INTRODUCTION

The Department of the Air Force (DAF) will expand the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) Pilot Training Center (PTC) mission at Ebbing Air National Guard (ANG) Base, Arkansas. The DAF bases this decision in part on the evaluations presented in the *Expansion of the Foreign Military Sales F-35 Pilot Training Center at Ebbing Air National Guard Base, Arkansas Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement* (SEIS) (Federal Register Vol 91, No. 74, April 17, 2026: page 20653, Environmental Impact Statement [EIS] No. 1750846563). The DAF developed the Final SEIS (FSEIS) considering the information, analyses, and comments received from the public and other stakeholders, along with other relevant matters.

The DAF is the Lead Agency and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) served as a Cooperating Agency pursuant to 42 United States Code (USC) 4336a(a)(3) for the development of the SEIS and coordination of this Record of Decision (ROD). The DAF is issuing this ROD per the *Department of Defense National Environmental Policy Act Implementing Procedures*, Part 4.1(d).

This ROD documents:

- The DAF's decision
- The alternatives considered
- Relevant factors and how those factors entered into the decision
- Mitigations

The alternative selected by the DAF involves the use of a civil airport, Fort Smith Regional Airport (FSRA)[1] and construction of infrastructure necessary to support the military aircraft basing and training activities at FSRA, where the FAA has jurisdiction by law and is the approval authority of proposed changes to Airport Layout Plans (ALP)[2]. The FAA's authority is based on its

[1] The official location identifying code (ID) for Fort Smith Regional Airport is FSM. However, to avoid confusion between the acronyms for the DAF Proposed Action, "FMS…" and the civil airport ID, FSRA is used throughout this ROD when referring to the civil airport.

[2] An ALP is a scaled, graphical presentation of the existing and future airport facilities and other pertinent information. The ALP serves as a record of present and future aeronautical requirements and is a blueprint for airport development by which the airport authority and FAA ensure all proposed development is consistent with local, state, and federal standards and requirements as well as airport and community land use plans. An up-to-date FAA-approved ALP is required for the airport authority to receive financial assistance from FAA.

responsibilities under the Airport and Airway Improvement Act of 1982 (49 USC § 47101) and Section 743 of the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 (Public Law 118-254). Thus, the FAA's federal action[3] is whether to approve changes to the City of Fort Smith's ALP when the City submits the updated ALP to the FAA depicting the DAF infrastructure projects subject to FAA review pursuant to 49 USC § 47107(a)(16) et seq., and Section 743 of the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024.

DECISION SYNOPSIS

The DAF will expand its FMS PTC mission at Ebbing ANG Base. The expansion of the mission includes beddown of an additional 12 F-35 Primary Aerospace Vehicle (PAA), revising training requirements, expanding the footprint of the PTC by constructing new infrastructure, renovating existing facilities, and increasing personnel as summarized under the Proposed Action below. The DAF has selected to expand the FMS PTC mission at Ebbing ANG Base to satisfy agreements with FMS nation customers while continuing to meet the DAF's overall purpose to continue the permanent FMS F-35 PTC mission for FMS F-35 pilot training. Additionally, the DAF has selected to construct a vertical landing pad (VLP) at the West VLP Site.

BACKGROUND

On March 11, 2023, the DAF signed a ROD for the *Beddown of a Foreign Military Sales (FMS) Pilot Training Center (PTC) at Ebbing Air National Guard Base, Arkansas or Selfridge Air National Guard Base, Michigan Final Environmental Impact Statement* (hereinafter referred to as the "2023 FMS PTC EIS") where Ebbing ANG Base was selected as the location to establish a permanent FMS F-35 PTC, which included up to 24 F-35s, relocation of 12 Republic of Singapore Air Force F-16s, and supporting infrastructure. Since the signing of the 2023 FMS PTC EIS ROD, new training requirements have emerged due to additional FMS purchases of F-35 aircraft, including operations that incorporate the F-35B's Short Takeoff and Vertical Landing (STOVL) capabilities. The SEIS addressed adding additional F-35 aircraft and incorporated new training

[3] Certain proposed changes to ALPs are major federal actions requiring FAA compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act. FAA's action is a separate but connected action, see FAA Order 1050.1G §6.1. As such, the FAA determination whether to approve a request for change(s) to the City of Fort Smith's ALP under 49 USC § 47101 is not the same as the DAF proposed actions under the authority of other laws. Also see 42 U.S.C. 4336(b) requiring evaluation in a single document when a proposed agency action requires action by more than one Federal agency.

requirements and operational procedures identified since completion of the 2023 FMS PTC EIS. The SEIS alternatives and associated analyses supplemented information in the 2023 FMS PTC EIS and ROD.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

