

U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Aviation Administration
Southwest Region

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Removal of Hazardous Wildlife Attractants
Alexandria International Airport
Alexandria, Louisiana

February 26, 2015

I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is to briefly present the reasons why the approval of Federal actions supporting the proposed removal of hazardous wildlife attractants at Alexandria International Airport (AEX), which serves the city of Alexandria, Louisiana will not have a significant effect on the human environment. England Airpark and Community (England Airpark), owner of the airport, requested Federal actions, including:

- A. Approval of the revised Airport Layout Plan showing the proposed removal of hazardous wildlife attractants;**
- B. Federal funding under 49 U.S.C. Chapter 471 for the proposed removal of hazardous wildlife attractants.**

Attached to this FONSI is the final environmental assessment (FEA) on which the finding is made.

II. SUMMARY

The FEA was prepared pursuant to the provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 and the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations (40 C.F.R. Parts 1500-1508). Additionally, the FEA meets the guidelines identified in FAA Orders 1050.1E, Environmental Impacts: Policies and Procedures and 5050.4B, NEPA Implementing Instructions for Airport Actions.

Although impacts exceed the thresholds of significance in this case for jurisdictional wetlands/waters of the U.S. and cultural resources, existing law recognizes that an EIS is not required when mitigation of those impacts brings them below threshold levels. Such impacts were appropriately mitigated, as described below, thus avoiding the need for an EIS.

Pertinent Federal, state, and local agencies were consulted during preparation of the EA. As documented in Appendix A, local citizens were also encouraged to provide comments. Notice of availability of the draft EA and opportunity to review and comment was advertised in the local paper. Comments received were statements of support for the Proposed Action. The major concerns expressed have been addressed, and action will be taken to the extent possible to mitigate or minimize adverse impacts of the proposed project.

III. PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose and need for the proposed action are presented in Section 1.2 of the EA. The airport has a history of wildlife-aircraft strikes, and the proposed action would remove hazardous wildlife attractants such as forested areas and wetlands from the operational environment. As noted, the action would be in accordance with the FAA-approved wildlife hazard management plan for AEX.

IV. ALTERNATIVES

The FEA explored and objectively evaluated reasonable alternatives that were considered practical and feasible in meeting the purpose and need.

Section 2.0 of the FEA describes the establishment of alternatives and their evaluation. Two action alternatives were presented. The Proposed Action alternative would clear, grub, shape, grade and maintain approximately 302 acres of property belonging to England Airpark. Approximately 170 of this are currently wooded, while the remaining 132 acres consists of hay pasture with sporadic trees. The Proposed Action would remove all trees and stumps within the 302 acre area, grade for drainage, then revegetate cleared areas with a mix of native grass and forb seeds not attractive to hazardous wildlife. These would be maintained for hay production.

An Agricultural Alternative would clear and grub the same 302 acres. However, it would include leasing the 170 acres currently wooded for row crop production. In accordance with the wildlife hazard management plan, any agricultural lease would prohibit farming of beans or grain-producing crops.

Finally, the No Action Alternative was considered in accordance with the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations 40 CFR § 1502.14.

After a complete consideration of the alternatives studied in the EA, the Proposed Action was selected as the preferred alternative by the England Authority, and FAA concurred in this

recommendation. The Proposed Alternative was preferred because, among other factors, it would best meet FAA's statutory mission of promoting a safe and efficient nationwide airport system.

Therefore, the FAA, in this FONSI, has determined that the Proposed Action is the FAA's preferred and selected alternative. In arriving at this decision, the FAA considered all pertinent factors, including the environmental impacts as well as the FAA statutory charter in the Federal Aviation Act of 1958, as amended, to encourage and foster the development of civil aeronautics (49 U.S.C. § 40101).

V. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

A. Potential Impact Resource Categories

Implementation of the Proposed Action or Alternatives has the potential to impact the following resource categories:

Air Quality (FEA, Section 4.8 and Appendices A and E) – The Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality reported that Rapides Parish is considered in attainment with the NAAQS. Therefore, General Conformity does not apply. However, in order to assess the temporary air quality impacts from the use of construction equipment and the disturbance of soils during clearing and grubbing activities, total emissions were calculated and compared to the *de minimis* NAAQS thresholds. As documented, air quality impacts would be insignificant. The analysis also documented that the Proposed Action's contribution to greenhouse gas emissions would be insignificant.

