environmentally preferred due to potential long-term impacts from modification of historic structures, potential impacts associated with construction including

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ground disturbance and an increase in impervious surfaces, increased emissions and production of hazardous materials and wastes during operation, and increased potential for bird/wildlife aircraft strikes expected from the MacDill AFB and Fairchild AFB alternatives. Therefore, in consideration of all potential environmental consequences of the Proposed Action and alternatives, the No Action Alternative is the overall environmentally preferred alternative.

**BASIS OF DECISION**

The DAF selects MacDill AFB for the KC-46A MOB 6 beddown based on operational analysis; results of site surveys; environmental, economic, and technical factors; environmental impacts as analyzed in the Final KC-46A MOB 6 EIS; input from the public and government agencies; and military judgment factors. Specifically, relevant factors considered in this decision include mission criteria, capacity criteria, environmental criteria, cost factors, military plans and guidance, global and regional coverage, combatant commander support, total force, beddown timing, force structure, training requirements and efficiencies, logistic supportability, and resources and budgeting. MacDill AFB meets all operational mission requirements, constitutes the most fiscally responsible decision amongst the candidate bases with regards to manpower and military construction costs, and best supports the DAF's tanker recapitalization strategy. This decision is in support of the Secretary of the Air Force's preferred strategic basing alternative of MacDill AFB for MOB 6, as announced through the DAF's Strategic Basing Process (Air Force Instruction 10-503, *Strategic Basing*).

In addition to the analyses, and as required by the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021, the DAF also considered military family readiness factors. As applicable to the subject basing action, Section 2883 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021 requires the Secretary of the Air Force in determining whether to proceed with the action to take into account, among other factors as the Secretary considers appropriate, the following three military family readiness considerations: housing, health care, and interstate portability of licensure and certification credentials. This ROD documents that the Secretary of the Air Force considered the following:

- **Housing.** As documented in the Final KC-46A MOB 6 EIS (*Vol. I, Page 3-37*), the DAF considered the extent to which DAF and private sector resources are available. The DAF continues to analyze and plan for the long-term regarding the adequate mix of such housing to support the expected population.
- **Health Care.** The DAF determined (*Final EIS KC-46A MOB 6 EIS, Vol I, Pages 3-76 through 3-77*) that existing health care resources were adequate to support the expected population and is conducting analysis and planning to ensure sufficient medical care from DAF and private sector resources are available.
- **Interstate Portability of Licensure and Certification Credentials.** Using the Support of Military Families analytic framework, the results of which are publicly available at <https://www.af.mil/> in the About Us section under State Licensure Portability, the DAF

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determined that Florida statutes do not contain barriers to licensure and certification portability.

### **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

Public involvement was integral to the DAF's development of the EIS. The DAF considered public and agency comments, including those received during scoping and during the Draft EIS public comment period, which included public hearings.

Public notices and meetings were accomplished as follows:

- **Notice of Intent:** Federal Register on April 14, 2022 (*Vol. 87, No. 72, Page 22195*) and local newspapers near MacDill AFB and near Fairchild AFB on the first possible publication date on or after the Federal Register publication, including April 17, 20, and 21, 2022, then again halfway through the scoping period, including May 4, and 5, 2022.
- **Scoping Period:** Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the DAF conducted public scoping remotely via the project website. Remote public scoping was conducted in accordance with the 2020 version of 40 Code of Federal Regulations Part 1506.6. The initial scoping period began on April 14, 2022, and ended on May 16, 2022. The scoping period was extended an additional 30 days, which ended on June 30, 2022 because scoping materials were made available at an alternate library location, but the location was not specified in the original newspaper advertisements. Additional notices regarding the alternate library location were published in local newspapers near Fairchild AFB on May 29, June 2, and June 9, 2022.
- **Draft EIS Notice of Availability:** Federal Register on February 10, 2023 (*Vol. 88, No. 28, Page 8843*) and local newspapers near MacDill AFB and near Fairchild AFB on the first possible publication date on or after the Federal Register publication, including February 10, 12, and 16, 2023.
- **Draft EIS Public Review and Comment Period:** The Draft EIS public review and comment period began with publication of the NOA and ended on March 27, 2023. The Draft EIS was made available at public libraries and on the project website for review. The DAF also held virtual public hearings via the Webex platform for the MacDill AFB and Fairchild AFB communities on March 7, and 9, 2023, respectively.
- **Final EIS Notice of Availability:** Federal Register on November 17, 2023 (*Vol. 88, No. 225, Page 82350*) and local newspapers near MacDill AFB and near Fairchild AFB on the first possible publication date on or after the Federal Register publication, including November 24, 26, and 30, 2023. The NOA publication initiated the mandatory 30-day waiting period prior to ROD signature.