Proposed Action (Preferred Alternative) (*FSEIS, Vol. 1, Pages 2-1 through 2-14, §2.1*). Under the Proposed Action, the DAF would beddown an additional 12 F-35 aircraft at Ebbing ANG Base. Annual airfield operations at the FSRA airfield, to include VLP maneuvers that support F-35B STOVL operations, would increase from 63,979 in the 2023 FMS PTC EIS to 69,661. The Proposed Action would utilize the same airspace analyzed in the 2023 FMS PTC EIS with annual airspace and Military Training Route (MTR) operations increasing by 13 percent (%) and 2%, respectively. However, annual nighttime operations would decrease by approximately 26%. Aircraft operating out of Ebbing ANG Base would utilize the Hog Military Operations Area (MOA); the Shirley MOA; a corridor between the Hog and Shirley MOAs called the "Pig Path"; MTRs consisting of Visual Routes (VRs), including VR-189, VR-1102, VR-1103, VR-1104, VR-1113, VR-1130, and VR-1182; and Instrument Routes (IRs) consisting of IR-117, IR-120, IR-121, and IR-164. FMS PTC aircraft training will occasionally occur in other Special Use Airspace, Air Traffic Control Assigned Airspace, and MTRs as discussed in the 2023 FMS PTC EIS.

Munition, flare, and chaff use would increase by 126,758, 4,000, and 8,000, respectively, as compared to the 2023 FMS PTC EIS (*FSEIS, Vol. 1, Pages 2-8 through 2-9, §2.1.1.3*). Munitions and countermeasure use would occur in Razorback Range (Restricted Area 2401/Restricted Area 2402 [R-2401/R-2402]) and live-fire training would be conducted during formal training exercises at Fort Johnson (formerly Fort Polk), Louisiana.

The Proposed Action would add 271 personnel and 325 dependents, for a total of an additional 596 persons (*FSEIS, Vol. 1, Pages 2-9 through 2-10; §2.1.2*).

Approximately 1.2 million square feet of facilities would be constructed or renovated (*FSEIS, Vol. 1, Pages 2-13 through 2-14, §2.1.3*). The SEIS evaluated two alternative locations to site the VLP: the West VLP Site Subalternative, which would construct the VLP and connecting taxiway along

the southwestern end of Runway 02/20, and the East VLP Site Subalternative, which would construct the VLP and connecting taxiway along the southeastern end of Runway 08/26.

Alternative 1 (*FSEIS, Vol. 1, Page 2-15, §2.3*). Under Alternative 1, the DAF would not beddown the additional 12 F-35 PAA, but FMS PTC operations would be modified for the existing 24 F-35 PAA to satisfy new requirements and refined operational procedures identified for F-35A and F-35B. The SEIS evaluated the same VLP site subalternatives as discussed under the Proposed Action to support F-35B STOVL operations and one VLP would be constructed within the FSRA airfield. The number of annual military operations at FSRA, airspace events, MTR events, nighttime operations and events, as well as use of munitions and countermeasures would not change from those included in the 2023 FMS PTC EIS. Personnel numbers would not change from the 2023 FMS PTC EIS ROD.

No Action Alternative (*FSEIS, Vol. 1, Page 2-15, §2.2*). Under the No Action Alternative, the DAF would not expand the FMS PTC mission at Ebbing ANG Base and the DAF would continue to implement the 2023 FMS PTC ROD, including the total number of aircraft, operations, personnel, and construction and renovation projects.

MITIGATION

Mitigations have been identified and those to be carried forward and implemented by the Air Education and Training Command are reflected below. The FSEIS identifies mitigations for effects identified or required by regulation or DAF guidance for each affected resource. Notwithstanding the mitigations prescribed in this ROD, the DAF has a continuing duty to review the FSEIS and consider new information relevant to environmental effects.

To track and coordinate implementation of the mitigation measures listed below the Air Education and Training Command proponent 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. The DAF will not implement an impact-inducing action related to the expansion of the FMS PTC before the applicable mitigation measure described in this ROD is funded and put in place.

The Mitigation Plan will:

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

The DAF will implement the following mitigations for effects on noise/land use, cultural resources, and physical resources at Ebbing ANG Base. No mitigations were identified as necessary for socioeconomics, biological resources, and air quality. Additionally, the DAF will ensure that the Air Education and Training Command coordinates review of the Mitigation Plan with FAA and the City of Fort Smith, as appropriate.

Noise/Land Use (Vol. 1, Page 3-38, §3.2.2.5/Vol. 1, Page 3-102, §3.3.2.5)

The following operational mitigation measure will be identified as standard procedures in local flying guidelines. However, individual aircraft operations may deviate somewhat from the standard procedures due to atmospheric conditions, air traffic, pilot technique, and other factors.