Compatible Land Use (FEA, Section 4.1) – The Proposed Action would convert 170 of the 302 acres within the project site from bottomland hardwood forest to grasslands. This would be compatible with the surrounding land uses; i.e., airport, commercial and agricultural. Therefore, compatible land use impacts would be insignificant. See also Noise below.

Construction (FEA, Section 6.0) – The sponsor has proposed best management practices (BMP's) which would minimize or avoid adverse impacts during construction. In addition to these BMP's, mitigation measures have been proposed to reduce impacts to cultural resources and wetlands/waters of the U.S. below the level of significance. Therefore, the FAA determines that construction activities would not result in significant impacts.

Farmlands (FEA, Section 4.2) – Under the Proposed Action, 170 acres of woods and 132 acres of hay pasture would be cleared and grubbed of trees, then re-seeded with native grasses and forbs that do not attract wildlife. This would not result in a significant impact to farmlands.

Fish, Wildlife and Plants (FEA, Sections 4.4, 4.5, 4.6 and Appendices A, B and C) – Although the Proposed Action Alternative would convert approximately 170 acres of bottomland hardwood habitat to grasses and forbs, impacts to natural communities and

wildlife populations would be insignificant due to the relative abundance of similar habitat in the area. There would be no significant impacts to Federal-listed Threatened or Endangered (T/E) species, since habitat for listed species does not occur in the project area. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) concurred and issued a “no effect” determination regarding Federal T/E species. In support of activities to reduce and prevent wildlife hazards at AEX, England Airpark has been issued a migratory bird depredation permit by the USFWS and a nuisance animal depredation permit by Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. The Migratory Bird Treaty Act recommends that activities such as the Proposed Action be conducted outside of the migratory bird nesting season (March – August). If the sponsor intends to conduct clearing, grubbing and grading activities within that period, it must first conduct a field survey for active nests and, if it chooses to proceed rather than delay work, must obtain the proper permit(s) from USFWS.

Floodplains (FEA, Section 4.3.4) – Approximately 46 acres of the area to be cleared is within the 100-year floodplain. Clearing of trees and re-seeding with grasses and forbs would not obstruct flow, and no development is proposed within the floodplain. Therefore, floodplain impacts would be insignificant.

Hazardous Materials, Pollution Prevention and Solid Waste (FEA, Section 4.12) – No hazardous materials have been identified in the project area, no development is proposed, and the only potential for spills is from construction equipment refueling. That potential would be minimized through adherence to BMP’s. Therefore, impacts would be insignificant.

Historical, Architectural, Archaeological and Cultural Resources (FEA, Section 4.7 and Appendices A and D) - Two significant cultural resources sites which have been determined as eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) are located on the proposed project site. Site 16RA692 is designated as the McNutt Plantation, and Site 16RA703 is designated as the Weil Property. The FAA has determined that the Proposed Action Alternative would have an adverse effect on both of these historic properties (It should be noted that these sites would be equally impacted by both the Proposed Action and Agricultural Alternative). Consequently, a Phase III Data Recovery project will be conducted to mitigate the effects. The specifics of this effort have been formalized in a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the Louisiana State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), the FAA and England Airpark. Data recovery would be conducted prior to clearing and grubbing activities within the site boundaries. The unavoidable adverse impacts to cultural resources would be reduced below the level of significance through the data recovery measures specified in the MOA. An unsigned draft of the MOA is presented in Appendix D, and a signed copy of the MOA is attached to this FONSI. During tribal consultation (Appendix A), the Jena Band of Choctaw Indians requested a cultural resource survey and other pertinent information regarding the project, due to ground disturbing activities. These were provided, along with a copy of the draft EA. In addition, copies of the draft EA were provided to the Chitimacha Tribe of Louisiana, the Coushatta Indian Tribe, the Caddo Nation of Oklahoma, and the Tunica-Biloxi Tribe. Stipulations in the MOA address ongoing Native American consultation.