### **COORDINATION AND CONSULTATION**

As described more completely in the Final KC-46A MOB 6 EIS (*Vol. I, Pages 1-9, and Vol. II, Appendix A*), the DAF coordinated and consulted with federal and state agencies and federally

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recognized tribes (tribes) throughout the EIS process. The coordination and consultation conducted for the MacDill AFB alternative is described below.

Government-to-Government Consultation

Following standard DAF practice, formal government-to-government consultation was initiated by installation wing commanders or tribal liaison officers as designated representatives per DAF Instruction 90-2002, *Interactions with Federally Recognized Tribes*. Throughout the EIS process, additional direct communication efforts (telephone calls and emails) were extended to tribes that did not respond initially to official project consultation invitations from the installation wing commander or installation tribal liaison officer. All communications with tribes were completed in accordance with Department of Defense (DoD) Instruction 4710.02, *DoD Interactions with Federally Recognized Tribes*; and 36 CFR Part 800, *Protection of Historic Properties*.

In accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), U.S. Department of Defense Instruction 4710.02, and Air Force Instruction 90-2002, the DAF notified all potentially affected tribes, via mail, of the DAF's intent to prepare the EIS and invited the tribes to participate in government-to-government consultation under Section 106. Final documents and correspondence for the Government-to-Government consultation effort at MacDill AFB are provided in the Final KC-46A MOB 6 EIS (*Vol. II, Appendix A-2*).

Agency Coordination and Consultation

The DAF coordinated and consulted with federal and state agencies responsible for relevant resources early in the project planning process by mailing notification letters during the scoping period (*Final KC-46A MOB 6 EIS, Vol. I, § 1.4.1, Pages 1-6 through 1-8, and Vol. II, Appendix A-1*).

*National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) Section 106 Consultation with State Historic Preservation Officer*

NHPA Section 106 consultation was conducted with the Florida State Historic Preservation Officer and completed on June 22, 2023 with the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement between the DAF and Florida State Historic Preservation Officer. Final documents and correspondence for the NHPA Section 106 consultation effort at MacDill AFB are provided in the Final KC-46A MOB 6 EIS (*Vol. II, Appendix A-3*).

*Endangered Species Act (ESA) Section 7 Consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service*

In compliance with Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA), the DAF conducted formal consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Florida Ecological Services Office regarding effects on federally listed threatened and endangered species (*Final KC-46A MOB 6 EIS, Vol. I, § 3.3.2.2.2, Pages 3-27 through 3-29*). Consultation was concluded with issuance of a Biological Opinion by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on April 26, 2023.

*Coastal Zone Management Act Consistency Determination*

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The DAF prepared a Federal Consistency Determination (*Final KC-46A MOB 6 EIS Vol. II, Appendix A-5.1*) and provided it to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection for their review concurrent with the Draft EIS public review period. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection concurred on April 19, 2023 that the proposed MOB 6 beddown at MacDill AFB is consistent with the Florida Coastal Management Program.

*Federal Aviation Administration*

During the public comment period, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), with whom the DAF had previously been engaged during the scoping period, requested to be a participating agency for the KC-46A MOB 6 Beddown NEPA process (*Final KC-46A MOB 6 EIS, Vol. I. § 1.4.1.2, Page 1-9*). The DAF accepted this request.

**MITIGATION**

Mitigation measures specific to the implementation of the MacDill AFB alternative are identified in the Final KC-46A MOB 6 EIS (*Vol. I. § 2.5, Pages 2-23 through 2-24*) and will be put in place to avoid, rectify, minimize, or compensate for potential impacts on specific resource areas.

To track mitigations, the DAF AMC will develop a Mitigation Plan within 90 days of the signature of this ROD that identifies principal and subordinate organizations with responsibility for oversight and execution of specific mitigations considerate of the human and natural environment and climate change. DAF will not implement an impact-inducing action related to the KC-46A MOB 6 beddown before the applicable mitigation measures described in this ROD are funded and put in place.

The Mitigation Plan will:

- Identify specific actions;
- Identify the organization responsible for each action; and
- Present the timing of each action.

The DAF will implement the following critical mitigation measures to avoid, minimize, or compensate for effects on the ambient sound environment, biological resources, and cultural resources. No installation-specific mitigation measures were identified for socioeconomics, soils and geology, water resources, infrastructure and transportation, land use, hazardous materials and waste, health and safety, air quality, and environmental justice and other sensitive receptors.

