RECORD OF DECISION
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT
492nd SPECIAL OPERATIONS WING BEDDOWN
AT DAVIS-MONTHAN AIR FORCE BASE

INTRODUCTION

The Department of the Air Force (DAF) is issuing this Record of Decision (ROD) for the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the beddown of the *492nd Special Operations Wing at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base* (Federal Register Vol. 89, No. 207, EIS Number 20240189, page 85200, October 25, 2024). The DAF considered the information, analyses, and public comments contained in the FEIS, along with other relevant matters.

The DAF is issuing this ROD per the current Department of Defense (DOD) National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Implementing Procedures and the Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023. The DAF considered all the alternatives, information, and analysis, and feedback submitted by state, tribal, and local governments, and other public commenters during development of the FEIS.

This ROD documents:

- The DAF's decision
- The alternatives considered
- The environmentally preferable alternative
- Relevant factors considered among the alternatives and how those factors influenced the decision
- Whether the DAF adopts all practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental harm from the selected alternative, and if not, why not
- Mitigation

DECISION SYNOPSIS

The 492nd Special Operations Wing (492 SOW), currently located at Hurlburt Field, Florida, is being transformed. The DAF will beddown the 492 SOW at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base (AFB), Arizona. Five elements of the Proposed Action Alternative that have the potential to affect the base and associated ranges and airspace were considered: (1) personnel, (2) airfield operations, (3) airspace use, (4) range use, and (5) facilities and infrastructure projects required to support the Proposed Action Alternative.

The DAF analyzed transformation of the 492 SOW involved up to 2,300 military, civilian, and contractor personnel plus up to 2,543 dependents (FEIS Section 2.2.1). Due to the evolving global threat environment, MC-130J and Special Tactics Squadron personnel and equipment analyzed in the final EIS are excluded from this decision. The personnel and equipment will be replaced with other Special Operations Forces pending supplemental NEPA analysis.

This beddown decision includes relocating the 492 SOW Headquarters, bedding down up to 15 OA-1K aircraft under the 319th Special Operations Squadron (SOS), transferring the 492nd Special Operations Theater Air Operations Squadron from Duke Field, and moving Intelligence Squadron personnel from multiple locations.

Operations will utilize existing special use airspace in Arizona and New Mexico without creating new airspace or modifying existing dimensions or altitudes, with regular use of Tombstone Military Operations Areas (MOAs) and Restricted Area (RA) 2303, occasional use of other airspaces including combat search and rescue low altitude tactical navigation area and various

military training routes (FEIS Section 2.2.2 and Section 2.2.3, Figure 2-2), and live munitions training at the existing Barry M. Goldwater Range (BMGR) using air-to-ground ordnance, chaff, and flares as defensive countermeasures (FEIS Section 2.2.4, Figure 2-2). The beddown will require new construction, facility renovation, and demolition at Davis-Monthan AFB (FEIS Section 2.2.5, Figure 2-3), which the Secretary of the Air Force determined as the preferred location.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

As stated in Section 2.2 of the FEIS, the DAF identified the Proposed Action Alternative as the Preferred Alternative, giving consideration to economic, environmental, technical, and other factors. The FEIS also considers the No Action Alternative, as described in Section 2.1 of the FEIS.

Preferred Alternative. The 492 SOW Beddown would occur at Davis-Monthan AFB resulting in changes to personnel, airfield operations, airspace use, range use, as well as the construction and renovation of facilities and demolition and infrastructure projects. When compared to interim conditions, the 492 SOW Beddown would result in a decrease of 4,028 annual aircraft operations resulting in 30 fewer off-base acres being exposed to 65 decibels (dB) day-night average sound level (DNL). In addition, at noise-sensitive locations near Davis-Monthan AFB, noise levels would decrease at some locations by up to 1 dB and increase at other locations by no more than 2 dB, none of which would be exposed to noise levels greater than 63 dB DNL. Implementation of the 492 SOW Beddown at Davis-Monthan AFB would result in a net reduction of 8,828 annual aircraft operations in existing airspace in Arizona and New Mexico, a reduction of 768,185 air-to-ground munitions used annually and 45,680 fewer countermeasures dropped annually. Noise levels, as measured in dB onset rate-adjusted day-night average sound level (L_{dnmr}), would decrease or remain the same relative to interim conditions in all airspaces except the Fort Huachuca airspace (Restricted Area 2303 [R-2303 A/B/C]), where L_{dnmr} would increase by 5 dB.

No Action Alternative. Implementation of the No Action Alternative would mean that the 492 SOW Beddown would not occur at Davis-Monthan AFB. Additionally, Air Combat Command's Intelligence Squadron personnel would not come to Davis-Monthan AFB. However, the planned Phase 2 of the A-10 retirement would be implemented to include associated personnel, airfield operations, and airspace and range utilization. Ongoing and currently planned activities, missions, and programs, including associated aircraft operations previously analyzed in separate NEPA documents, which are included in the interim conditions, would continue to occur at Davis-Monthan AFB.

ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERABLE ALTERNATIVE

The environmentally preferable alternative is the No Action Alternative.

MITIGATION

The FEIS addresses mitigations that could avoid, minimize, or compensate for effects caused by the Proposed Action.

To track mitigations, the 492 SOW 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 492 SOW Beddown before the applicable mitigation measure described in this ROD are 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 the acoustic environment, biological resources, and infrastructure. No mitigations were identified as necessary for air quality, soil and water resources, cultural resources, socioeconomic resources, and hazardous materials and wastes.