DOT Act Section 4(f) – As discussed in the FEA and the preceding section of this FONSI, the FAA carried out Section 106 consultation with the SHPO. The SHPO determined that mitigation of adverse effects could be accomplished through data recovery rather than preservation of resources *in situ*. Therefore, the FAA determines that DOT Act Section 4(f) is not applicable.

Light Emissions and Visual Impacts (FEA, Section 4.11) – No lighting facilities are proposed and most, if not all, clearing and re-seeding activities would be performed in daytime. While removal of trees would alter the visual landscape, the re-established vegetation would be consistent with other open areas of the airport and adjacent agricultural operations. Therefore, light emissions and visual impacts would be insignificant.

Natural Resources, Energy Supply and Sustainable Design (FEA, Section 6) – The Proposed Action would remove approximately 170 acres of bottomland hardwood forest and replace it with grasses and forbs. Given the relative abundance of bottomland hardwood forest in the area, it would not represent a significant loss. Further, the replacement pasture would yield sustainable hay crops. Energy costs would primarily be the fuel required by heavy equipment during the clearing, grubbing, grading and re-seeding activities, and would not represent a significant commitment of energy in the region.

Noise (FEA, Section 4.9) – Since the Proposed Action would not change aircraft operations, the only potential for noise impact would be from construction and agricultural equipment. There are five residences near the southern border of the site, two of which are located within the current threshold 65 DNL noise contour associated with aircraft operations. The remaining three homes are located adjacent to agricultural fields where agricultural equipment noise is routine. Given the temporary nature of equipment operations and the existing land uses, the Proposed Action would result in no significant noise impacts.

Socioeconomic Impacts, Environmental Justice and Children’s Environmental Health and Safety Risks (FEA, Sections 4.1, 4.3, 4.8, 4.9, 4.10, and 4.12) – As documented, all activities associated with the Proposed Action would occur on-airport. Off-airport surface transportation associated with the activities would be negligible. As demonstrated in discrete sections of the FEA (e.g., Air Quality, Water Quality, Hazardous Materials, Noise and Compatible Land Use), there would be no significant impacts; therefore, there would be no significant impacts in regard to children’s environmental health and safety risks. Similarly, although Census Tract 105 in the project area is high minority and high poverty, the absence of the aforementioned impacts leads to the conclusion that no significant impacts would be borne disproportionately by environmental justice communities.

Water Quality (FEA, Section 4.3 and Appendix A) – The project site would be susceptible to erosion during clearing and re-seeding activities. However, the sponsor has proposed BMP’s which would minimize such impacts. As documented, the sponsor would acquire an NMDES Stormwater Discharge Permit from Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality prior to project initiation, and this would include a Stormwater Pollution and Prevention Plan. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency determined that the Proposed Action would not have an adverse effect upon groundwater, and the Louisiana Department of

Environmental Quality stated no objections. Based upon the available information, the FAA determines that water quality impacts would be insignificant.

Wetlands/Waters of the U.S. (FEA, Section 4.3 and Appendix A) – Approximately 14 acres of jurisdictional wetlands and 7,890 linear feet of waters of the U.S. would be permanently impacted by the Proposed Action Alternative. Consultation with the New Orleans District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) resulted in a determination that Clean Water Act Sections 404 and 401 permits would be required. Discussions between the USACE and England Airpark yielded a mutually-acceptable mitigation measure whereby the latter would purchase compensatory mitigation credits from a local, approved wetland mitigation bank. England Airpark proposes to purchase 28.4 bottomland hardwood credits, and the selected mitigation bank would be required to record the credit on the USACE New Orleans District's Regulatory In-Lieu Fee & Bank Information Tracking System (RIBITS) to ensure that the required credits are still available and appropriate. As documented in Appendix A, the USACE has agreed to this mitigation approach and has identified four potential wetland mitigation banks.

Cumulative Impacts (FEA, Section 5.0) – Cumulative impacts from the Proposed Action and past, current and reasonably foreseeable projects were disclosed and considered. The analysis concludes that cumulative impacts would be insignificant.

B. Resource Impact Categories Unaffected by the Proposed Action or Alternatives

Coastal Resources – The study area for the Proposed Action is located outside of the Louisiana Coastal Zone.

Wild and Scenic Rivers - No designated Wild and Scenic Rivers or rivers with the potential for such designation are located within the study area for the Proposed Action.