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Resource	Measures to Reduce Adverse Environmental Impacts
Noise	<p>To reduce the effects of noise, MacDill AFB limits transient aircraft to one approach and a full stop landing between the hours of 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. Fighter aircraft are restricted to straight-in/full-stop approaches/landings after 9 p.m. Additionally, the installation controls and schedules missions to keep noise levels low, especially at night. Flight patterns specific to MacDill AFB have resulted from the following considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Takeoff patterns routed to avoid noise-sensitive areas as much as possible</li> <li>• Arrivals and departures routed to avoid restricted airspace</li> <li>• Criteria developed to govern the speed, rate of climb, and turning radius for each type of aircraft</li> <li>• Efforts made to control and schedule missions to keep noise levels low, especially at night</li> <li>• Coordination conducted with the FAA to minimize conflict with civil aircraft operations.</li> </ul>
Biological Resources	<p>To protect special status birds, when feasible, construction activities, particularly any tree-clearing activities, will not occur during nesting season, which generally runs April 1 through August 31. If tree clearing activities cannot avoid nesting season, pre-construction surveys could be conducted to identify and avoid any active nests. Additionally, construction personnel will be trained to identify, avoid, and report active nests.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To minimize the introduction and spread of non-native and invasive species, all construction equipment will be inspected and cleaned to remove seeds, plants, and soil upon entering and exiting construction areas or the installation. All construction materials and any fill will also be inspected to ensure it is as free of seeds, plants, or undesirable soil as practicable. Additionally, where appropriate, disturbed areas will be revegetated with native plant species.</li> </ul> <p>In consideration of the KC-46 MOB 6 Biological Opinion conservation recommendations, the installation would also implement the following to the extent practicable:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remove or minimize food sources on the airfield; prohibit planting or re-seeding with plants that attract wildlife; encourage landscape designs that minimizes features that attract or sustain wildlife around the airfield.</li> <li>• Continue to support the installation BASH program including DNA analysis of snarge and analysis of BASH data to determine potential trends that could be associated with wildlife conflicts.</li> <li>• Continue to support implementation of new projects that increase living shoreline, wetland creation, and mangrove and saltern restoration projects to improve habitat.</li> </ul>

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Resource	Measures to Reduce Adverse Environmental Impacts
Cultural Resources	MacDill AFB has developed and will follow the MOA with the Florida SHPO regarding renovations to Hangars 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. To minimize adverse effects, the additions will be designed to mimic the roofline and general historic appearance of the hangars. The exterior finishes will however be differentiated from the historic finishes to be consistent with Standard 9 of the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings, such as different types of concrete wainscoting and corrugated metal wall panels. In addition, MacDill AFB will send three-dimensional renderings for each hangar and current photographs of the hangars to the SHPO per their request.

1

2 **FONPA**

3 As explained in the Final KC-46A MOB 6 EIS (*Vol. I, Pages 3-47 and 3-48*), approximately 93  
4 percent of the land area at MacDill AFB is located within the 100-year floodplain, including the  
5 areas around the flight line where several of the existing facilities and infrastructure that would  
6 support the MOB 6 mission are located. Several of the existing facilities would be modified to  
7 support the incoming replacement tanker mission; however, the existing facilities would not be  
8 sufficient to support the MOB 6 beddown on their own, and new construction would be required.  
9 To provide for collocation and consolidation of mission requirements, new facilities supporting  
10 the MOB 6 mission must be constructed and operated along the flightline in close proximity to  
11 the existing facilities and infrastructure required for the Proposed Action; therefore, there is no  
12 practicable alternative to development within the floodplain from construction in support of the  
13 KC-46A MOB 6 beddown at MacDill AFB. Construction of all facilities will be in the 100-year  
14 floodplain. As described in the Final KC-46A MOB 6 EIS (*Vol. I, § 2.3.1.2, Pages 2-6*) the new  
15 facilities would be constructed and operated in accordance with the Executive Order 11988,  
16 *Floodplain Management*, and MacDill AFB would continue to implement ongoing actions that  
17 occur at the installation to promote climate resiliency and avoid flooding impacts on facilities  
18 and infrastructure. MacDill AFB would also continue to implement installation-wide projects to  
19 combat impacts from climate change and severe weather and prevent further exacerbation of  
20 climate change impacts. These specific ongoing actions that would continue to be implemented  
21 to avoid or minimize effects on the floodplain at MacDill AFB are identified and analyzed in the  
22 Final KC-46A MOB 6 EIS (*Vol. I, § 2.6, Pages 2-26 through 2-29; and Vol. I, § 3.3.6.2.2,*  
23 *Pages 3-47 through 3-48, respectively*), and long-term, minor, adverse impacts on the  
24 surrounding floodplain at MacDill AFB would be expected.

25 **DECISION**

26 After considering the potential environmental consequences of the Proposed Action and  
27 alternatives, comments and concerns of the public and other key stakeholders, as well as other  
28 factors related to national defense, including current military operational needs and costs, the