Acoustic Environment

- Noise impact reduction measures include compliance with the quiet hours program and flight procedures designed to avoid noise-sensitive locations near the installation. Davis-Monthan AFB officials meet on a regular basis to discuss potential improvements to operational procedures at and near the installation. These discussions include consideration of adjustments to policies related to noise abatement.

Biological Resources

- Materials used for on-site erosion control will be free of non-native plant seeds and other plant parts to limit potential for establishment of invasive species.
- Check construction sites for presence of invasive plants. If present, employ mechanical or chemical treatment to invasive plants, and thoroughly clean and inspect equipment and work clothing before moving off site to lessen the probability of spreading invasive seeds throughout the installation.
- Native weed-free seeds or plants will be used to revegetate temporarily disturbed areas.
- Obtain materials such as gravel, topsoil, or fill from existing developed or previously used sources that are compatible with the project site and are from legally permitted sites. Materials from undisturbed areas adjacent to the project site will not be used.
- To prevent entrapment of wildlife species, ensure that excavated, steep-walled holes or trenches are either completely covered by plywood or metal caps at the close of each workday or provided with one or more escape ramps (at no greater than 1,000-foot intervals and sloped less than 45 degrees) constructed of earthen fill or wooden planks.
- Each morning, before the start of construction or maintenance activities and before such holes or trenches are filled, ensure that they are thoroughly inspected for trapped animals. Ensure that any animals discovered are allowed to escape voluntarily (by escape ramps or temporary structures), without harassment, and before construction activities resume, or are removed from the trench or hole by a qualified person and allowed to escape unimpeded.
- The Migratory Bird Treaty Act (16 United States Code Sections 703–712 [1918, as amended 1936, 1960, 1968, 1969, 1974, 1978, 1986, and 1989]) requires that federal agencies coordinate with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service if a construction activity would result in the known take of a migratory bird. Construction contractors are to coordinate with the on-site U.S. Department of Agriculture wildlife biologist to ensure

impacts to migratory birds are minimized. All construction activities within known habitat should be scheduled outside of nesting seasons. If construction or clearing activities are scheduled during nesting seasons (March 1 through September 1) within potential nesting habitats, surveys would be performed to identify active nests. Other mitigation measures that would be considered include if an active nest is found, a buffer zone would be established around the nest and no activities would occur within that zone until nestlings have fledged and abandoned the nest.

- Avoid lighting impacts during the night by conducting construction and maintenance activities during daylight hours only. If night lighting is unavoidable, (1) use special light-emitting diode (LED) bulbs designed to ensure no increase in ambient light conditions, (2) minimize the number of lights used, (3) place lights on poles pointed down toward the ground, with shields on lights to prevent light from going up into sky, or out laterally into landscape, and (4) selectively place lights so they are directed away from all native vegetative communities.
- Avoid contamination of ground and surface waters by storing concrete wash water, and any water that has been contaminated with construction materials, oils, equipment residue, etc., in closed containers on site until removed for disposal. Concrete wash water can be toxic to wildlife. Storage tanks must have proper air space (to avoid rainfall-induced overtopping), be on-ground containers, and be located in upland areas away from washes.

Infrastructure

To mitigate sky glow, where possible, the DAF could:

- Provide minimum lighting where and when the lighting of various areas is necessary
- Use recessed and fully shielded fixtures
- Use LED lights in warm colors, where possible

DECISION

The DAF has considered the potential environmental consequences of the Proposed Action and alternatives analyzed in the FEIS, 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.

In consideration of the evolving global threat environment, the proposed action excludes personnel and equipment associated with the MC-130J and Special Tactics Squadrons. The personnel and equipment will be replaced with other Special Operations Forces following supplemental analysis conducted in accordance with NEPA.

All other proposed actions, including airspace and range activities associated with the MC-130J, will remain integral to the action and this decision.

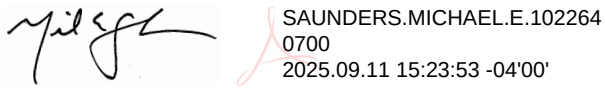
This decision specifically supports the following basing actions (FEIS Section 2.2):

- Relocate the 492 SOW Headquarters from Hurlburt Field, Florida, to Davis-Monthan AFB, Arizona.

- Beddown up to 15 OA-1K aircraft at Davis-Monthan AFB under the 319th SOS, also relocated from Hurlburt Field, Florida.
- Relocate the 492nd Special Operations Theater Air Operations Squadron from Duke Field, Florida, to Davis-Monthan AFB, Arizona.
- Transfer personnel associated with a new IS under the ACC 361st Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance Group from Hurlburt Field, Florida, and Cannon AFB, New Mexico, to Davis-Monthan AFB.

This decision supports the Secretary of the Air Force's final basing decision for the 492 SOW Beddown (dtd 8 Sep 25) . By implementing the mitigation measures identified in this ROD and adhering to the mitigation plan described herein, the DAF has adopted all practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental harm.

The DAF will, by this decision, beddown the 492 SOW at Davis-Monthan AFB, Arizona. I certify that the DAF has considered all alternatives, information, analyses, and objections submitted by commenters.



9/11/25

MICHAEL E. SAUNDERS, P.E., SES, DAF
Acting Assistant Secretary of the Air Force
(Energy, Installations, & Environment)

Date