VI. CONDITIONS

As prescribed by 40 CFR § 1505.3, the FAA shall take steps as appropriate to the action, such as through special conditions in grant agreements, property conveyance deeds, releases, airport layout plan approvals, and contract plans and specifications and shall monitor these as necessary to assure that representations made in the EA and FONSI with respect to mitigation of impacts will be carried out. Mitigation plans to be developed will be coordinated with the appropriate jurisdictional agencies.

Specifically, conditions of approval associated with this project are listed below.

A. **Condition regarding Cultural Resources** – England Airpark shall ensure that data recovery measures are accomplished prior to conducting clearing, grubbing and grading activities in and around historic property Sites 16RA692 and 16RA703. All work shall be carried out in accordance with the attached MOA.

B. **Condition regarding Migratory Birds** - If clearing, grubbing and grading activities occur within the migratory bird nesting season (March – August), England Airpark must first conduct a field survey for active nests. If active nests are found and the sponsor chooses to proceed rather than delay work until after nesting, they must obtain the proper permit(s) from USFWS.

C. **Condition regarding Wetlands/Waters of the U.S.** – England Airpark shall obtain the required Clean Water Act permit(s) prior to conducting clearing, grubbing and grading activities in and around the jurisdictional wetlands and Waters of the U.S. The FAA assumes that the purchase of any compensatory mitigation credits, as discussed in this FONSI, will be a condition of the CWA permit(s).

VII. DECISION CONSIDERATIONS AND ADDITIONAL FINDINGS

Throughout the development of the airport, including the proposed improvements described in Part IV above, the FAA has made every effort to adhere to the policies and purposes of NEPA, as stated in CEQ Regulations for Implementing NEPA, 40 CFR § 1500-1508. The FAA has concentrated on the truly significant issues related to the action in question. In its determination whether to prepare an EIS or process the EA as a FONSI, the FAA weighed the following considerations:

In accordance with 40 CFR § 1507.3 and 1501.4, the Order 5050.4B, represents the agency procedures to supplement the CEQ Regulations for airport development projects.

After examination of the EA, comments from Federal, state, and local agencies, public comments, as well as all other evidence available to the FAA, the FAA has determined the available record demonstrated that no thresholds indicating the potential for significant impact were exceeded and an EIS is not required. In addition, the FAA determined that existing evidence available to the agency clearly points to the proposed project as beneficial in fulfilling the FAA's statutory mission of promoting a safe and efficient nationwide airport system, and further study of the issues in an EIS will result only in "amassing needless detail." As the nation's aviation agency, the FAA has the ultimate technical expertise to develop, evaluate, and select actions and alternatives that would result in safe and efficient use of U.S airspace as prescribed in 49 U.S.C. §40103(a). In accordance with 49 U.S.C. Section 44502(b), the FAA has determined that the proposed action is reasonable necessary for use in air commerce.

The FEA has adequately provided the agency with the information it needs: (a) to make an informed, objective decision on the environmental effects, as well as other effects, of the proposed project; and (b) to take actions that protect, restore, and enhance the environment. The FAA weighed both the potential positive and negative consequences that this proposed action may have on the quality of the human environment. Further processing of this proposed action in an EIS would needlessly generate additional paperwork and a rehashing of issues, while simultaneously impeding the FAA from carrying out its mission and blocking a primary goal of NEPA -- that of fostering excellent action.

In summary, the FAA opts to use a finding of no significant impact based on its conclusions that the proposed project will not have a significant effect on the human environment.

RECOMMENDED
FOR APPROVAL:


Environmental Protection Specialist

02/26/15
Date

APPROVED:


Manager, LA/NM Airports Development Office

2/26/15
Date

Final

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
FOR
CLEARING AND GRUBBING FOR WILDLIFE HAZARD
MITIGATION AT WEST SIDE OF AIRFIELD**

December 2014

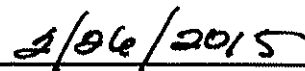
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This Environmental Assessment becomes a Federal document when evaluated and signed and dated by the responsible FAA official.

Federal Aviation Administration
Louisiana/New Mexico Airports District Office


Lacey D. Spriggs
Manager



(Date)