

Air National Guard F-15EX Eagle II & F-35A Lightning II Operational Beddowns Environmental Impact Statement

Fact Sheet #4 Summary of the Public Comment Period for the Draft Environmental Impact Statement



What's inside this Fact Sheet:

- Review of the proposed action
- Summary of the Draft EIS public comments received
- Next steps following the public comment period
- Updated timeline

Previous Fact Sheets:

- Fact Sheet #1 included an overview of the proposed action, National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process, public scoping meeting schedule, and a link to the project website.
- Fact Sheet #2 included an overview of the public scoping process, public comment process, and comments received during the scoping period.
- Fact Sheet #3 included an overview of the EIS timeline, dates and locations of the public hearings, and methods for submitting comments.

Proposed Action

The United States Department of the Air Force (DAF) and the National Guard Bureau (NGB) propose to maintain the combat capability of the Air National Guard fighter wings currently flying the F-15C/D aircraft. These aircraft have reached the end of their lifespan and will be retired due to safety and maintenance concerns. These fighter wings (that are not already undergoing similar evaluation) include:

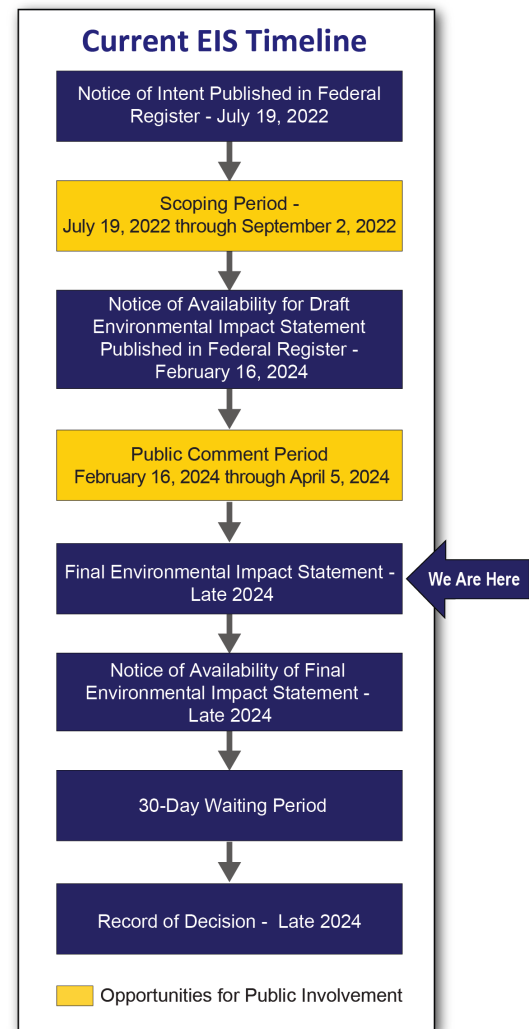
- 104th Fighter Wing (104 FW) at Westfield-Barnes Regional Airport in Westfield, Massachusetts;
- 144th Fighter Wing (144 FW) at Fresno Yosemite International Airport in Fresno, California; and
- 159th Fighter Wing (159 FW) at Naval Air Station (NAS) Joint Reserve Base (JRB) New Orleans, in Belle Chasse, Louisiana.

The proposal is the beddown, operation, and associated infrastructure construction of one squadron of F-15EX Eagle II (F-15EX) aircraft at two of these fighter wings and one squadron of F-35A Lightning II (F-35A) aircraft at either the 104 FW or the 159 FW. These aircraft would replace the aging F-15C/D fighter aircraft at the selected wings. It is also conceivable that one or more of these fighter wings would retain the legacy F-15C/D aircraft for the foreseeable future and construction associated with that alternative would be implemented to support the current legacy aircraft.

Draft EIS Public Comment Period

Public involvement is a fundamental element to the successful implementation of the NEPA process. The public has an important role in providing input during this process to help the NGB and DAF make more informed decisions to implement these aircraft beddown actions. The NGB and DAF recently completed the second phase of public involvement in the EIS process which was a review of the Draft EIS. The formal public review period for the Draft EIS began with the publication of a Notice of Availability (NOA) in the Federal Register on February 16, 2024 and extended through April 5, 2024.

The NGB and DAF used several methods to notify the public of opportunities for involvement and methods to comment on the EIS. These methods included: an announcement in the Federal Register; mailing of letters to relevant federal, state, and local agencies; publication of newspaper advertisements at each of the fighter wing locations; copies of fact sheets mailed to individuals on the mailing list that provided a physical address, as well as to all residential and business addresses within the proposed 65 dB noise contours; distribution of public service announcements and press releases to local media; and a website posting relevant information. Copies of the Draft EIS were also sent to local document repositories.



Public hearings (both virtual and in-person) were held as shown below.

- **104 FW**
 - Virtual hearing: March 6, 2024, 5:30-6:30 p.m. EST
 - In-person hearing: March 19, 2024, 5-7 p.m. EDT, Westfield Intermediate School, 350 Southampton Rd., Westfield, MA
- **144 FW**
 - Virtual hearing: March 7, 2024, 5:30-6:30 p.m. PST
 - In-person hearing: March 14, 2024, 5-7 p.m. PDT, Piccadilly Inn, 5115 E. McKinley Ave., Fresno, CA
- **159 FW**
 - Virtual hearing: March 5, 2024, 5:30-6:30 p.m. CST
 - In-person hearing: March 21, 2024, 5-7 p.m. CDT, Belle Chasse Auditorium, 8398 LA-23, Belle Chasse, LA

EIS Project Manager
National Guard Bureau
NGB/A4AM
Shepperd Hall
3501 Fetchet Ave.
Joint Base Andrews MD 20762-5157

Air National Guard F-15EX Eagle II & F-35A Lightning II Operational Beddowns Environmental Impact Statement

Public comments

The NGB and DAF received a total of 42 comments from the public during the official comment submittal period (February 16–April 5, 2024). The following is a summary of the most frequent comments received during the public comment period:

- General complaints about noise
- Concerns about environmental justice communities (i.e. low income and minority)
- Concerns about impacts to children/schools
- Suggestions to identify less urban areas for the F-15EX and/or F-35A
- Request for additional information regarding noise mitigation – how it can be obtained and when it can be obtained.
- General support, or lack thereof, for the proposal

What's Next

The NGB and DAF are currently in the process of incorporating all relevant, substantive comments from the public and agencies review process. The Final EIS is expected late 2024 and will provide the Secretary of the Air Force with a comprehensive review of the potential environmental consequences of selecting either the F-15EX or F-35A for any of these three Fighter Wings. An NOA will be published in the Federal Register to announce the availability of the Final EIS and a 30-day waiting period will be initiated prior to signing the Record of Decision (ROD). The ROD is a concise public record that will address the DAF decision, identify the alternatives considered, specify the environmentally preferable alternative, state whether all practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental harm have been adopted, and if not, why they were not. The ROD will then be announced in the Federal Register no sooner than the end of the Final EIS 30-day waiting period.

Following publication of the ROD, a mitigation plan will be prepared, which will address specific mitigations identified and agreed to during the environmental review process. It will include metrics to track and monitor those activities that are identified to minimize the impacts. The Mitigation and Monitoring Plan will identify who is responsible for implementing specific mitigation procedures, who is responsible for funding them, and who is responsible for tracking these measures to ensure compliance.



Scan QR code
for project
website