- **0% Hold-Down.** F-35 aircraft conducting non-combat afterburner departures will shut off the afterburner after reaching 300 knots rather than 350 knots and will then continue to accelerate to 350 knots at full non-afterburner power. In addition, departures to the west (i.e., on Runway 26) will delay the initial turn from runway heading until reaching the Arkansas River, then half of the departures will turn north, and half will turn south. No altitude hold-downs will be implemented.

Cultural Resources (Vol. 1, Page 3-139, §3.5.2.5)

As described in the 2023 FMS PTC EIS and ROD, in response to the Cherokee Nation concern about the project's proximity to the Trail of Tears, and as mitigation for potential effects to undiscovered archaeological sites, contracting for the construction phase of the project will require monitoring of all ground-disturbing activities by an archaeologist meeting the Secretary of the Interior Professional Qualifications Standards as prescribed by National Historic Preservation Act Section 112 and the Section 106 regulations, at § 800.2(a)(1). At the conclusion of monitoring, a

report will be prepared and submitted to the Tribe and the Arkansas State Historic Preservation Officer. Since construction activities have not commenced, no archaeological monitoring has occurred to date.

In the event of an inadvertent discovery during ground-disturbing operations, the following specific actions will occur:

- The project manager will cease work immediately, and the discovery will be reported to the 188th Wing Group environmental manager, who will secure the location with an adequate buffer and notify the Commander and the National Guard Bureau cultural resources manager.
- The environmental manager will then continue to follow ANG standard operating procedures for inadvertent discovery of cultural resources.

In the event that Native American artifacts or human remains are encountered, the DAF will stop work and contact the Choctaw Nation Historic Preservation Department immediately, pursuant to the Section 106 consultation with the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma completed on January 6, 2026.

Physical Resources (Vol. 1, Page 3-177, §3.7.2.5)

Mitigations are similar to those discussed in the 2023 FMS PTC EIS including the following actions, which are required as part of regulatory requirements.

- VLP Site, connecting taxiways, and arm/de-arm sites access will be designed to avoid any waters of the United States (WOTUS).
- Any WOTUS that are unavoidable will require a Clean Water Act Section 404 permit and associated compensation or mitigation.
- If a Jurisdictional Determination is necessary for any WOTUS in the proposed construction areas, the DAF will coordinate with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Little Rock District to obtain the determination and apply for proper permitting.
- Facilities will comply with Unified Facilities Criteria 3-210-10, *Low Impact Development* (as amended, 2016), and Energy Independence and Security Act § 438 (42 USC § 17094); this

serves to maintain the site's pre-development runoff rates and volumes to minimize effects from increased impervious surface area.

- Implement best management practices for construction and industrial activities and to avoid, minimize, or manage excavated soil (and dewatering liquid) that is contaminated with hazardous substances, pollutants, or contaminants, specifically per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances, the proponent will ensure compliance with the *Memorandum for ALMAJCOM-ALFLDCOM-FOA-DRU/C, Best Management Practices for Addressing Contaminated Soils on Military Construction and Facilities Sustainment, Restoration, and Modernization Projects*, March 4, 2025.
- The Ebbing ANG Base operates under a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System program, which provides engineering and management strategies designed to improve the quality of stormwater runoff from the installation and thereby improve the quality of receiving waters. Construction activities that disturb one or more acres are regulated under Arkansas' National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System construction stormwater program and will need a Construction Stormwater Permit. To protect water quality, Ebbing ANG Base implements the following strategies:
  - Monitor surface water quality.
  - Prevent surface water pollution by ensuring environmental plans (e.g., Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan) are implemented.
  - Minimize the use of pesticides.
  - Maintain vegetation buffers around water resources.
  - Reseed disturbed areas after construction.

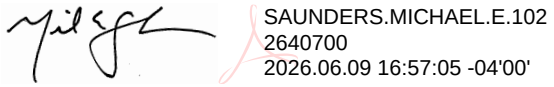
DECISION

The DAF has considered the potential environmental consequences of the Proposed Action and alternatives analyzed in the FSEIS, as well as the comments and concerns of the public and other key stakeholders. The DAF also considered other factors related to national defense,

including mission support, physical infrastructure, weather, capacity and environmental criteria, cost factors, and military plans.

The DAF will implement the mitigation measures identified in this ROD and adhere to the Mitigation Plan described herein to minimize environmental harm.

The DAF will, by this decision, expand the FMS PTC at Ebbing ANG Base, Arkansas. I certify that the DAF has considered all alternatives, information, and analyses.



6/9/26

MICHAEL E. SAUNDERS, P.E., SES, DAF Date

Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Air Force

(Energy, Installations, & Environment)