

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
AND
FINDING OF NO PRACTICABLE ALTERNATIVE
FOR
CONSTRUCTION AND OPERATION OF A DIVISION STREET GATE
AT
KEESLER AIR FORCE BASE, MISSISSIPPI**

AGENCY: Department of the Air Force, 81st Training Wing, Keesler Air Force Base (AFB), Mississippi.

PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES: The proposed action is to construct a new Anti-terrorism/Force-Protection (AT/FP)-compliant main gate on Keesler AFB. The new gate would have a visitor center/contractor center, vehicle inspection facility, gatehouses, guard kiosks, and over-watch facilities. The vehicle inspection facility and gatehouses would have support spaces such as restrooms, telecommunications, and mechanical/electrical rooms. The Preferred Alternative (Alternative 1) is to build a new main gate off Division Street on the east side of the base, the site of a former housing area at the southeast corner of Keesler AFB that was damaged during Hurricane Katrina in 2005. All structures except roads have since been removed from the property. This vacant on-base property is approximately 33 acres and is large enough to accommodate all facilities necessary for a new main gate. Division Street does not enter Keesler AFB, so the U.S. Air Force would purchase up to six private properties near the intersection of Forrest Avenue and Division Street to join the base and the new main gate to Division Street. The Meadows Drive gate and a temporary commercial gate on the base's northern boundary would be closed when the new main gate was completed. Alternative 2 is to implement the Preferred Alternative as describe above, but over an extended period of time in two phases. Initially, the new gate at the Division Street location would have a vehicle inspection station and would be for commercial and contractor vehicles only. Upon completion of the first phase, the temporary commercial gate on the northern boundary of the base would be closed and commercial traffic would be redirected to the new Division Street gate. During the second phase of Alternative 2, the new Division Street gate would be completed with the addition of a visitor's center and other facilities not constructed during the first phase, and the Meadows Drive gate would be closed. The No Action Alternative consists of not constructing a new gate and continuing to use the existing gates.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS: An Environmental Assessment (EA) was completed and is attached and incorporated by reference. It analyzes the Preferred Alternative, Alternative 2, and the No Action Alternative. Direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts regarding airspace use and management, noise, air quality, safety and occupational health, earth resources, water resources, infrastructure and utilities, traffic and transportation, hazardous and toxic substances, biological resources, cultural resources, socioeconomics and environmental justice, land use and visual resources, sustainability and greening, and recreational use and resources were all analyzed. No significant impacts would be expected as a result of implementing the Preferred Alternative, Alternative 2, or the No Action Alternative. The impacts are summarized in the following section and discussed in detail in the attached EA.

Implementing the proposed action (under the Preferred Alternative or Alternative 2) would be expected to result in short-term minor increases in noise, emissions of air pollutants, soil erosion, sediment in storm water and surface waters, and spills and leakage of hazardous materials. Implementing the proposed action would be expected to result in a long-term minor increase in demand on utility systems, a long-term change in traffic patterns on local roads surrounding Keesler AFB, a loss of some Live Oak trees, encroachment on a 100-year floodplain, a long-term effect on environmental justice, and a change in aesthetics at some residences. The proposed action could have an adverse effect on cultural resources by removing structures that potentially contribute to an historic district. The Air Force would mitigate any adverse effect on the historic district by documenting the houses to be demolished in accordance with Mississippi Department of Archives and History requirements. No adverse effects on airspace, safety, the local economy, the protection of children, sustainability, or recreational resources would be expected. None of the effects would be expected to be significant. The proposed action would not be expected to contribute appreciably to cumulative environmental impacts when considered in the context of other projects that have recently been completed, are currently under construction, or are anticipated to be implemented in the near future.

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC REVIEW AND INTERAGENCY COORDINATION: The appropriate federal, state, and local agencies were provided copies of the Draft EA and Draft Finding of No Significant Impact/Finding of No Practicable Alternative and asked to submit comments. The Draft EA and Draft Finding of No Significant Impact/Finding of No Practicable Alternative were made available to the public and public agencies for 30 days. Notification of the 30-day comment period was placed in the *Biloxi Sun Herald* on April 17, 2015. Two responses—from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Jena Band of Choctaw Indians—were received (see Appendix B). Neither response raised concerns about the proposed project, the EA, or the FONSI/FONPA. IICEP letters were sent to 13 potentially concerned parties on January 26, 2015, with responses requested by March 15, 2015. Nine of the parties contacted responded. The City of Biloxi noted that it strongly supports the Preferred Alternative (Alternative 1; see Section 2.2), though it could also support a phased approach for the construction of the Division Street gate (Alternative 2; see Section 2.3). The Southern Mississippi Planning and Development District found the proposed project consistent with its Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. The Gulf Regional Planning Commission noted that closing two gates and opening a new gate will affect traffic patterns in the vicinity of the base, and requested that a thorough assessment of local circulation patterns to consider the impact of the changed traffic volumes be conducted. Both the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma and the Jena Band of Choctaw Indians concur with a finding of “No Historic Properties Affected” for the proposed project. The Department of Marine Resources, which in cooperation with other state agencies is responsible under the Mississippi Coastal Program for managing the coastal resources of Mississippi, had no objections provided that the project has no direct or indirect impacts to coastal wetlands and no coastal program agency objects to the proposal. The Mississippi Department of Archives and History noted that the residences to be demolished could contribute to a potential historic district and recommended that the Air Force provide documentation of the houses before they are demolished.

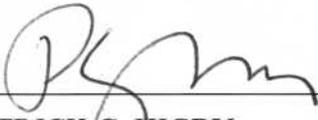
FINDING OF NO PRACTICABLE ALTERNATIVE: Pursuant to Executive Order 11988, and considering all supporting information, I find that there is no practicable alternative to the proposed implementation of the projects sited in a 100-year floodplain as described in the

attached EA. The attached EA identifies all practicable measures to minimize harm to the existing environment. Construction of the proposed facilities will increase impervious cover to the area within the floodplain, however, the resulting increase in total impervious cover will have a minimal impact on the total volume of stormwater runoff on Keesler AFB.



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FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT: Based on my review of the facts and analysis in the EA, I conclude that neither the Preferred Alternative nor Alternative 2 will have a significant impact either by itself or considering cumulative impacts. Accordingly, the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act, the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations, and 32 Code of Federal Regulations 989 have been fulfilled, and an environmental impact statement is not required and will not be prepared.



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